DISABILITY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT: PROVIDING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR JAPANESE CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study examined special education in an elementary school in Japan through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and case studies of children with developmental disabilities. Participants are three children with developmental disabilities, their parents, and 15 educators. Children’s disabilities were considered to result from neurological conditions, including learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders. These disabilities are frequently referred to as “developmental disabilities” in Japan. Traditionally, Japanese children with these disabilities were considered to be slow learners or “difficult” children. In contrast to more visible disabilities involving mobility, vision, and hearing, their challenges are hidden from view, which makes it difficult for educators to recognize and interpret their struggles and provide them with appropriate support. It was not until 2007 that these children received formal special education services.

Such policies related to special education have been controversial among some educators and parents due to beliefs regarding the sociocultural embeddedness of disabilities. Although Japanese educators, parents, and legislators generally recognize the need for special education for children with developmental disabilities, the idea of providing individualized support conflicts with the traditional Japanese educational practices that center children’s socialization and learning within their peer groups. Participant educators and parents struggle to address this dilemma by providing special education services in regular classrooms, small groups, or individual settings without labeling children. Educators guided children with developmental disabilities to learn skills in a protected environment where they felt safe and comfortable, for example, by involving their peers in the support and valuing their needs as opportunities for peers’ moral education. Educators also used children’s problems and needs in their daily lives at school to create opportunities for them to learn and guided them to handle the problems. Parents who struggled to accept their children’s special needs also received support from educators to
become active collaborators with them in supporting their children at school and home. Instead of explicitly directing or teaching parents, educators guided parents to understand their children’s disabilities and participate in supporting their children “naturally.” These implicit strategies, such as creating an environment where children and their parents feel safe and accepted, were embedded in children’s social contexts and observed frequently at the site of this study. Results raise issues for supporting children with disabilities that may have broad relevance beyond the Japanese cases observed in this study, for example, the use of peers as a support system for children with disabilities in other cultural contexts, including the U.S.
To my father, mother, brother, and our little family, Chi and Fu
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

American people may use the term, “feel free” to invite other people to interact and participate. When I came to the U.S. from Japan as a MSW student eight years ago, I felt free from other people’s “eyes” on my wheelchair, and on what I did and said. I was different in several ways from many other Japanese people, for example, I majored chemistry, which was not a choice for the majority of girls, used a wheelchair, and studied social work in the U.S. Other people’s comments and attitudes often reminded me that I was different. In the U.S., however, many people have taken these differences to be my strengths and personality, not necessarily a source of comparison with what other people usually do. As I spend time in the U.S., I have come to understand that I feel free in the U.S. because I do not have to care so much about what other people think and how they will respond to my differences.

At the same time, I miss the comfortable and accepting atmosphere at home, school, and work in Japan. When I am with familiar people in Japan, such as my family members and friends from college, frequently, I do not have to tell them what I need, because they already know and even try to “read” what I need from our conversations and my responses. I also tend to think about how other people will respond before asking questions and sharing my stories. Beginning in early childhood, my mother taught me to read other people’s responses in this way. Even though I have felt tired of other peoples’ eyes, I also have relied on them. Currently, I am not able to meet with my family and Japanese friends as frequently as I used to, but their understanding and acceptance make me feel that I am protected and remind me that I am part of them.

I also miss Japanese rituals in our daily lives. For example, we say *itadaki-masu* and *gochiso-sama* before and after eating meals, respectively. The literal meaning of *itadaki-masu* is
“receiving,” and gochiso-sama means “it was a great meal.” Both itadaki-masu and gochiso-sama show thanks to the person who has prepared the meals, such as a mother when eating at home. However, we also say these words when we eat at restaurants, or eat something we do not have to cook, such as fruits. If my parents or grandparents found even a piece of rice left in my bowl, they said, “The farmer will cry.” By saying itadaki-masu and gochiso-sama, we thank everyone involved in preparing the food, including farmers, although it may be unconscious and taken for granted.

Other words we use daily in Japan are itte-rasshai and okaeri-nasai. When we leave home to go to school or work, we say, “Itte-kimasu (I am leaving and coming back),” and anyone who is staying at home says, “Itte-rasshai (Go and come back).” When we come home, we say, “Tadaima (Right now),” and people who are at home say, “Okaeri-nasai (Welcome back).” We use these words without thinking about their literal meanings, but by using them, we send and receive the message that the person who is leaving belongs to the place and that there is someone waiting for him or her to come back. The places to which we belong are not only our homes, but other groups, for example, classrooms for school-aged children. When I noticed that I said “Itte-kimasu” before leaving my room in the U.S. and found that there was no one who told me itte-rasshai, or even that there was no one who knew these words, I realized how these ritual words made me feel safe and reassured that there was someone who protected me. Hearing someone say, “Itte-rasshai” and “Okaeri-nasai” reminds me that I am part of a family or a group in which we help one another.

Living in another culture has given me a chance to learn about my own culture and the new culture at the same time. This placed me in a unique environment, simultaneously an insider and an outsider of both cultures. I learned about school social work and special education in the U.S. When I was in Japan, I knew there were children with disabilities, such as learning
disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), and autism spectrum disorders, in regular classrooms. These disabilities became known among Japanese people as “developmental disabilities,” but I did not have an opportunity to interact with them. Therefore, what I know about these children and how we work with them as social workers is based on my experiences and study in the U.S. From Japanese eyes, the support system for children with disabilities in the U.S. appeared rigid and somewhat coercive. I thought that Japanese people might not prefer the way U.S. school social workers and other school staff members worked with children and their parents, for example, pulling children out from their classrooms during instruction time to provide interventions and discussing children’s problems in meetings where there were educators parents did not know well. Many of the children receiving special education did not look to me like they had “disabilities,” but I did not know how children with similar problems were treated in Japan. Although I felt awkward with U.S. practices, they were what school staff members did daily and what we were supposed to learn to be school social workers.

Eventually, I became used to the U.S. way of interacting and working with children with disabilities, and conducted a pilot study with school staff members at an elementary school in Illinois who were providing support for children with disabilities (See Appendix A for the overview, methods, and results of the pilot study). In the pilot study, I noticed informal communications between school staff members that appeared very similar to Japanese personal relationships. For example, decisions to place children in special education were made by team members consisting of the children’s parents, classroom teachers and other specialists including a school psychologist and a school social worker. In fact, it was difficult to make such a decision

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1 In Japan, children with conditions which in the U.S. would be referred to as autism spectrum disorders, ADHD and learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, are referred to as “developmentally disabled.” This definition is not equal to clinical or academic definitions of developmental disabilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2007b), which may involve mental retardation and other disabilities (See the following sections in this chapter and Chapter 2 for more details).
within a limited time during the meetings. Accordingly, school staff members had frequent informal conversations to reach agreement before the meetings. This type of informal communication happens frequently in Japan. Therefore, I thought it was interesting to examine the function of such informal communications in the U.S. Yet, without knowledge of practices in Japanese schools, my explanation and discussion were not clear to people in the U.S.

In this dissertation study, I focused on an elementary school in Japan and observed and actually interacted with children with disabilities. I worked as a teaching assistant, and for the first time viewed a Japanese school from an adult perspective. From the viewpoint of a “teacher,” I noticed many practices I was not aware of as a child. I was able to identify these practices, because I had seen schools in the U.S. At the same time, I was frequently confused by Japanese teachers’ flexibility in trying out new “ideas” to deal with children’s problems, which was different from the structured support provided for U.S. children based on their Individualized Education Programs (IEP).

Many educational practices have changed since I was an elementary school student in Japan. The school that served as my research site had introduced several new systems, such as support for children experiencing social and learning difficulties. Yet, I found that relationships between teachers and children and the home-like atmosphere in classrooms had remained unchanged since I was a child. Children say “Itadaki-masu” and “Gochiso-sama” before and after eating school lunch. When someone leaves their classroom, children say, “Itte-rasshai.” Children clean their classrooms and other places in their school building by themselves. Because they clean by themselves, they try not to make a mess. If they spill something, they have to clean the floor, not a custodian or a janitor.

I also observed how peer support works to solve problems. When I worked with a group of children preparing for a presentation, some of the group members started arguing and one of
them cried. While 2-3 children tried to comfort the child crying, two other children joined the argument, and one of them cried when another child almost kicked him. Some group members went to talk to these children, and others went to find their classroom teacher, who was in another room. The teacher asked the children one by one what happened and how they felt, and let them tell her what they should have done. After that, she asked one of the group members to lead the group and told the group members to keep working on the project, and then she left the room. Before leaving the room, she said to me, “These kids were always like that. Don’t worry.” Because this incident involved a physical fight, if it was in the U.S., these children might have been sent to the administrator’s office, but this classroom teacher said, “It wasn’t a big deal” and things went on as if nothing had happened.

I observed many similar interactions between teachers and children or between children in which children learned how to behave and what teachers and other adults expected of them in their daily interactions. Some such interactions were with children who experienced social and learning difficulties in their regular classrooms. Teachers explained to me that for these children, interacting with their peers is a good opportunity to learn social as well as academic skills. In addition, their peers learn that there are many different people and find ways to learn and play together. There were conflicts between children, but I also observed that peers voluntarily helped children who had disabilities without knowing that they had “disabilities,” and teachers facilitated such interactions. As far as I observed, it was not common in schools in the U.S. for peers to be actively involved in support for children with disabilities; rather, support was primarily provided by educators.

As I observed and talked with teachers, children, and their parents in Japan, I began to understand the sense of these differences. In my own experience, groups can be a source of pressure to conform, as well as a source of emotional and physical protection from the outside.
Even though Japanese people prefer to work in groups, they are individuals with different personalities. They consciously or unconsciously express their individual desires without breaking group coherence, which is an important skill Japanese children learn in their daily interactions with others at home and school. Just as my mother taught me to anticipate what other people would feel before speaking to them, “reading” other people’s minds can help one to express one’s own feelings and willingness. If we understand what other people think and feel, it makes it easier for us to express our own feelings and thoughts in a way others can accept. I observed that this kind of interaction was common between teachers, children, and their parents at this elementary school in Japan. Educators created an environment in which parents are “guided” to accept their children’s needs naturally and children can best benefit from the support.

It is interesting to consider why they seem to prefer such indirect communications and support rather than expressing their needs straightforwardly as do many people in the U.S.

Another focus of this study is to describe the beliefs of children, their parents, and educators regarding children’s disabilities which are causing social and learning difficulties. “Disability” can be a sensitive issue for parents and children. I have come through the process of accepting my disability, which began when I was told as a graduate student in Japan that I would never be able to walk again. The first thing that came to my mind was, “Why me?” I soon realized that I also had to deal with other people’s responses to my wheelchair. My “disability” is apparent when other people see my wheelchair. Therefore, I have to deal with other people’s “eyes,” unless I chose to stay at home all of the time. If their disabilities are not so visible as my wheelchair, individuals have a choice to keep their disabilities private for a certain period of time.

Parents of children with disabilities who are experiencing academic and interpersonal difficulties in regular education classrooms have to make such a decision. Recently in Japan, children with developmental disabilities¹ causing social and learning difficulties in regular
classrooms became eligible to receive special education services. Although their “disabilities” are invisible from their physical appearances, many children and their peers know that they are different from other children, based on their everyday behaviors and interaction at school. In a society where disability can be a source of stigma, parents are faced with a dilemma; whether to obtain additional support for their children so that they can function better at school, or to keep their children’s disabilities private. How parents deal with this dilemma, choosing a benefit for their children that also creates a risk, may be related to the issue of how to keep the balance between individuality and group coherence. Children also have to navigate this issue, whether or not they receive additional support, in their daily lives at school with other children.

One of the reasons I feel “free” in the U.S. is that I can express my personal needs without worrying so much about other people’s responses, because the U.S. seems to place relatively more emphasis on individuality than Japanese society. At the same time, this means that if I do not express what I think and feel, my voice may not be heard. I still remember a conversation in my first year in the U.S. with other international students from Japan. We discussed that we had to learn to be more assertive in the U.S., but we might have to re-adjust to the Japanese way of expressing our needs when we returned to Japan. Otherwise, many Japanese people would be bothered and try to avoid us. One teacher at the Japanese elementary school also told me that individual differences should be respected, but too much “freedom” could be difficult. Therefore, individual children’s needs for additional support must be balanced with the needs of groups, such as their classrooms.

Yet, it is an oversimplification to characterize Japanese society as group oriented and U.S. society as individualistic. The relative emphasis on individuality and group coherence is a continuum and may vary within as well as across groups depending on the circumstances and issues. Even in the U.S., I met parents who were confused when their children’s potential
disabilities were indicated and who were concerned about what other people would think. Although the degree may be different from Japan, there is a stigma attached to disabilities in the U.S. For example, in my experience, Japanese people tend to treat wheelchairs more negatively than U.S. people. At the airport in the U.S., I saw many people who were able to walk if they used crutches using wheelchairs equipped for public use. I was surprised that staff members at the airport asked me if I could walk. In my mind, I was in a wheelchair because I was not able to walk. A wheelchair is for them one of the tools that helps people move around. In contrast, Japanese people try to avoid using wheelchairs if possible, due to the negative images of wheelchairs. Using a wheelchair means that they are different from others.

Although Japanese people are sensitive to “differences” from other people, they are also careful not to acknowledge these differences openly. Still, they offer help if they find someone who is in trouble. For example, when I visited the Japanese elementary school for the first time, I did not have to open the gate. I had told the principal that I was in a wheelchair, and one teacher who saw my car in front of the gate came out to help me open the gate. Later, I found that she was a school nurse and a special education coordinator of this school, and I worked as a teaching assistant under her direction. On my first day as a teaching assistant, I went to the gym to introduce myself during a morning meeting with all the children. There were several steps at the entrance, so the school nurse called several male teachers to carry my wheelchair. As we got to know one another, she learned what I could and could not do. After about 6 months when I had to go to the gym, she told me, “You can come in by yourself, right?” because by that time, she knew I was able to find someone who could help me, and I preferred this to making an arrangement ahead of time. Sensitivity to differences and offering/receiving support may sound contradictory, but somehow they co-exist in Japan, and I was curious about what makes this possible.
These questions may be difficult to answer, because they are interrelated to many other factors, such as personal experiences, available services and support, societal and cultural norms and beliefs, historical background, and policy and laws. Being in two different cultures provided me with opportunities to learn U.S. culture and re-learn Japanese culture from both outsider and insider perspectives. This allowed me to identify unique characteristics in each context, such as beliefs about disability and patterns of communication and personal relationships, which became a starting point to explore cultures in both countries from new perspectives.

**Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to explore, through an ethnographic approach, Japanese cultural beliefs about disability as they impact the experiences of children with disabilities at regular public schools, and the service delivery system of special education. Specifically, this study focuses on children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms at an elementary school in Japan. In this study, I have chosen to use the broad term, “developmental disabilities,” rather than focusing on specific disabilities. This is the term used by Japanese educators to refer to a variety of social and cognitive disabilities, such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorders. While Japanese children may have particular clinical diagnoses, Japanese educators focus on the functional implications, for example, their common challenges in learning within a group and interacting with peers. Their concerns, and my interests in this dissertation, are how children’s difficulties are understood by the children, parents, peers and educators; children’s daily experiences at school; and how children with developmental disabilities can be supported within the context of Japanese educational practices.

**Children with Developmental Disabilities in Regular Classrooms**

Children who are struggling with learning at school may have noticed that they are “different” from their peers. Many of them, however, do not know that they may have
“disabilities.” Their parents may not even be aware of their children’s disabilities. In many cases, these children’s disabilities are caused by neurologically based deficits that impact their school learning and social skills. These disabilities demonstrated by children in this study are called developmental disabilities in Japan, which include learning disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorders including high functioning autism and Asperger’s syndrome (See Chapter 2 for definitions used in public schools). According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which has established criteria to assess children’s eligibility to receive special education services under these disability categories, learning disabilities refer to:

- a deficit in understanding and using certain abilities, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, doing mathematical calculations, and reasoning without delay in overall intellectual development. It is suggested that learning disabilities are caused by deficits in the central nervous system, but not directly caused by environmental factors or other disabilities including visual and hearing impairments, mental retardation, and emotional disorders. (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1999)

ADHD is defined as:

- a disability causing impulsivity, hyperactivity, and/or a lack of attention that are not consistent with the age and the level of development of the child and that affect the child’s participation in social activities and educational performance. Symptoms of ADHD are present usually before the age of seven and are persistent. It is suggested that ADHD is caused by deficits in central nervous system (Reference: DSM-IV). (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003)
Autism, high functioning autism, and Asperger’s syndrome are defined as follows:

- Symptoms of high functioning autism are usually present before the age of three. High functioning autism refers to autism that is not associated with mental retardation.
- Symptoms of autism, which is a disability causing behavior problems, include 1) difficulties in developing social relationships with others, 2) delay in language development, and 3) narrow interests and persistent preoccupation with certain things.
- Asperger’s syndrome is not associated with mental retardation and delay in language development. High functioning autism and Asperger’s syndrome are categorized as pervasive developmental disorders (see DSM-IV). (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003)

These disabilities provide an important opportunity for exploring cultural beliefs about disability because they can be difficult for educators, other adults, and peers to interpret. The difficulties inherent in understanding the struggle of a child, who looks “normal” and healthy, can stimulate reflection on the nature of these disabilities. To some degree, challenges experienced by children with developmental disabilities, such as difficulties in reading, writing, math calculations, and focusing attention, are experienced by other children in regular classrooms. Appropriate support and accommodations at home and school, including modification of assignments and social skills training, facilitate children’s abilities to learn either in regular or special education classrooms (e.g., Dupper, 2002; Smith, 2007; Takayama, 2006). However, the challenges presented by these children are hidden from view, unlike those created by other disabilities involving mobility, visual, and hearing. In addition, the stigma of being different can cause secondary disabilities or disorders. If children are not able to receive appropriate support, deficits in social skills and difficulties in learning may negatively influence children’s self concept, their ability to make friends, and the way they approach schoolwork (e.g.,
McNulty, 2003; Portway & Johnson, 2005, Smith, 2007). These interpretive challenges provide a rich context to discuss cultural beliefs about disability and appropriate societal responses.

**Elementary school-aged children**

This study focuses on elementary school-aged children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms. Children benefit from early identification of their disabilities and interventions before their difficulties become complicated by secondary disabilities (e.g., Smith, 2007; Takayama, 2006). However, due to the invisibility of their disabilities, not all children can benefit from such support. Research on younger children can contribute to practice by raising awareness and accumulating knowledge on early intervention programs that meet the needs of individual children.

**What Makes Japanese Special Education Unique**

Cultural variations also exist in how children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms are understood and responded to, including at the societal level. For approximately 35 years, for example, U.S. children have received special education services in local public schools based on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Department of Education, 2010). IEPs are designed to provide individualized support to meet each child’s special needs in collaboration with parents and multiple professionals including special education and classroom teachers, school social workers, and other support staff members. The IDEA requires schools to assess the “least restrictive environment” for each child to receive special education services. Accordingly, children are placed at local public schools unless they need to receive intensive support at a more restrictive environment, for example at special education schools (Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009).

In contrast, the Japanese government only recently implemented formal special education

Traditionally in Japan, special education services have been provided primarily for children with serious and low incident disabilities, such as visual and hearing impairments and severe mental retardation, in special education schools or classrooms separate from regular education classrooms (See Chapter 2 for history and policies related to special education in Japan). During the 2006-2007 school year, children with mental retardation made up about 40% of children receiving special education services in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2007c). In contrast, about 40% of children receiving special education services under the IDEA in the U.S. were children with learning disabilities (Data Accountability Center, 2008; See Table 1 for the incidence of special education service delivery to children in the U.S. and Japan by disability).

Since the late 1970s, the Japanese government has become increasingly aware of children with learning difficulties in regular classrooms (National Institute of Special Needs Education, 1978). Nevertheless, until recently, these children were educated in regular classrooms (e.g., Stevenson & Stigler, 1992) by classroom teachers who had neither specialized training nor support services (Kataoka, van Kraayenoord, & Elkins, 2004). During the 1990s, the special needs of children with disabilities in regular classrooms received wider public attention, and the special education system entered a period of reform (e.g., Abe, 1998). It was around this time when children with disabilities, such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorders, in regular classrooms became known as children with developmental disabilities in Japan. In the 2007-2008 school year, schools in Japan implemented a new system of formal
special education services for these children (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2006a, 2006b, 2006d). After this educational reform, children who used to be recognized as “slow learners” were treated as children who required special education services. This shift has provoked thought and reexamination of implicit assumptions about developmental disability in Japan. In short, this shift in policy provides a unique opportunity to explore how children, their parents, and educators understand “developmental disabilities” and the way support for these children is delivered.

For example, confusions caused by the educational reform have put children with developmental disabilities, their peers, and educators in a unique environment in which they have to adjust to the new support system. As they receive additional support, children with developmental disabilities establish their status as individuals with special needs in their interactions with peers and educators, who also are adjusting to the new environment. Classroom teachers have to re-learn how to provide appropriate support for these children. In other words, not only children with developmental disabilities, but also their peers and educators are currently situated in an educational environment in transition. According to Bakhtin, this process of transition can be examined through dialogue among the involved individuals (Morson & Emerson, 1990), such as children’s daily interactions with peers, educators, and their parents. One example of such an interaction could be conversations related to educational support as children engage in new interactions and relationships. This new genre of dialogue on disability and educational support among children may illustrate the process of how children adjust and re-create their relationships with others and how they understand their experiences of support.

The Meaning of Disability Stories

Hearing participants’ disability stories is of interest to researchers who explore experiences and perceptions of people with disabilities, such as how they think and feel about
their disabilities, the way they cope with difficulties associated with their disabilities, and how they integrate their difficulties into their daily lives (Lutz & Bowers, 2005; Phillips, 1990). From the perspective of individuals with disabilities, the opportunity to tell their stories may not always be welcomed. They tell what they can at the moment of meeting with researchers. They may intentionally leave out some experiences or choose to remain silent, because telling their stories about disabilities may cause emotional reactions, such as fear, anger, shock, and sorrow in themselves and others. Therefore, they may choose audiences who can understand them (Charmaz, 2002). If they think that researchers are not able to understand such feelings and their difficulties, they may speak only briefly, or remain silent. In order to hear their stories and interpret silence, researchers may have to develop long-term relationships with them, gain trust, and let them know that the researchers have the abilities to understand their stories. If researchers have similar experiences and share them with participants, it can help to establish trusting relationships.

People who have disabilities and chronic illnesses can be marginalized and stigmatized with limited opportunities to participate in social activities. They may suffer from stress caused by restrictions associated with their disabilities and illnesses. For example, children with chronic illness may not be able to enjoy and fully participate in school activities if they do not receive accommodations, and they may feel that they are different from other children. As a way to cope with stress, children may express their ambiguity and confusion indirectly in their stories, play, humor, and rituals (Clark, 2003). Similarly, working class parents transformed negative experiences into entertaining stories to deal with grief (Miller, Cho, & Bracey, 2005). Morgan (1980) discussed stories of a black family that turned hardships, such as racism, into jokes and comical stories as a way of coping. Researchers who have similar experiences may be more sensitive to implicit messages regarding hardships. They may be able to identify and interpret
such messages and explore them further. This sensitivity and empathy also makes it possible to recognize when the interview has become intrusive, and make an ethical decision whether or not to continue (e.g., Stake, 2010).

Some stories are untellable because the tellers choose to remain silent in certain contexts, such as their families. Their concerns are for family members, including their reaction to the stories and its impact on their relationships. By knowing secret stories, family members also have to bear an extra burden. For example, a Taiwanese grandmother kept stories about her deceased first husband, who appeared in her dreams repeatedly, secret for years until she told a researcher. Because remarriage was a violation of cultural norms for her and the dreams were too intimate and emotional to be shared, she thought that their children would not appreciate her stories. However, the researcher was an outsider, so the grandmother did not have to care about such consequences and felt comfortable in telling her stories (Miller, Fung, & Koven, 2007). There seem to be appropriate relationships and a social distance to express and understand stories involving socially unacceptable and emotional experiences. Disability stories also may be a type of secret story in some cultures, such as Asian countries where group harmony is valued (Chan, 1998; Tachibana & Watanabe, 2004). Telling one’s own or a family member’s disability story in public can mean singling out individuals with disabilities as different from others and not competent to take full responsibility as a member of the community. This can damage their relationships in the community as a “group.”

Children also know how their illness influences their relationships with family members including their parents and siblings, and sometimes they choose to remain silent about their illness in order to maintain family roles. Children sometimes feel that they can handle their experiences and feelings better than their parents (Clark, 2003). If parents become overprotective or overwhelmed by hearing their stories, children may miss opportunities to be
“normal” children and to participate in social activities as other children do. For example, an eight-year-old child understood her terminal illness and was concerned about her parents and older brother after her death (Deford, 1997). Children may know much more than adults think and have the ability to express their feelings and experiences. Researchers from outside may be able to provide more opportunities for them to express their feelings and experiences than family members and friends with whom children have close relationships.

There is also a right time to tell traumatic and silenced experience. Portelli (2003) interviewed people who witnessed the massacre in Rome at the end of World War II. One of the participants described his experience during the war as the worst experience of his life. Fifty years later, he noted that he talks about those times with friends to remember. Experiences of the war may be different from those of disabilities, which usually are life long, but both types of memories and emotions associated with traumatic experiences may be carried by the individuals for the rest of their lives. In addition to adjustment to a traumatic loss, people who acquire disabilities have to accept their disabilities and re-learn skills required in their daily lives. Parents of children with disabilities also have to make psychological adjustments and additional efforts in searching for necessary support for their children (Cohen & Napolitano, 2007). They may need time to remain silent, until they internalize their past experiences and feel that they are not in a crisis situation any more.

Thinking back about their past experiences and re-organizing their stories may help people to cope with past traumatic experiences (Steedman, 1986). Every person should have experiences that had important meanings for them, such as experiences that determined the future path. At these turning points, people might have left “unfinished business,” especially when they were not satisfied with the decision they made. When people acquire disabilities or when parents find that their children have disabilities, they have to make a decision to do their
best while coping with the disabilities. Their prior desires may not be fulfilled and may have to be adjusted within the available resources and abilities (Cohen & Napolitano, 2007). Memories and emotional reactions to these experiences may come up years later when they come across similar situations. Steedman (1986) notes that writing down one’s own history makes it possible to understand how each experience is connected, and to learn about the self. In the same way, thinking back about their past and telling their stories may help people with disabilities and their parents to comprehend, internalize, and make peace with the past painful experiences.

Similarly, children with disabilities may benefit from expressing their feelings and experiences. Their experiences, however, may differ by the type of disability. Children with physical disabilities may have more opportunities to receive support and express their needs, because their disabilities are apparent. In contrast, the needs and difficulties of children with developmental disabilities are less visible, and their difficulties and struggles may not be understood correctly by others. If adults and their peers do not have enough knowledge and resources, their needs and confusion may not be expressed unless someone creates opportunities for them. Researchers can assume this role. For example, Biehl (2005) helped Catarina, who was socially abandoned, to meet her family and make her stories about illness and disability open to the public.

Further, if a researcher exploring disability stories has a disability, like me, it may be beneficial for both of the researcher and participants, for example, learning about self through sharing disability stories. Tregaskis and Goodley (2005) emphasize that their own personal experiences of disability provide them with more opportunities than other researchers to hear participants’ disability stories and explore their perceptions of disability.

**Conceptual Framework**

Disability can be examined at several different levels, for example, at the micro level
including individual physical and mental conditions which cause particular problems in their daily lives and at the macro level including societal responses and cultural beliefs about disability. Furthermore, these levels interact with one another and influence the lives of children with disabilities and their parents. For example, cultural beliefs about disability and policies can shape the values and individual beliefs of others, such as professionals regarding children’s needs and abilities (Ware, 2002). Such beliefs and values affect the services available for these children and their daily experiences in their relationships with professionals, families, and friends. Therefore, “disability” can be defined as the interactions of children with particular atypical conditions [micro level] and their environments [macro level] that include specific cultural beliefs about disability (e.g., Shweder et al., 2006). These beliefs serve as a frame of reference for parents and professionals to provide children with care and support and help them integrate “disabilities” into their lives.

**Theories Related to Disability**

The medical model defines disability as a problem of functioning at the individual level. Under this model, causes of a disability are within the individual, such as impairment caused by disease or health condition (LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007; Lutz & Bowers, 2005). Their needs are considered to emerge from a medical condition, such as deficits in physical and mental functioning, rather than seeing disability as socially constructed (Oliver, 1986). Interventions under this model include medical and related health interventions, which mainly focus on treatment of symptoms that have caused impairment (Turnbull & Stowe, 2001). Therefore, children with disabilities and their parents are expected to seek professional assistance for eliminating individual problems, in order to function in their society (Donoghue, 2003). Under this model, individual children with disabilities are the persons who are responsible for adjusting to society.
In contrast, the social model of disability looks for causes of disability in society’s responses, such as unequal access and negative attitudes (LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007; Lutz & Bowers, 2005; Oliver, 1986). Psychological barriers, including stigma and discrimination, as well as physical environments that are not accessible to children with disabilities marginalize them in society. Solutions to the problems created by disabilities under this model include policy changes to facilitate equal access to social services, such as special education, and reduce barriers in society. Accessibility to services including public education and social participation are viewed as basic human rights (e.g., Lutz & Bowers, 2005; Turnbull & Stowe, 2001). Children with disabilities and their parents are empowered through societal and policy changes. These changes affect the lives of children with disabilities indirectly by helping society to adjust to them. The core concept of the social model is antidiscrimination, and support at the individual level is less emphasized (Turnbull & Stowe, 2001).

In addition to examining individual and societal factors separately, it is also important to consider the perspectives and everyday experiences of children with disabilities in relation to their interactions with the environment. They may feel less “disabled” when they are successful in achieving culturally valued expectations, such as college graduation and participating in leisure activities (Devlieger, 1999; LoBianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). Indeed, accessible environments can empower children with disabilities and change their way of thinking about their disabilities. Phillips (1990) explored the personal experiences of people with disabilities. One of the participants with disabilities described how her perceptions of her own disability changed when she went to a university that was accessible to students with disabilities. She became confident with moving around the campus by herself and pursuing her study, in spite of her earlier experiences in which she had to depend on family members and gave up going to college due to difficulties in finding assistance to attend classes on a daily basis. Further, the
presence of other students with disabilities had influenced the culture of the university. They were treated as equal to other students while receiving necessary support.

Crystal, Watanabe, and Chen (1999) discussed disability by using an interactive nature of stigma (Goffman, 1963). Community-based systems of belief define what is normal and what is deviant. Individuals establish ideas about disability depending on their exposure to shared beliefs in the society as well as their past experiences and relationships with other people. In other words, culture is constructed by choosing items from the past and present that are weighted by individual experiences, values, and prevalent beliefs in the society (Fung, 2003). Societal and cultural belief systems have the potential to shape interactions between children with disabilities and other people.

Especially in Japan, where “self” tends to be understood in relation to social relationships, what people say and how they behave may be adjusted in a way that is appropriate and acceptable to the social groups to which they belong (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Similarly, children with disabilities and their parents may locate children’s disabilities in their relationships with others, for example, by considering children’s functioning within their peer groups. At the same time, Shimizu (2001a) indicates that individuals may have a conflict between their own beliefs and what they think is expected as socially appropriate and acceptable behaviors. In this context, failure to meet societal expectations can be understood as an opportunity to work on improving deficits (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). For children with disabilities and their parents, differences from other typically developing children may become the major concern, probably more than biological descriptions of their disabilities based on the medical model. Therefore, it is important to examine their experiences and beliefs about disability in the social and cultural contexts to which individuals with disabilities belong.
Developmental Cultural Psychology

In this study, the experiences of children with disabilities, their parents, and educators will be viewed in relation to the issue of cultural beliefs about disability and related systems of special education through the lens of developmental cultural psychology. Children learn and co-create normative beliefs and expectations to take responsibility as members in their culture through their participation in daily activities as well as their interactions with family members and neighbors. Although there are individual differences, they share similar beliefs, expectations, and perceptions within the culture, and each of the members contributes to re-creating and shaping these shared meanings (e.g., Gaskins, Miller, & Corsaro, 1992; Shweder et al., 2006; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993).

In this framework, the everyday experiences of children with disabilities and those who care for and educate them are mediated by cultural beliefs about disability including appropriate social accommodations and understandings of disability in the society. Therefore, disability should be considered as the interaction of children with disabilities and their environment that reflect specific cultural beliefs about disability (Ware, 2002), such as their parents and professionals who provide them with care and support, peers and friends at school, and their siblings at home. For example, family members and educators have a direct impact on the lives of children with disabilities through the care and socialization they provide. They also can provide a bridge between children with disabilities and society by advocating for appropriate services and accommodations, thereby impacting cultural beliefs, values, and social structures. Relationships between family members and professionals are critical, as they work to facilitate interactions between children with disabilities and society.

Such interactions experienced by children with disabilities are examples of Bakhtin’s genres in daily experiences (Morson & Emerson, 1990), namely, disability genre or dialogue.
Since every person has different experiences, their interpretations of the same incidents, such as conflicts caused by disabilities, vary. Through these interactions, people learn how other people interpret and shape their own understanding, including beliefs about disability. Specifically, children adjust to social demands, for example, by acquiring skills to perform daily activities and integrating their disabilities as part of their lives through daily interactions with parents and receiving services from professionals (Cohen & Napolitano, 2007; Lutz & Bowers, 2005). Consequently, appropriate approaches to children with disabilities will vary cross culturally (Banks, 2003).

As interactions with others continue, children with disabilities begin to internalize and construct their own understanding of disabilities. These interactions may include their parents, peers at school, and educators. During this process, discourse, for example, what they talk about and do to deal with difficulties caused by disabilities, functions as Vygotsky’s meditational means (Wertsch, 1991) that reflect their understanding of and beliefs about disability. For example, in a classroom, through the problem solving process caused by disabilities, children may learn that they are different from their peers, but are nevertheless able to participate in activities with support from others. Other children who are typically developing may learn there are people who have different competencies from their own and become more open to people with disabilities.

Observations of such interactions between children with disabilities and others help us to understand what children learn from their daily experiences at school through an approach termed “creative understanding” by Bakhtin (Morson & Emerson, 1990). In order to understand someone, we have to locate ourselves outside of the group to which the individual belongs. If this person is in the same group as our own, it creates a blind spot. There are patterns we can identify when looking at the person from an outsider perspective that an insider may take for
granted. Accordingly, looking at children with disabilities and their interactions from an outsider perspective can provide a more complete understanding of the children as well as cultural beliefs about disability. For example, in their essays about their experiences of raising children with autism, two Japanese parents who experienced special education services for their children in both countries described differences in cultural beliefs about disability and special education services in the U.S. and Japan (Chibikuma mama, 2005; Ogino, 2004). They noted that educators in the U.S. were willing to provide services even for children who were not U.S. citizens and appreciated that they tried to find children’s strengths and develop programs based on these strengths. After becoming used to the U.S. system, parents noticed barriers in Japan that other Japanese parents might take for granted, such as a lack of service and city office workers, preschools, and day care centers that refused to provide services for their children due to their disabilities. Educators and administrators were concerned about the safety of children with disabilities as well as other children in the programs. Parents had to re-adjust to Japanese ways of thinking about disability and actively search for services for their children.

This contrast between U.S. and Japanese practices articulated by these parents highlights issues related to the emphasis in the U.S. and Japan on individualized and group-based support, respectively, and how such differences may impact the experiences of children with disabilities at school in each culture. Like the Japanese parents who experienced special education services for their children in the U.S. and Japan, my experiences and knowledge of U.S. special education and school social work provide me with the “outsider” perspective, in order to further explore and discuss what I have observed at an elementary school in Japan as an “insider.”

**Parental Beliefs and Experiences of Special Education**

Several studies have explored parents’ beliefs and experiences of special education in the U.S. (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Nelson, Summers, &
Turnbull, 2004), and in Japan (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). Studies by Blue-Banning et al. (2004) and Nelson et al. (2004) also included educators as participants. In both the U.S. and Japan, parents have expressed the importance of the relationships they establish with educators providing services to their children with disabilities.

Kasahara and Turnbull (2005) explored the meaning of the family-professional partnership from the perspective of Japanese parents of children with disabilities. Thirty mothers of children with disabilities participated in either focus groups or individual interviews. Children’s ages ranged from 3 to 13, and their disabilities varied from physical disabilities to Down’s syndrome and autism. Several needs of parents of children with disabilities were discussed including establishing collaborative relationships with professionals, such as teachers and other educators as well as medical doctors and social support staff.

Blue-Banning et al. (2004) conducted a similar study in the U.S. exploring family and professional partnerships. A total of 137 parents of children with and without disabilities and educators including service providers and administrators participated in either focus groups or individual interviews. Later, a secondary analysis of this data set was conducted by Nelson et al. (2004) focusing on boundaries between parents and educators. Of the 70 parents of children with disabilities, about two thirds had children who were pre-school or elementary age. The majority of children were reported to have mild to moderate disabilities, but types of disabilities were not specified. To encourage parents’ full participation, educators and parents participated in separate focus groups. Several indicators of educator behavior that facilitated collaborative partnerships were identified, such as communication, equality, trust, and educators’ commitment to their work.

Cultural Beliefs about Disability

Cultural beliefs about disability presumably provide parents and educators with a framework for responding to children’s disabilities. Japanese parents of children with disabilities
who participated in focus groups or individual interviews conducted by Kasahara and Turnbull (2005) reported struggling with social stigma expressed toward them or their children in daily conversations, such as “I am sorry for you,” or “You must be unhappy.” Japanese people tend to consider people with disabilities to be abnormal. A belief in the responsibility of the government to uphold the individual rights of people with disabilities, such as equal participation and opportunities, is not yet typical in Japan, as it has become in the U.S. (Crystal et al., 1999) after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s to 1960s (e.g., Hall, 2002; Mithaiwala, 2004).

In contrast, care for individuals with disabilities is viewed by many Japanese people as the responsibility of families, even though public assistance is available. Some individuals believe that receiving social services is not worth the risk. Being known to be a person with a disability by others could damage the person and the family because of the negative images of disability (Asai & Kameoka, 2005; Tachibana & Watanabe, 2004). Japanese people tend to see family members as part of the family as well as the community, rather than considering them as individuals. Therefore, problems of individual family members are considered to be problems of the family, and they prefer to avoid situations in which they may feel shame (Asai & Kameoka, 2005), for example, they may hide a family member with a disability from their neighbors (Tachibana & Watanabe, 2004).

Japanese parents, who prefer inclusion to segregation in schooling, have had to fight against segregative views of disabilities. In the study by Kasahara and Turnbull (2005), Japanese parents revealed considerable strength in addressing their children’s disabilities. Parents viewed disabilities as part of their children’s identity and personality, and they expressed needs for more support. Kasahara and Turnbull noted that parents preferred to use the term “services,” which emphasized consumers’ rights to receive support from local governments and schools. The concept of consumers’ rights appeared to lessen the sense of guilt and shame Japanese families
often felt for asking society for a “favor.”

**Parents’ Experiences with Educators**

U.S. and Japanese parents commonly addressed the need for collaboration with educators, the use of individualized programs based on children’s special needs, and children’s rights to receive appropriate services (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2009; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). Indeed, both U.S. and Japanese parents perceive that equality, reciprocity, commitment, skills, trust, and respect are professional attributes that facilitate collaborative partnerships between parents and educators (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). These concepts, however, seem to have somewhat different meanings for U.S. and Japanese parents. More specifically, Japanese parents tended to be relatively passive and valued empathy in their relationships with educators (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005), whereas U.S. parents expressed the importance of equality, reciprocity, and open communication with educators (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Nelson et al., 2004).

**Equality and Reciprocity**

In the U.S., parents and educators emphasized the importance of equality and reciprocity to their positive partnership. In order to establish equality, parents reported that educators had to empower families by encouraging them to express opinions and providing support to gain skills, so that families were able to participate fully in the decision making process. Consequently, parents reported the need for frequent, open, and clear communications with educators, including positive comments on children in addition to their difficulties, avoidance of blame, and freedom from jargon (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Japanese parents also indicated that clear communications and equal and reciprocal relationships empowered parents, but described frequent negative experiences, due to hierarchical relationships and stigma (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Tachibana & Watanabe,
2004). For example, one Japanese mother talked about an unsympathetic medical doctor, who discounted her concern about her child’s seizures. Other Japanese parents reported their hesitation in communicating with educators, due to the existence of hierarchical relationships in schools (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). Even though Japanese parents tried to deal with hierarchical relationships and negative views of disability, these issues seemed to be barriers to establishing equal and reciprocal relationship with educators.

One of the major challenges raised by Japanese parents was a need for support in order to communicate with educators. Although parents expressed a desire for establishing equal relationships with teachers and other educators, they perceived themselves as possessing less power and expressed guilt and anxiety when disagreeing with or challenging teachers (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). Parents’ struggle is consistent with Japanese hierarchism in the context of family-professional relationships, which has been taken for granted historically (Gordon, 2005; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). By challenging teachers, parents go against Japanese hierarchism. Parents may become anxious that teachers do not care properly for their children, once they find that parents are not satisfied with or critical of their way of teaching. Some scholars have suggested that relationships between Japanese teachers and parents have changed after World War II. Teachers are not respected as they used to be, due to increased parental education and a liberalization of educational practice (Gordon, 2005). Parents are more assertive and feel that they are qualified to judge the educational process (Fujita, 1991). Still, parents need someone who can provide support to express their concerns without fear of negative consequences in their relationships with educators. A school social worker may be the appropriate person to be a liaison between them.

**Respect and Trust**

U.S. and Japanese parents commonly expressed the importance of establishing trusting
relationships with educators and the desire to work with committed educators who respected
them and their children, and whose skills and motivation met their children’s unique needs
(Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Nelson et al., 2004). U.S. and Japanese
parents, however, expressed slightly different ideas about “respect” and “trust,” which
contributed to parents’ ways of thinking about the quality of support for their children with
disabilities.

Japanese parents felt that they and their children were respected by educators when they
were treated as individuals with free will. They were willing to receive services from educators
who enjoyed working with children and whose work was rooted in love and respect for children
(Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). Japanese parents seemed to understand respect passively and
implicitly. Even though they expressed a willingness to work collaboratively with educators,
they tended to be hesitant with sharing their ideas with educators. Nevertheless, they expect
educators’ commitment and empathy. As a result, many Japanese parents felt that they and their
children were not respected as they had expected.

U.S. parents also emphasized the importance of the individual human rights of children
and respect for parents’ contributions to supporting their children. They emphasized their equal
and regular participation with educators in decision making and their children’s care. In addition,
they expected acknowledgement for their contributions and efforts (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).
U.S. parents understood respect as part of the general rules and their right (Crystal et al., 1999).

Both U.S. and Japanese parents addressed educators’ commitment as part of trust, so that
they felt comfortable leaving their children with educators (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, Kasahara
& Turnbull, 2005; Taub, 2006). Additionally, some parents in the U.S. emphasized the
importance of confidentiality of personal information (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). The major
difference between parents in the U.S. and Japan was that Japanese parents stressed empathy as
the important factor in establishing trusting relationships.

Since childhood, Japanese people are socialized to experience empathy in their relationships with others (Shimizu, 2001b). When asked about a peer with a disability, Japanese children addressed more concerns for them and empathy than did U.S. children (Crystal et al., 1999). Further, when preschool teachers were asked to choose the most important thing for children to learn in preschool, one third of Japanese teachers and 5% of U.S. teachers picked the choice, “sympathy, empathy, and concern for others” (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson, 1989).

Accordingly, Japanese socialization emphasizes sensitivity and caring for other’s feelings (e.g., Azuma, 1994; Shimizu, 2001b; Shweder et al., 2006; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009). For example, Japanese teachers emphasized the importance of skills in listening over speaking (Tobin et al., 1989). In contrast, U.S. socialization practices encourage children to articulate their own feelings (e.g., Azuma, 1994; Shweder et al., 2006; Tobin et al., 1989; Tobin et al., 2009), and U.S. teachers emphasize children’s verbal communication skills in expressing themselves clearly (Tobin, et al., 1989).

For Japanese people, empathy involves sensing and anticipating other people’s needs and taking care of them (Lebra, 1976). Doi (2001) described his confusion when visiting a family in the U.S. when a host asked what he wanted to drink before the meal. In such a case, a Japanese host may serve what he or she thinks a guest wants without asking. The responsibility of the individual is to sense what others are feeling and thinking more than to express one’s own emotion and thoughts.

Further, in a comparison study of parenting in the U.S. and Japan, Azuma (1994) found that Japanese children were exposed to more opportunities to guess and sense what other people felt than U.S. children. Such an environment was created by their parents, who prioritized children’s abilities to control their feelings without disturbing other people. This contrasted to
U.S. parents who expected their children to be able to express their own opinions in their relationships with other children. Accordingly, empathy is taken for granted among Japanese parents, and they may unconsciously expect and wait for educators to show empathy and find out their problems before speaking up.

Japanese parents of children with disabilities indicated several attitudes of empathetic professionals, including treating children as if they were their own, being open to asking families for help, making persistent efforts to improve the situation beyond expected duties, and sharing children’s perspective rather than applying preconceptions to children’s performances (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). In other words, many parents desire to establish closer personal relationships with professionals without hierarchical power differences, which can be demonstrated by ongoing interactions with families based on careful observations from the viewpoint of families and children. Consequently, professionals are required to read the meanings behind children’s and parents’ behaviors and attitudes and to be sensitive to signs suggesting that children and parents have some problems at school and/or home. Kataoka et al. (2004) indicated, however, that not all educators are able to provide children with the necessary support due to time constraints and a lack of knowledge and skills to work with children with disabilities.

One of the Japanese mothers of children with autism who experienced special education in both countries described her experiences after she came back to Japan. She thought that she could trust and rely on a classroom teacher when the teacher visited her home before her child started school and said that she wanted to learn from the mother about the child. The teacher continued that although she had learned how to teach children with autism in general, mothers knew more about children’s personality and characteristics. This mother had prepared a sheet of paper filled with the child’s preferences, characteristics, and difficulties, and wondered how she would share it with the teacher. She did not need to worry after all, because the teacher asked
before she shared the information. The same mother also reported that she “tested” school staff members’ responses when she and her child visited the school earlier without requesting anything prior to the visit. The school’s accommodations were satisfactory, and she decided to have her child attend this school (Chibikuma mama, 2005). Even though this mother did not express them verbally, she had concerns and requests for teachers in her mind. This conversation between the mother and the classroom teacher as well as the mother’s “testing” show how they communicate non-verbally by “reading” the minds and feelings of the other. “Invisible” negotiations between parents and professionals are one of the characteristics of Japanese relationships.

**Boundaries between Interpersonal Relationships**

While Japanese parents wanted educators to work with their children beyond their expected duties and to show children respect, many parents reported a lack of such quality in educators. Accordingly, these Japanese parents expressed a desire to sustain interdependence between parents and educators in order to establish balanced role sharing, partly due to the lack of educators’ willingness to consider the unique ideas from children’s families (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005).

In the U.S., where parents’ participation in collaborative decision making with educators is required by the IDEA, parents provided both positive and negative perceptions regarding professional boundaries. Some parents expressed the need for educators to be accessible and flexible, for example, one mother appreciated that her child’s teacher gave the mother her personal contact number in case of emergency. Yet, other parents expressed their willingness to keep boundaries as parents and educators, not as friends, because it would hurt them and their children when their relationships were terminated when moving to another classroom or school. Each parent seemed to have specific preferences in terms of professional boundaries and optimal
distance (Nelson et al., 2004).

A cross-cultural study on friendship in the U.S. and Japan suggested that Japanese friendship emphasized interdependence and group conformity through sharing problems and encouraging solutions, whereas U.S. friends were expected to be relatively more independent in taking care of themselves (Maeda & Ritchie, 2003). Doi (1996) discussed that the importance of personal relations is one of the unique characteristics in Japan by using the concept of *amae*, which refers to indulgent dependency observed between persons who have close relationships. He further indicated that Japanese people place a unique quality in their relationships. In order to express *amae*, there should be a certain quality of relationship between people who express *amae* and who receive such a request, for example, relationships between parents and children and between friends. Japanese people distinguish how to behave when they have or have not established relationships. When they do not know each other yet, people tend to hold back. As they get closer, they can be more open and express dependence, such as their needs and desire, with less restraint, which is another way to describe *amae*. Showing *amae* to others can be a sign suggesting that their relationships are close enough to be considered as members of a group in which they help one another (Doi, 2001). In these relationships, people are required to be sensitive to what other people think and feel, which helps them to measure how close or distant their relationships are.

**Systematic Services**

In the U.S., parent involvement in special education is required by the IDEA (e.g., Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009). This system, however, may look somewhat impersonal and business-like to parents. Some U.S. parents struggle with the complexity of receiving special education services. Parents may feel that the language used by educators, such as unclear words and jargon, and confidentiality of personal information can impede their
participation in the process (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Meanwhile, the lack of systematic provision of services for children with disabilities caused problems for parents in Japan. Japanese mothers of children with disabilities hoped to receive services in a more coordinated, integrated, and seamless way in their children’s school transitions through shared information about their children across agencies providing services. Yet, Japanese parents seemed to have structural barriers in their children’s school transitions, such as the lack of established procedures for information sharing, educators’ low awareness of child development, and competition among educators (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005). In contrast, school staff members in the U.S. are required by the IDEA to plan and provide support for students’ transitions, such as opportunities for parents, students, and current and future school staff members to meet together before moving to new settings, so that parents and educators are able to share the same information from the former placements (e.g., Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009).

In the U.S., parents and school staff members seem to have somewhat different issues from Japan in working together collaboratively. Special education in the U.S. is characterized, ideally, as family centered practice emphasizing individuality, an equal relationship between parents and professionals, and active participation of parents in the decision making process for IEP development (e.g., Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009). For example, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) provides a Parent Guide that explains in detail the educational rights of students with disabilities and the importance of parents’ participation in the decision making process for their children in a language parents can understand (ISBE, 2009). Unfortunately, this system can also be a barrier to building relationships between parents and school staff. Complicated procedures and paperwork that parents may not understand can make parents feel isolated (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Multidisciplinary meetings, including IEP
meetings, provide parents with opportunities to participate in the decision making process. However, when meetings are spent filling out paperwork, parents may feel a lack of empathy, ignored, and left out. Even though parents receive a Parent Guide, they may need further explanation and timely assistance to go through the process. Thus, school social workers can be interpreters for parents, for example, during the IEP meetings.

Japanese parents may benefit from the U.S. style system, for example, in children’s transitions, so that they can adjust to new people and environments more easily. This U.S. system, however, may not be accepted by Japanese parents and professionals as it is, even though Japanese parents indicate the need for more systematic support for their children. Because parents emphasize the importance of empathy in order to build trusting relationships with professionals, systematic support determined by the law, such as the IEP process under the IDEA, may not be important for Japanese parents when they feel comfortable with working collaboratively with professionals and are satisfied with the services. They seem to seek a deep emotional connection in their relationships with professionals, including school social workers. Thus, attitudes of school staff toward parents may affect their willingness to be a part of teams providing support for their children. Japanese parents may prefer to establish their own system that emphasizes cooperation among children, parents, and professionals at an emotional level.

Beliefs, Experiences, and Service Delivery Systems
Japanese parents’ needs in special education services, including individualized programs and coordinated services for their children, are reflected in the new special education system recently implemented in Japan. Schools have begun implementing new programs, including IEP-type services and team-based coordination of services for children with special needs by borrowing ideas from other countries including the U.S (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2007a; See also Chapter 2 for the new special education services). Still,
special education in the U.S may be perceived as too systematic by Japanese parents who value empathy in their relationships with educators. Learning and borrowing systems from other countries should be done carefully. Even if the system works in the U.S., it has to be modified so that Japanese parents, children, and educators feel comfortable in receiving/providing services (Cheng, 1998). Policies and practices developed in other cultures have to be modified to fit the existing Japanese educational system described below.

**Elementary Education in Japan**

One of the important purposes of Japanese education for school-aged children is learning social and interpersonal, as well as academic, skills. Okamoto (2003, 2006) indicates that Japanese education is unique among industrialized countries because it emphasizes the spiritual function of education, such as development of personalities and mind, and emotional and social well-being in addition to academic skills. Accordingly, parents expect educators to assume broader roles in their children’s development, not only teaching academic skills, but also providing opportunities to learn basic life skills and manner, discipline, and moral education. Okamoto (2006) explains this emphasis on non-academic skills by using the Japanese notion of “kokoro,” which corresponds to mind and heart in English:

“Kokoro” is a concept with a wide range of connotations including heart, mind, soul, spirit, attitude, value system, and humanity. As witnessed by the frequent use of slogans extolling the virtues of “education for kokoro”, it can be said that the fundamental purpose of education in Japan is surprisingly defined in nothing but spiritual, loftier terms such as “kokoro” or character development. (p. 9)

The Fundamental Law of Education of 2006 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2006) actually states the purpose of education:

Education has to be provided in order to promote full character/personality development
and raise children who are healthy both physically and mentally and who have abilities to contribute to the formation of a peaceful and democratic nation and society. (Article 1, paragraph 1)

This statement clearly identifies personality/character development as a fundamental purpose of education. In addition, a phrase like “children who are healthy physically and mentally” is frequently used in Japanese education, such as in the National Curriculum Standards and mission statements of each school. The original Japanese word for “physically and mentally” is “shin-shin (心身: mind/heart and body)” that involves a Chinese character, “kokoro (心).” Development of personality as well as kokoro seems to be a central value guiding Japanese education.

Furthermore, the Japanese translation of education, “kyo-iku (kyo: teach, iku: grow, raise),” itself includes both “raising up” children and “teaching.” Classroom teachers are required to understand each child and gather information on children, for example, including their family environments and relationships. To do so, classroom teachers in many schools visit homes of all children in their classrooms (Okamoto, 2003, 2006), which may not be typical in other countries including the U.S.

Moral education also is a priority at public schools. The most recent National Curriculum Standard for elementary education determined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2008) describes moral education as one of the objectives of public education along with academic skills and physical/health education. Specifically, the curriculum standard describes three objectives for elementary education. The first objective describes the purposes of education in general and how education has to be delivered:

Schools have to aim at facilitating children’s strength to “live.” Through educational activities involving originality and ingenuity, schools have to help children acquire basic and fundamental knowledge and skills; facilitate children’s abilities, such as to think,
judge, and express, by utilizing these knowledge and skills in order to complete tasks; promote attitudes of learning independently/spontaneously; and work towards education substantially utilizing children’s individuality. In so doing, schools have to consider children’s developmental stages, provide as much opportunities as possible for children to use language, and facilitate the habit of learning in children in collaboration with their families. (p. 13)

The second objective describes the role and purpose of moral education:

Moral education has to be done in a way that facilitates relationships among children as well as relationships between children and teachers in collaboration with families and the community through various activities, such as field trips with overnight stays involving group activities, volunteering, and activities in contact with nature, so that morality within children can grow. (p. 13)

The third objective focuses on children’s physical health:

Physical and health education has to be provided by considering children’s developmental stages in a way that is appropriate throughout the educational activities at school. Especially nutrition education (shoku-iku; shoku: eat, iku: grow, rear, raise), instruction facilitating physical strength and safety, and instruction sustaining and promoting mental and physical health should be provided not only in physical education classes, but also in other subjects, such as home economics and special educational activities, depending on the characteristics of each subject. Further, through these instructions, schools have to promote activities that help children perform tasks related to their physical and health needs in their daily lives, in collaboration with children’s families and the community, so that they are able to stay healthy, safe, and active throughout their lives. (p. 14)
These objectives make it clear that Japanese education does not only focus on learning academic content from teachers during formal instruction, but “attitudes” required to acquire skills from interactions with others, including teachers, peers, parents, and people in the community. Learning of “attitudes” is accomplished, partly, through small groups in classrooms.

In Japanese classrooms, small groups called “han” are used frequently in both academic and non academic activities, including completing group projects (e.g., Lewis, 1995; Cave, 2007), eating lunch, and cleaning classrooms (e.g., Cave, 2007; Lewis, 1994; Mansfield, 2000; Tsuneyoshi, 1994, 2001). Children learn through these activities by working collaboratively with others and contributing to their groups (Tsuneyoshi, 1994). Small groups play a central role in children’s daily lives at school. For example, Lewis (1995) indicated that the incident of bullying that became known in the 1990s underscored the psychological power of groups, such as teasing and excluding certain children. These small group experiences may have more emotional power to influence children than when they work individually.

Further, children’s peer memberships are also used to guide and motivate children to learn. White (1987) observed that when Japanese children worked on academic tasks in small groups, teachers placed importance on their cooperative teamwork and learning. In such an environment, children who are underachieving are stimulated, for example, to perform better, and are fully involved in the whole process of completing tasks though interacting with other children and observing what is going on in the group. She indicated that this team work was different from U.S. peer tutoring, which primarily focused on solving or reducing the problems of children who were struggling academically more than facilitating their feelings of belonging. In the Japanese example, “underachieving” children are motivated to learn as a result of their interactions with peers, but this outcome is not explicitly facilitated by teachers or “peer tutors.”

This sort of indirect approach to facilitating children’s voluntary learning is another
characteristic of Japanese elementary education.

This indirect teaching model is not limited to academic skills. Children learn how to behave appropriately and solve problems in their relationships with peers, guided by their classroom teachers. Existing research on Japanese preschools discusses in detail how teachers create an environment where children voluntarily learn social skills in their daily lives in classrooms (e.g., Lewis, 1995; Peak, 1991; Tobin et al., 1989; Tobin et al., 2009). For example, Tobin and colleagues (1989) observed that when children misbehaved and had conflicts with peers, their classroom teacher noticed the incident, but did not intervene. She let the children solve the problem. This frequently used Japanese practice is called mimamori (mi: looking at; mamori: protection) which can be defined as indirect protection by observing and watching over others carefully, standing back, and waiting for them to react (e.g., Bamba & Haight, 2009; Tobin et al., 2009).

In this socialization practice, it was considered children’s responsibility to solve the problem. To do so, not only the children involved in the incident, but their peers were expected to help them solve the problem. Even if two children were involved directly in the incident, other children playing together were also considered to be responsible (Tobin et al., 1989). Lebra (1976) indicates that it is a Japanese tendency that everyone involved in a conflict is responsible for it. The main point from this example was that this teacher used an incident in their daily classroom lives as an opportunity for them to learn how to solve problems.

Direct experiences involving hardships, overcoming difficulties, and completing certain tasks are considered the most powerful strategy to educate children among Japanese teachers. Children learn more from such experiences than lectures and explanations provided by teachers (Singleton, 1991). As written in the National Curriculum Standard for elementary schools, Japanese education is designed so that children’s learning takes place in every activity within and
outside of their classrooms (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2008). Accordingly, Japanese public education, especially, preschool and elementary education is characterized by an emphasis on socialization practices as well as academic contents (e.g., Cave, 2007; Lewis, 1995; Mansfield, 2001; Tsuneyoshi, 1994, 2001; White, 1987).

**Research Questions**

This study explores the daily experiences of children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms in Japan through an ethnographic approach. Specifically, the following four questions are addressed. The first three questions ask about adults’ experiences and beliefs, and the last question is from the viewpoint of children actually receiving support.

1. What are the beliefs of Japanese educators and parents regarding the developmental disabilities of children in regular classrooms, including their understanding of, and emotional reactions to, children’s disabilities?
2. What are the experiences of educators and parents of children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, for example, with the provision of support?
3. What challenges and sources of support do educators and parents identify for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, and what improvements to services would they recommend?
4. How do children understand and experience the special education services they receive?

**Significance of This Study**

Both U.S. and Japanese schools recognize the need to provide support for children with disabilities in regular classrooms. Nevertheless, the appropriate way to provide such support varies, which reflects the differences in beliefs about disability and the meanings of special education services for these children. Although there is a significant body of research addressing
school social work and special education services in the U.S., existing research on Japanese
special education, especially children’s experiences of receiving special education services, is
limited. Special education for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms has
occurred in the last three years (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology,
2006d), and not much is known about how the services are implemented. There are several
studies on educational practices in Japan (e.g., Cave, 2007; Lewis, 1995; Peak, 1991; Stevenson
& Stigler, 1992, Tobin et al. 1989; Tobin et al., 2009, Tsuneyoshi, 1994, 2001). These studies,
however, do not specifically focus on children with disabilities. More information on Japanese
children with disabilities is necessary.

Further, existing research on experiences of parents and educators has not differentiated
types of children’s disabilities (e.g., Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Dunst & Dempsey, 2007;
Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Nelson et al., 2004; Summers et al., 2007). There may be
differences in perceptions by the type of disability, because children with developmental
disabilities have unique needs, such as learning interpersonal and social skills. Studies on
children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms will be especially beneficial, since
there is a lack of resources for teaching these children in Japan (Kataoka et al., 2004) and
children with learning disabilities are the highest-incidence disability group in the U.S. (Data
Accountability Center, 2008).

In addition, very little research has considered the experiences and beliefs of children
with disabilities, especially in Japan. Individual interviews with children with learning
disabilities in the U.S. suggest that they enjoy receiving additional support, but they also have
negative experiences related to their disabilities, for example, being left out by peers or “laughed
at.” They express negative feelings, such as, “I am stupid,” because they receive special
education services (Meadan & Halle, 2004). Children’s input is valuable, as they make sense of
their disabilities and learn to adjust to their society through daily interactions with other people who provide them with care and support. Children’s understandings of their disabilities also influence their peers, parents, and educators, and contribute to re-creating and challenging beliefs about disability. In order to understand this reciprocal process, it is necessary to hear from both children and adults within the same study.

Japan is an important context in which to examine the beliefs and experiences of disability and special education, because the educational services for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms are newly evolving (National Institute of Special Needs Education, 2010). The time of major re-structuring of educational services provides adults, such as educators and parents, with opportunities to reflect on their otherwise taken for granted beliefs about disability. It also provides an important opportunity to learn how children with developmental disabilities understand their own difficulties and services they are receiving. At the same time, the long term and careful considerations of the Japanese government regarding this educational reform from the late 1970s to 2000s illuminate cultural underpinnings of beliefs and practices regarding special education. This provides me with a unique opportunity to examine the relationships and interactions between cultural beliefs about disability, service delivery systems, and experiences of educators, parents, and children involved in special education.

An ethnographic approach involving participant observations, interviews with children, their parents, and educators, and review of policy and laws related to special education allows me to examine this reciprocal interaction from multiple view points, specifically, individuals who receive services (children and their parents), service providers (educators), and policy makers who oversee and create services delivery systems. At the same time, information an ethnographic study provides makes it difficult to simply compare children in the U.S. and Japan
who are educated in different educational environments that reflect distinct cultural beliefs and historical backgrounds in each country. Instead, this study primarily focuses on one elementary school in Japan in order to understand the educational and cultural context in detail. Still, I have used my pilot study in the U.S. and the existing literature to provide another perspective on Japanese practices identified in this study.
Table 1  Percentage of Students Receiving Special Education Services by Disability in the U.S. and Japan (Data Accountability Center, 2008; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2007c, 2009d, 2009e)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6-14 years old</th>
<th>Disabilities defined by the IDEA</th>
<th>1st-9th grades</th>
<th>Disabilities defined by the Education Act, Japan</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 40.28</td>
<td>Specific learning disabilities</td>
<td>10 0.67</td>
<td>Learning disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Disorder in one or more of the</td>
<td></td>
<td>Deficits in specific abilities of a child,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>basic psychological process</td>
<td></td>
<td>including listening,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>involved in understanding or in</td>
<td></td>
<td>speaking, reading, writing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>using language, spoken or written,</td>
<td></td>
<td>reasoning, and mathematical</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that manifests itself in the imperfect</td>
<td></td>
<td>calculations, and reasoning,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ability to listen, think, speak,</td>
<td></td>
<td>without a delay in intellectual development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>read, write, spell, or to do mathematical</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>calculations” (Department of Education, 2006, p. 46757)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 25.79</td>
<td>Speech or language impairments</td>
<td>3 15.27</td>
<td>Speech or language impairments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 9.78</td>
<td>Other health impairments</td>
<td>6 2.49</td>
<td>Illness and other health problems</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>including ADHD</td>
<td></td>
<td>ADHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Having limited strength, vitality,</td>
<td>8 0.81</td>
<td>Impulsivity, hyperactivity, and/or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli” (Department of Education, 2006, p. 46757)</td>
<td></td>
<td>a lack of attention that are not consistent</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>with the age and the level of development and</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>that affect the child’s social and educational performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 6.96</td>
<td>Mental retardation</td>
<td>1 39.31</td>
<td>Mental retardation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive and intellectual</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive and intellectual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disabilities that adversely affect a child’s educational performance (Department of Education, 2006)</td>
<td></td>
<td>disabilities that significantly affect a child’s adaptive living skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 6.26</td>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
<td>2 17.69</td>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional or behavioral</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional and/or behavioral</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disturbances that adversely</td>
<td></td>
<td>disturbance that affects</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>affects a child’s educational</td>
<td></td>
<td>educational performances</td>
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<td></td>
<td>performances over a period of</td>
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<td></td>
<td>time (Department of Education, 2006)</td>
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Table 1 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Autism</th>
<th></th>
<th>Autism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>“Developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance” (Department of Education, 2006, p. 46756)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>The major symptoms include difficulties in developing interpersonal relationships, delay in language development, and unusual interests. High functioning autism refers to autism without intellectual delay. Asperger’s Syndrome refers to high functioning autism without delay in language development.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>Developmental delay Served under part C of IDEA, children ages from 3-9 years</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>Deafness including hearing impairment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>Deafness and hearing impairments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>Orthopedic impairments Impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance, including clubfoot, bone tuberculosis, cerebral palsy, and amputations (Department of Education, 2006, p. 46756)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.08</td>
<td>Physical disability Disabilities in body, legs, and hands that affect a child’s writing, walking, and other performances in the daily life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>Visual impairments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>Visual impairments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>Traumatic brain injury</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>Deaf-Blindness</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER TWO

History of Special Education in Japan

History and related policies of special education provide a context for understanding the Japanese emphasis on supporting children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms. In other words, the ways in which the Japanese government has dealt with children with developmental disabilities reflect cultural beliefs about disability and how children’s disabilities are understood in society (See Table 2 for the summary of history related to special education in Japan and Appendix C for the timelines regarding special education in Japan and across the world).

In comparison with the U.S. (See Appendix D for the history of special education in the U.S.), the way Japanese public schools treat children with disabilities is unique in several ways. Special education services have long been provided for children who require intensive support, for example, due to hearing and visual impairments and severe mental retardation, in segregated settings at special education schools and classrooms. Yet, the special needs of children with other types of disabilities that cause social and learning difficulties in regular classrooms have only recently been recognized. Learning disabilities received attention at first as disabilities children struggling in regular classrooms tended to have. Later, ADHD and high functioning autism including Asperger’s syndrome were added. These disabilities are frequently referred to as “developmental disabilities” in Japan. Children with developmental disabilities had been included in regular classrooms, but were not recognized as having special needs, partly because of negative images associated with disabilities and the Japanese traditional educational practices that value interactions between children to facilitate their learning. In this sense, Japanese special education was characterized by two extremes of exclusion, receiving support in segregated settings, and inclusion, studying in regular classrooms without individualized support by
specialists.

The following review of the history of special education in Japan describes the historical context that has shaped Japanese perspectives on special education and has impacted the way children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms have been treated, and how the Japanese government has responded, including through the formation of a formal support system for these children.

**The Emergence of Special Education in Japan**

Special education in Japan emerged in the late 19th century as schools for children with visual and hearing impairments. After the first school for children who were “blind” and “deaf” was founded in 1878, schools for children with visual and hearing impairments were described for the first time in a law, the second amendment of the Legislation of Elementary Schools in 1890 (Ueno & Hanakuma, 2006; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981). Initially, children with visual and hearing impairments were educated in the same school buildings. In 1923, schools for children with visual and hearing impairments were separated by the Blind and Deaf Schools Law due to differences in their needs.

Special education for children with other disabilities followed. The first special education classroom for children who were “underachieving” was established in 1890 (Murakami & Meyer, 2010). In 1907, the government officially recommended the establishment of classrooms for individuals with mental retardation as well as visual and hearing impairments at teachers’ training colleges. One of the purposes of these classrooms was to conduct research on how to educate these individuals (Third amendment of the Legislation of Elementary Schools; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981). The first special education school for children with mental retardation was established about 30 years later in 1940 (Murakami & Meyer, 2010).

Special education for children with physical and mobility disabilities began later, when
the first institution for children with physical disabilities was established in 1918. Although the institution provided educational services, it was not recognized as a school by the government (e.g., Murakami & Meyer, 2010). In 1932, the first school for children with physical disabilities was accredited as a facility providing elementary education. Several schools created classrooms for children with these disabilities, but no other school for children with physical disabilities emerged before World War II. Further, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture did not officially indicate the need of education for children with physical disabilities until 1940 (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981).

Before World War II, education for children with disabilities other than hearing and visual impairments was provided primarily at regular public schools including special education classrooms. There were, however, children who were exempted from compulsory education for several reasons, including their disabilities. Since the Legislation of Elementary Schools was enacted in 1886, which became the basis of compulsory elementary education, the law allowed parents to request local governments to exempt their children from the obligation of having them attend school for certain periods of time due to illness and family problems such as poverty (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981). The result was that many children, including those with disabilities, did not receive a formal education. Today, the notion of “exemption from education” continues to exist in laws regarding compulsory education (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2007), although it is rarely used (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2003).

**Educational Reform after World War II**

The Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law were passed and
enacted in 1947\(^1\) as part of the major educational reform after World War II. The Fundamental Law of Education describes the philosophy, mission, and purposes of education in general, from education at home, school education, and higher education to parents’ obligation to have their children receive a public education (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2006). There is no equivalent law in the U.S. (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2010a). The School Education Law determines the framework and requirements for compulsory and higher education. Under this law, compulsory education is defined as 6 years of education at elementary schools and 3 years at junior high schools. Children may receive special education as needed (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2007; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981). The law specifically states that special education services are provided at either schools for the “blind,” “deaf,”\(^2\) special education schools, or special education classrooms in regular public schools\(^3\) (National Archives of Japan, 1947).

Although there were “deaf” schools and “blind” schools, there was no special education school described in the law for children with other disabilities, including mental retardation, physical disabilities, and other health and emotional impairments. Consequently, the obligation

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\(^1\) These laws were created while Japan was occupied after World War II by the Allied Powers led by the U.S., along with the new constitution of Japan. This educational reform included concepts that were different from Japanese educational culture and there was a lack of resources to implement them due to the confusion after the war (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, 1992). The major components of this reform include, 1: Personality education 2: Equal access to education and gender equality, 3: Discontinue multiple paths to higher education and establish a “single line” educational system consisting of elementary, junior high, high school, and college education. 4: free compulsory education at elementary and junior high schools (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2001c). Personality education refers to “Education that raises individuals who care for truth and justice, respect personal values, and set a high value on labor and responsibility, and are independent and healthy physically and mentally’ in the Article 1 of the Fundamental Law of Education of 1947 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2010b).

\(^2\) Schools for “blind” and schools for “deaf” were combined with special education schools for children with other disabilities beginning 2007 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006d).

\(^3\) U.S. special education is determined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, separately from the No Child Left Behind Act which determine education in general. In Japan, the School Education Law covers both regular and special education.
to establish special education schools under the School Education Law was postponed. This complicated the receipt of any financial support from the government to create new special education schools. A study conducted from 1953 to 1955 by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture showed that there were 1,000,000 children who needed special education, including children with mental retardation, physical disabilities, and other health impairments such as illness. Accordingly, the Standard Criteria for the Assessment of Pupils and Students with Special Educational Needs and the Law of Encouragement of Attendance for Schools for Blinds, Schools for Deaf, and Special Education Schools were established in 1953 and 1954, respectively, in order to strengthen the support to encourage school attendance. Further, another law to establish public special education schools was passed in 1956, which made financial support from the government available to create new special education schools, and the number of schools providing special education services increased (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981).

Along with special education schools, the School Education Law in 1947 described that elementary, junior high, and high schools were able to create special education classrooms for children with “abnormal personality,” mental retardation, visual impairment, hearing impairment, language disabilities, health impairment, and other problems affecting school learning (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1953; National Archives of Japan, 1947). However, the number of special education classrooms had decreased due to World War II. As of 1953, only about 800 classrooms existed across the country (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1953), and the Ministry implemented a plan to increase the number of special education classrooms. From 1957, the Ministry began providing financial assistance to cities that created

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4 These are the disability categories for children receiving support at special education classrooms at the time when the School Education Law was passed (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981; National Archives of Japan, 1947). “Abnormal personality” corresponds to emotional disorders under the current law.
new special education classrooms. As of 1970, the number of special education classrooms for children with mental retardation at elementary and junior high schools increased to nearly 15,000 (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981).

Still, the number of special education schools for children with severe disabilities was low, and special education classrooms in regular public schools were “reserved” for children with “minor disabilities.” If children’s disabilities were considered medium to severe, their access to public education was denied. As a result, many children with disabilities were “exempted” from public education or had their school attendance “postponed” (Mogi, 1992), by parents’ request under the School Education Law (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2007).


Although compulsory education at special education schools and classrooms improved access to a public education for children with disabilities, it also resulted in “exclusive” special education in Japan. This practice was against the concept of mainstreaming and inclusive education that had become known and accepted by countries across the world (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2010c).

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5 Support for children with disabilities outside of schools is provided under the Child Welfare Act, which was passed and enacted in 1947. This law determines institutions for children, including facilities providing early intervention programs for children with disabilities (Ministry of Internal Affairs Communication, 2008a).
Shift to Special Education for Children in Regular Classrooms

To promote special education, the research report on children with disabilities conducted in 1967 suggested the following objectives: 1) provide flexible support that fits the abilities and characteristics of children with disabilities, 2) create as many opportunities as possible to receive education together with children who are developing typically, 3) consider early intervention [for younger children] and continuing education after compulsory education, and 4) promote awareness of disabilities in Japanese society (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1981).

At the same time, the percentage of Japanese children receiving special education services at special education schools or special education classrooms continued to decrease after 1980, from about 1.1% to 0.89% in 1990, which was lower than other industrialized countries (Ueno & Hanakuma, 2006). Comparing the percentage of Japanese children receiving special education services with the percentage of children who receive special education services from other countries is complex. Japanese special education primarily focused on children with relatively severe disabilities at special education schools or classrooms (Abe, 1998; Ueno & Hanakuma, 2006). In contrast, U.S. special education involved services for children with disabilities “included” in regular classrooms6. For example, in 1990, about 7% of U.S. children aged from 3 to 21 received special education under the IDEA (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009a, 2009b).


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6 Since 1975, U.S. children with learning disabilities have received special education services in local public schools under the Public Law 94-142, currently Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In addition to LD, autism was added as a special education category under the IDEA in 1990, and ADHD was added to the Other Health Impairments category in 1997 (e.g., Smith, 2007).
suggested that children with disabilities in regular classrooms should be able to receive pull out support at special education classrooms as needed within the schools they attended or at schools with such support near children’s homes (National Institute of Special Needs Education, 1978), rather than studying in regular classrooms all day long without appropriate support.

During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the lack of special education services for children with learning difficulties placed in regular classrooms was identified as a problem both at the societal and the governmental levels. Mogi (1992) estimated that at least 3 to 4% of elementary and junior high school aged children had some sort of disability. Further, a study at 16 elementary schools and 16 junior high schools in one prefecture in 1994 showed that 3.0% of elementary school children and 2.9% of junior high school children had learning difficulties (Abe, 1998). Among them, only 1% of children received special education, and the others were in regular education classrooms. Mogi further articulated that these children were still able to learn in regular classrooms and make friends. Yet, if they did not receive special attention in their classrooms, they fell behind academically, which might lead to lower self-esteem and a dislike of school.

A decade later from the 1978 report to the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, the need for utilizing special education classrooms to provide pull out instruction for children in regular classrooms was discussed at the Ministry, specifically, at the Extra Council of Education in 1987 and the Council for Educational Curriculum in 1988 (National Institute of Special Needs Education, 1992). In 1990, the Ministry started a research project on special education classrooms providing pull out instruction (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1990). The advisory committee report submitted to the Ministry in 1992 showed that many children in special education classrooms also studied at regular classrooms as needed. The report further suggested a need for pull out instruction for children who did not need to stay in special
education classrooms all day long, but needed additional support when studying in regular classrooms (National Institute of Special Needs Education, 1992). Accordingly, an amendment to the enforcement regulation of the School Education Law was made in 1993, and children with disabilities in regular classrooms became eligible to receive instruction part-time at special education classrooms (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1993a, 1993b).

**Special Education for Children with Learning Disabilities**

In 1990 the first nationwide support group for parents of children with learning disabilities was established in Japan (Abe, 1998; National Association of Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities, 2010). Since the first year, the support group actively communicated with the government, including meeting with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture and requesting formal educational support for their children. Their activities also include conducting and publishing research regarding children and individuals with learning disabilities and establishing and expanding the network among parents who have children with learning disabilities in order to improve their living environment, such as education, social welfare, medical and health care, and employment (National Association of Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities, 2010).

At the governmental level, along with the implementation of special education classrooms providing pull out instruction for children in regular classrooms, the report in 1992 also discussed children with learning disabilities (National Institute of Special Needs Education, 1992). This report indicated that children with learning disabilities could benefit from pull out instruction in special education classrooms. Consequently, in 1992, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare had declared that children with learning disabilities were eligible for special education support. After this amendment, children with learning disabilities were able to receive pull out instruction outside of their classrooms, but the regulation specifically did not list “learning disabilities” as disability categories for pull out instruction until 2006. As of 1993, disability categories for pull out instruction included language disabilities, emotional disorders (including autism), hearing impairments, visual impairments, and other disabilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006a, 2006b).

The discussions regarding educational services for children with learning disabilities continued for 15 years, until the formal special education services for these children began in 2007. In addition to learning disabilities, the discussion was expanded to include the needs of children with ADHD and high functioning autism in regular classrooms (Ueno & Hanakuma, 2006). At this point in time, only a few special education researchers in Japan knew about learning disabilities, and many regular classroom teachers were not aware of learning disabilities. They viewed children with learning disabilities as slow learners (Abe, 1998). While this suggestion for special education reforms involving support for children experiencing learning difficulties was accepted positively by most people involved in special education, Abe indicated that there were a few publications suggesting the potential dangers of labeling by establishing a new disability. They proposed a new term, “special educational needs” to which less stigma was attached than a term, disability or handicapped, that directly refers to deficits.

The interim and final reports of the research on children with learning disabilities were submitted and discussed at the Ministry in 1995 and 1999, respectively (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, 1999). In these reports, learning disabilities were defined for the first time at the governmental level and criteria for the assessment of learning disabilities were proposed (See Chapter 1 for the criteria). In addition, several suggestions were made as to how to teach children with learning disabilities at regular public schools, such as support provided by classroom teachers in their regular classrooms; team teaching which was introduced in 1993 to provide individual and small group instructions in regular classrooms; support provided during non instructional hours including after school by classroom teachers; and pull out instruction (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1999). Although pull out instruction had been
introduced in 1993, it did not specifically target children with learning disabilities (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1993). In this report, the use of pull out instruction for children with learning disabilities was clearly suggested.\(^7\)

**Worldwide Movements for Children with Disabilities**

Worldwide, the right of children with disabilities to a public education at local schools was discussed. The resulting UNESCO Salamanca Statement in 1994 called on governments to provide inclusive education regardless of disabilities (School Social Work Association of Japan, 2008; UNESCO, 1994). The statement emphasizes the importance of access to regular education classrooms for children receiving special education:

> The practice of ‘mainstreaming’ children with disabilities should be an integral part of national plans for achieving education for all. Even in those exceptional cases where children are placed in special schools, their education need not be entirely segregated. Part-time attendance at regular schools should be encouraged. (UNESCO, 1994, p. 18)

In the field of social welfare for people with disabilities, the concept of normalization, which originated in Scandinavia in the 1960s became well known. Normalization emphasized that people with disabilities should be able to enjoy the “normal” life patterns that are typical of others in their society (e.g., Yates, Dyson, & Hiles, 2008). The United Nations (UN, 2004a) proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, which emphasized equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities as well as rehabilitation and prevention. The following years from 1983 were proclaimed as the International Decade of Disabled Persons, in order to implement the World Programme of Action which was adopted in 1982 (UN, 2004b, 2010a).

Associated with these movements, the Japanese government developed two Long Term Plans for Persons with Disabilities in 1982 and 1987 in order to promote equal participation of
people with disabilities (Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan, 1993; Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1992). In the meantime, in 1992, the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2003) was proclaimed by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), in order to further raise awareness of people with disabilities and improve the quality of government policies on disability in Asian and Pacific countries after the International Decade of Disabled Persons (Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan, 2010). Accordingly, the Japanese government implemented the New Long Term Plan for Persons with Disabilities in 1993, which further emphasized the importance of their equal participation and independence in society. One example was the need to develop generalized programs involving elements that make it easier for people with disabilities to participate, rather than providing support specifically designed for them (Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan, 1993).

In the meantime, children’s rights became an issue throughout the world. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 at the United Nations (UN, 1989), and ratified by Japan in 1994 (UNICEF, 2010). The convention describes human rights from the viewpoint of children, who require appropriate assistance and protection as they live, grow, and develop (UN, 1989; UNICEF, 2010). This convention also describes rights of children with disabilities, including the right to receive an education.

2. States Parties recognize the right of the disabled child to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension, subject to available resources, to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care, of assistance for which application is made and which is appropriate to the child’s condition and to the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child.

3. Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended in accordance
with paragraph 2 of the present article shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development (UN, 1989, Article 23, paragraph 2 and 3). Although the convention emphasized social integration of children with disabilities, Japanese special education was provided primarily in segregated settings. As a result, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child requested that the Japanese government promote integration of children with disabilities in 1998 and 2004 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2010c).

Consequently, in 1993, an amendment of the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities was passed. It was the major revision of the previous law and included the objectives that the law was to promote participation of children with disabilities in social, economical, cultural activities as independent individuals (The House of Representatives, 1993). For example, in article 6, the new law states that people have to make an effort to create a society where people with disabilities can “participate” in various activities. This amendment replaced the word “contribute” in the original law with “participate” (The House of Representatives, 1993; Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan, 1993), shifting to the active participation of people with disabilities in society from being the passive recipients of services and protection.

**Special Education Reform**

Along with these movements, in the field of education, the advisory committee assigned by the Ministry submitted a final report of the discussions entitled, “Future directions of special
education in the 21st century: Specialized support that meets the needs of each child” to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology⁸, 2001a). In this report, it was suggested that in order for children with disabilities to be able to interact with various people and actively participate in society, collaboration across the whole society, including education, social welfare, health care, and employment was required. In so doing, the report indicated that in special education, it is critical to understand the needs of each child with a disability from the viewpoint of the child and to provide support based on the child’s needs.

This report further indicated that support for children who required additional help in regular classrooms was not adequate yet, because special education had been targeting children in special education schools and classrooms. The report suggested that the government had to be actively involved in providing support for children with learning disabilities, ADHD, and high functioning autism in regular classrooms (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2001a). In this report, the need for support was expanded to children with ADHD and high functioning autism in addition to children with learning disabilities.

Accordingly, in 2001, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2001b) announced that it would start a research project exploring special education services for children in regular classrooms as well as children in special education schools, whose disabilities became severe and multiplied across disability categories. The final report of this project submitted in 2003 indicated that as of 2002, only 0.001% of children of compulsory education ages were exempted from or postponed school attendance due to their disabilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2003). Although children with disabilities attended schools, many of them were struggling. National research on children who

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⁸ The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture was combined with the Science and Technology Agency in 2001.
need special educational support in regular classrooms conducted in 2002 along with this project showed that among 41,579 children in five areas across Japan, 6.3% of children were identified by their classroom teachers as exhibiting academic or behavioral difficulties (4.5%: academic only; 2.9%: behavioral only; 1.2%: both academic and behavioral; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002a).

This 2003 final report also endorsed the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards an Inclusive, Barrier-Free and Rights-Based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. This framework was adopted as the regional framework for action for the next decade of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, extended until 2012 (Cabinet Office, the Government of Japan, 2010; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003). This framework clearly states the education of children with disabilities as one of the Targets and Action in the Priority Areas:

Available evidence suggests that less than 10 percent of children and youth with disabilities [across Asia and the Pacific] have access to any form of education. This compares with an enrollment rate of over 70 per cent for non-disabled children and youth in primary education in the Asian and Pacific region. This situation exists despite international mandates declaring that education is a basic right for all children and calling for the inclusion of all children in primary education by 2015. Governments should ensure the provision of appropriate education which responds to the needs of children with all types of disabilities in the next decade. It is recognized that there is wide variation in the response which Governments in the Asian and Pacific region have made in providing education for children with disabilities, and that children are currently educated in a variety of formal and informal educational settings, and in separate and inclusive schools. (UN ESCAP, 2002, Paragraph 24)
Consequently, the 2003 final report on special education services proposed special education reforms associated with the increasing number of children who required additional support and who had diverse educational needs. These reforms included implementation of individualized education programs, special education coordinators, resource rooms\(^9\) where children were pulled out to receive specialized instruction, and committees in which staff members discussed how to provide support to children (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2003). Furthermore, in the final report, definitions and criteria for the assessment of ADHD and high functioning autism were described for the first time in special education (See Chapter 1 for the definitions of ADHD and high functioning autism; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2003), in relation to the definition of learning disabilities described in the research report in 1999 (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, 1999).

In the meantime, the New Long Term Plans for Persons with Disabilities, which expired in the fiscal year 2002 was discussed and renewed as the Basic Programme for Persons with Disabilities in 2002 (Cabinet office, the Government of Japan, 2002a). In this program, the need to provide support for children with disabilities, including learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism related disorders was emphasized. As part of this, in the Five-Year Plan for Implementation of Priority Measures, issues that had to be dealt with within 5 years were identified, including the need to develop guidelines for educational reforms in order to provide educational support to children with learning disabilities and ADHD by the end of the fiscal year 2004 (Cabinet office, the Government of Japan, 2002b). Children with autism were not identified

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\(^9\) In literature and documents on Japanese education written in English, “resource rooms” may be referred to as special education classrooms providing part-time pull out support for children with disabilities in regular classrooms. In this dissertation, I will use “resource room” as the English translation of *tokubetsu shien kyoshitsu* (special support room) that is newly introduced after this special education reform (See also the following sections in this chapter).
in this 5 year-plan, because they had been receiving special education services under the disability category of emotional disorders.\textsuperscript{10}

In response to the five year plan and the final report in 2003, a tentative guideline for educational reform was distributed by the Ministry in 2004 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2004). In this guideline, specific instructions were provided for school staff members, specialists at local boards of education who assess and evaluate children’s needs and abilities,\textsuperscript{11} and parents and children who receive support. In addition, definitions and criteria for determining learning disabilities, ADHD, and high functioning autism were provided. Further, this guideline provides instructions concerning how new positions, roles, and procedures suggested in the final report should be implemented at each school.

In 2005, the Elementary and Lower Secondary Education subdivision of the Central Council for Education also submitted a report to the Ministry regarding discussions on how to implement the new special education system (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005c), which provided an overview of this special education reform. The reform included re-organizing the roles and functions of special education schools, establishing special education support for children in regular classrooms, and new requirements for teaching certifications for special education.

Consequently, at the beginning of 2006, one year before the formal implementation of the new special education, the enforcement regulation of the School Education Law was amended

\textsuperscript{10} The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture (1992) indicated that when special education schools were made compulsory in 1979, autism began to be widely recognized as part of emotional disorders and children with autism received special education under the category of emotional disorders. In the 2006 amendment of the enforcement regulation of School Education Law, autism was separated from emotional disorders (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006b).

\textsuperscript{11} Japanese schools do not assess and evaluate children in order to determine their eligibility to receive special education. Instead, a team of specialists at local boards of education take this role. Children who may have disabilities are referred to the team at the local board of education.
partially (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006b). This amendment made it officially acceptable to pull out children with learning disabilities and ADHD from their classrooms for instruction beginning in the 2006-2007 school year (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006a, 2006b). Children with autism had been receiving services under “emotional disorders,” but autism was separated from emotional disorders in this amendment. These children were eligible to receive pull out instruction\(^\text{10, 12}\) (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006b).

Finally, in 2006, the Fundamental Law of Education was amended for the first time since it was passed in 1947 and a description of special education was added. This amendment makes it clear that it is a responsibility of the national government and local governments to make sure that children receive necessary support in order to receive a public education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006c). The School Education Law and its regulations were amended again in 2006, and the new special education system, including services for children with learning disabilities and ADHD started from the 2007-2008 school year (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006d).

**Developmental Disabilities**

Along with the emphasis on the need for additional support for children in regular classrooms, the Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act was passed and enacted in 2004 and 2005, respectively (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2004a). Support provided under this law is not limited to public education. The “developmental support” determined by the law includes “medical and educational support as well as social welfare that promote their appropriate psychological development and facilitates their social lives without

\(^{12}\) Children with autism had received support at “special education classrooms for children with emotional disorders.” It was in 2009 when the classrooms were renamed to “special education classrooms for children with autism and emotional disorders” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2009a).
any disturbance (Article 2-3).”

A notice distributed before the implementation of this law under the names of both the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology and the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare\footnote{These two government offices are responsible for laws determining support for children with disabilities. The government office responsible for The School Education Law is the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science, and Technology, and the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare is responsible for the Child Welfare Act.} states the importance of providing early intervention programs for individuals with developmental disabilities while they are young, as soon as children are diagnosed (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005a). Under this law, “developmental disabilities” are (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2004a):

- autism, Asperger’s syndrome and other pervasive developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, and other related disabilities caused by deficits in brain functioning determined by the enforcement ordinance. Typically, symptoms of these disabilities are present since early childhood. (Article 2-1)

According to the enforcement ordinance, “other related disabilities” are “disabilities involving language, motor coordination skills, and others caused by deficits in brain functioning and those symptoms typically are present from early childhood (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2004b).” “Other” disabilities described in the enforcement regulation include disabilities that affect “psychological development as well as behavioral and emotional disorders (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2004c).” In the notice by the two Ministries, these definitions are interpreted as follows:

- It is assumed that disabilities determined by these rules, covered under the law, are listed in either “Disorders of psychological development, F80-89” or “Other disorders of the nervous system, F90-98” in ICD-10, International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems and have to be disabilities caused by deficits in brain functioning determined by the enforcement ordinance.
functioning and these symptoms are present since early childhood [See Appendix E for disabilities listed in ICD-10]. In addition, epilepsy and other disorders caused by deficits in the central nervous system and aftereffects of traumatic brain injury and cerebrovascular disorders that involve symptoms described above are also covered by this law. (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005a) As this law came into effect at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology described how this law would impact public education (2005b). In this notice, the Ministry interpreted the definitions of developmental disabilities and developmental support that:

Children with these disabilities had already received special education services at special education classrooms and schools, received pull out instruction, or will be covered by the new special education system involving support for children with disabilities in regular classrooms, such as those with learning disabilities, ADHD, high functioning autism, and Asperger’s syndrome\(^\text{10}\).

In addition to the need for more research on this population, the Ministry required that in order to meet the requirement of this law, school staff members must be educated to help them acquire specialized knowledge about “developmental disabilities.” Learning disabilities, ADHD, and high functioning autism were presented as disabilities that children with additional needs in regular classrooms tend to have, but these are not exhaustive and other disabilities can be included. Since 1993, when pull out instruction was formally listed as one form of special education services for children with disabilities in regular classrooms, these disabilities eventually became known as “mild developmental disabilities” in Japanese society (Ueno & Hanakuma, 2006).

Until the Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act came out, the Ministry
of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology used these three disabilities in its regulations, including enforcement regulation, notices, and announcements, to refer to disabilities children in regular classrooms typically had. In 2007, the Ministry announced that it would use the term, “developmental disabilities,” which was more familiar to Japanese people. The Ministry, however, decided not to use “mild developmental disabilities,” because it could be ambiguous (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2007b).

In this announcement, the Ministry acknowledged that this definition was only for political and administrative uses, and was not equal to clinical and academic definitions (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2007b). For example, in either of the diagnostic manuals, DSM-IV-TR by the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2000) or ICD-10 by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2007), there is no specific disability category for “developmental disabilities.” Developmental disabilities also may refer to other disabilities involving more obvious impairment of children’s physical and cognitive abilities. For example, under the U.S. Developmental Disabilities Assistance Bill of Rights Act, developmental disabilities refer to severe and chronic disabilities involving mental and physical impairments and symptoms of disabilities present before the age of 22 (Department of Health and Human Services, 2000).

Furthermore, a research group under the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare developed a manual for practitioners to identify children with these types of disabilities at the

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14 Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology used the ICD-10 to interpret which disabilities are covered under the Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act, but the law and its’ ordinance and regulation did not use ICD-10 to define “developmental disabilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005a).”

U.S. special education also does not group these disabilities as one disability category. Under the IDEA, learning disabilities and autism are listed as disability categories to determine children’s eligibility to receive special education services, and ADHD is included as one of the health conditions under the “Other Health Impairment” category (Department of Education, 2010).
regular 5 year old check-up. The manual used “mild developmental disabilities,” which was, according to the authors, more familiar to Japanese people. Yet, the manual described that there was no official guideline or criterion for mild developmental disabilities (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2006).

**Support under the New System of Special Education**

Newly developed Japanese special education is called *tokubetsu shien kyo-iku* (*tokubetsu*: special, *shien*: support, help, *kyo-iku*: education). Although the official translation used by the Japanese government, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, is “Special needs education,” the literal meaning of *tokubetsu shien kyo-iku* is “Special support education.” Both translations mean that children should receive necessary support that meet their special needs. Before the amendment of the School Education Law, a special education school was called *Yogo gakko* (*yogo*: protective care, nursing; *gakko*: school), and a special education classroom was called *tokushu gakkyu* (*tokushu*: special, *gakkyu*: class, classroom). These terms connoted protection for children who were weak or handicapped because of illness and disabilities. The way to “protect,” however, frequently meant to provide educational services in isolation from other children in special education classrooms or special education schools. Therefore, the transition to *tokubetsu shien kyo-iku* was a large step toward promoting individual rights of children with special needs in regular public schools. In order to make it simple and

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15 In 2006, the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities was adopted and came into force in 2008 (UN, 2006, 2010b). Japan signed this convention in 2007. According to the Ministry of Education, the way the new special education system addresses children with disabilities in relation to the notion of “inclusive education system” required by this convention becomes one of the focuses to determine whether or not Japan ratifies the convention (2009b).

(article 24-2)

(a) Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability

(b) Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live
prevent confusion, “Special education” is used in this study to refer to *tokubetsu shien kyo-iku*.

In this new special education system, regular public schools are required to introduce new positions and implement procedures to provide formal special education services for children with disabilities, specifically:

1. In-school committee on special education

Under the leadership of the principal, each school has to have a committee to establish a school wide system in order to assess and discuss the needs of children, including children with disabilities. The committee includes administrators, a special education coordinator, a teacher who is in charge of academic affairs, a student guidance director, teachers providing pull out instruction, special education classroom teachers, a school nurse, classroom teachers of a particular child, a teacher in charge of each grade level, and other staff members who can contribute to the committee. [Continue describing roles of the committee at special education schools.]

2. Understanding children’s needs

Each school has to make an effort to understand what is going on with children and to identify any children who need special support. For those who need special support, staff members have to work collaboratively with a special education coordinator within the school, give a careful explanation to parents in ways parents can understand, and discuss with parents regarding support [for the children] at school as well as at home. Communications with parents are critical, as children may need medical attention depending on their conditions. At preschools\(^\text{16}\) and elementary schools, [educators should] keep in mind that early identification and interventions are

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\(^{16}\) Japanese preschools correspond to Kindergarten as well as preschools in the U.S.
important, and make certain to assess and provide necessary support.

3. Designation of a special education coordinator

The principal of each school has to select and assign one educator to serve as a special education coordinator, which is considered as part of administrative duties. In order to promote special education in each school, a special education coordinator’s role includes organizing and administrating a committee on special education and in-school training/workshops; communicating and collaborating with other related agencies, facilities, and schools; and being a contact person for parents. The principal has to oversee [the whole process] so that a special education coordinator functions as part of the system at school.

4. Develop and utilize individualized educational support programs in collaboration with related agencies and facilities.

Special education schools have to provide special education services efficiently by utilizing individualized educational support programs containing support from multiple viewpoints, including medicine, social welfare, and employment, in order to provide long-term educational support consistently from infancy throughout public education and after leaving school. [Regular public] elementary and junior high schools also can develop individualized educational support programs as needed to provide support efficiently in collaboration with other related agencies and facilities.

5. Develop individualized education programs

Special education schools have to promote establishment of education for children

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17 At public schools, the School Education Law describes that administrators can assign educators to perform part of administrative duties. The duties may include collaboration with the community, curriculum development to share within the school, and human rights education. Roles special education coordinators are supposed to play are considered one of the duties educators has to perform in addition to their regular teaching responsibility.
whose disabilities have become severe, multiplied, and diverse and to strengthen instruction by utilizing individualized education programs. [Regular public] elementary and junior high schools have to promote education that meets the needs of individual children, for example by developing and utilizing individualized education programs as needed.

6. Education of educators regarding professional knowledge

In order to promote special education, it is critical that educators acquire more professional knowledge about special education. Accordingly, each school has to make an effort to provide education, for example by holding in-school workshops and sending educators to out of school workshops. Educators who have completed certain programs also have to continue their education, for example, by participating in more specialized workshops, collecting the most recent information, and utilizing training workshops for instructors offered by the National Institute of Special Needs Education. Further, workshops organized by local boards of education and other organizations [targeting educators and staff members at public schools] should be open to national and private schools and preschools. (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2007a)

**Types of Placement**

As of 2007, four types of placement for children with disabilities were determined under the School Education Law and its regulations. They are special education schools, special education classrooms, pull out instruction, and resource rooms for children in regular classrooms. Generally, children with developmental disabilities receive pull out instruction, or study at resource rooms or special education classrooms.

A notice distributed to prefectural governors and prefectural boards of education in 2002
by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology has been used as a guideline to determine children’s placement. The notice describes the severity of disabilities and characteristics of children in special education schools, special education classrooms, and children receiving pull out instruction under each of the disability categories (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002b, 2006e). According to this notice, a decision has to be made by considering the best interest of children and utilizing opinions from multiple professions, such as education, medicine, and psychology.

**Special Education Schools**

The School Education Law determined that special education schools are for children with hearing impairments, visual impairments, mental retardation, physical disabilities, or other health impairments (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2007). Children whose disabilities are severe enough to attend special education schools may attend regular public schools. However, the notice reassures educators at regular public schools that they have to consider whether their schools have an appropriate educational environment for children with these disabilities, including equipment children need and staff members who have the knowledge and skills to teach these children, before accepting them (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002b).

**Special Education Classrooms**

There are two types of special education classrooms, self contained\(^{18}\) and pull out instruction. Self-contained special education classrooms are described in the School Education Law. According to the law, schools can create special education classrooms for children with disabilities including mental retardation, physical disabilities, low vision, hard of hearing, other

\(^{18}\) Self contained special education classroom in the U.S. may refer to classrooms in which children study all day.
health impairments, as well as for children with other disabilities who can benefit from instructions at special education classrooms\(^\text{19}\) (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2007). Its regulations further specify “other disabilities” as language disabilities and autism-emotional disorders (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002b, 2009a). Schools are able to create special education classrooms that fall in each of these categories. For example, if a school has a child with mental retardation and a child with autism, the school can create two special education classrooms, one for mental retardation, and the other for autism-emotional disorders.

The maximum special education classroom size determined by a law is 8, which is smaller than the maximum classroom size, 40, for regular classrooms (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2008b). The amendment of its regulations in 2002 made it possible for schools to assign additional teachers to both regular and special education classrooms when schools determined that a classroom had a child who required additional support (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002c).

In regular public schools, children have to belong to either regular or special education classrooms, and from where they belong, they visit regular or special education classrooms as needed. If children transfer to special education classrooms, schools have to follow a procedure similar to the one they complete when children transfer to other schools, specifically, moving their school register called “seki” to special education classrooms, even if they attend the same

\(^{19}\) In the U.S., special education classrooms refer to classrooms taught by special education teachers, usually in small groups or individually. At the school and district level, there may be self-contained special education classrooms and resource rooms where children are pulled out for individual or small group instruction. The federal law, the IDEA, however, does not determine either self-contained classrooms or resource rooms. The IDEA requires schools to determine children’s placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and schools are required to provide the reasons why the placement is the LRE for a particular child. The hours that a child should receive special education services must be specified in the child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP; Department of Education, 2010).
school. Once they transfer to special education classrooms, they are considered as children in self-contained special education classrooms, no matter how many hours they study at regular or special education classrooms.

**Pull-out Instruction**

The School Education Law does not specifically describe pull out instruction at special education classrooms, but its enforcement regulation determines that schools can provide pull out instruction outside of their regular classrooms for children with disabilities, including language disabilities, autism/emotional disorders, low vision, hard of hearing, learning disabilities, and ADHD, and children with other disabilities who can benefit from receiving pull out instruction (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1993b; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002b, 2006a, 2006b). Regulations of the School Education Law determine that children are able to receive instruction outside of their regular classrooms including academic instruction and skills that help children handle difficulties caused by their disabilities (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1993b, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2006b).

Children may receive pull out instruction at special education classrooms within their schools or at other schools when their schools do not have a classroom providing pull out instruction. In this case, the notice in 2002 states that classroom teachers and teachers providing pull out instruction have to exchange information on a regular basis and work with the children collaboratively (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002b).

Unlike special education schools, there is no national curriculum standard determined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology for self-contained special

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20 This information was obtained from the website of, or publication by, the local board of education. In order to maintain confidentiality of the research site, I have excluded these information sources from the reference list of this study.
education classrooms and pull out instruction. The enforcement regulation of School Education Law allows schools to use specially designed curriculum for children in special education classrooms and children receiving pull out instruction if it is appropriate (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2010a). In addition to the National Curriculum Standard for regular elementary or junior high schools, the Ministry indicated that schools had to consult and utilize the National Curriculum Standards for special education schools as needed in self-contained and pull out special education classrooms in order to provide each child with appropriate support depending on their needs (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2002b, 2009c). Local boards of education may determine their own curriculum standards for special education classrooms and pull out instruction.20

**Resource Room**

The utilization of resource rooms21 was suggested in the final report in 2003 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003), and discussed how to implement resource rooms in 2005 before the formal start of the new special education program (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2005c). In a report from this meeting, the resource room was described as “a room where children in regular classrooms who have disabilities, including learning disabilities, ADHD, and high functioning autism, receive specialized instruction as needed, in addition to receiving support in their regular classrooms, such as appropriate support from classroom teachers, team teaching, individual instructions, and accommodations depending on the level of understanding of contents.”

Although a resource room is not mentioned in either the School Education Law or its regulations, when the amendment of the School Education Law was passed, implementation of a

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21 Resource rooms (tokubetsu shien kyoshitsu) in Japan may correspond to individual support provided by classroom teachers in the U.S. Resource rooms in the U.S. typically refer to rooms where children receive pull out instruction/interventions from special education teachers.
resource room was included as a supplementary resolution (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2006e). However, there is no national guideline for the utilization of resource rooms. The way to utilize resource room varies by cities and prefectures.

For example, in the city where a school that served as a research site of this study is located, classrooms providing pull out instruction and resource rooms are clearly differentiated. A guideline created by the local board of education states that pull out instruction “is provided based on individualized education programs that fit the characteristics [of each child]. Individualized educational support programs as well as individualized education programs [created for pull out instruction] are also used in regular classrooms, and instruction children receive at the pull out classrooms are shared in regular classrooms.” In contrast, a resource room is more flexible, specifically, the guideline describes resource rooms as a place that has “a comfortable environment, which [teachers can use for] children to calm down emotionally, provide instructions that fits the characteristics [of each child], and assist children in fulfilling/enjoying learning and daily lives in their classrooms.” The guideline lists three examples of the utilization of resource rooms; 1) learning in a way that fits the child’s learning style, which facilitates motivation to learn by experiencing how fun it is to understand, 2) providing transitional support for children who are not comfortable with being in their regular classrooms, 3) utility space for all children that provides variety in children’s learning.\(^\text{20}\)

**Conclusion**

Japanese children with developmental disabilities were educated in a unique environment, in comparison to U.S. children with similar disabilities receiving special education services at local public schools. Japanese children with developmental disabilities were included in regular education classrooms, but did not receive formal special education services until 2007. In addition to a need for the formal support for children with learning difficulties, a movement
across the world during the 1990s to protect children’s rights, especially to receive an appropriate public education, pressured Japan to implement special education services for children with developmental disabilities. Children who used to be recognized as “slow learners” are now treated as children who need special education. This shift is associated with a change in the societal recognition of children with developmental disabilities. Yet, this social response is within a culturally acceptable range. The ideas and concepts learned from other countries are interpreted and incorporated into the traditional Japanese educational practices. I will describe these practices in the results chapters.
Table 2  History of Special Education in Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major educational reform in special education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Started as schools for children who are “blind” or “deaf”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1947 | Compulsory education at schools for children who are “blind” or “deaf”  
Special education classrooms at regular public schools |
| 1979 | Compulsory education at special education schools for children with other disabilities |
| 1993 | Pull out instruction for children in regular classrooms.  
[Language disabilities, emotional disorders including autism, low vision, hard of hearing, physical disabilities and other illness] |
| 2004 | Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act  
Definition of developmental disabilities:  
· Disabilities caused by deficits in central nervous system  
· Symptoms of these disabilities present since early childhood  
[e.g., LD, ADHD, high functioning autism, language disabilities, disabilities involving motor coordination skills, disabilities that affect “psychological development as well as behavioral and emotional disorders, etc.] |
| 2006 | Pull out instruction  
Learning disabilities and ADHD were added  
Autism was separated from emotional disorders |
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology: Research Design

This ethnographic study involved participant observations as a teaching assistant and individual interviews with children with developmental disabilities, their parents, and educators at one elementary school in Japan. These qualitative methods provide a thick description of the everyday lives, experiences, and meanings of disabilities and special education for children, their parents, and educators in cultural context (Gaskins et al., 1992; Miller, Hengst, & Wang, 2003), for example, through hearing their stories of personal experiences and observing their daily interactions. Ethnographic studies, which involve observations and involvement in the social contexts of research participants, allow us to understand the meanings of people’s talk and actions in their culture (Hymes, 1988). People may not express their “meanings” explicitly. As Bakhtin indicates, behind their daily dialogues and interactions, they have specific social, historical, and cultural backgrounds. Without knowing the contexts in which people are living, what we can learn from verbal communications is limited (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Ethnographic methods help us understand their daily experiences by uncovering implicit meanings (Hymes, 1988). In order to explore what developmental disabilities and special education services mean for children, parents, and educators, I focused on their daily experiences by observing their interactions at school, in addition to explicitly asking participants what they believed and thought of children’s disabilities and special education services during individual interviews.

Participant observation as a volunteer teaching assistant also provided me with a unique opportunity to learn about the school as an insider, a teacher, and an outsider, a researcher. Clear expectations and responsibilities as a teaching assistant provided me with a “place” to belong and accordingly made it possible to observe and communicate with children in “natural” settings,
which was critical to understanding participants’ own experiences (e.g., Briggs, 1986).

Observations were conducted in three phases over a period of one year, across two school years. This longitudinal design allowed me to observe how children perceived transitions from a regular classroom to a resource room and, subsequently, a special education classroom, how they adjusted to new environments, and the way that adults, including their parents and educators, dealt with the transitions.

Three out of four children who transferred to a special education classroom from their regular classrooms during the period of data collection were selected for in-depth case studies. The three children were chosen not to represent children receiving special education services, but to describe how children understood their experiences during the transition, which were different from one another. They were from different grade levels, and their disabilities, needs for support, and family backgrounds also varied. Through the eyes of these three children, I intend to describe and understand how the support system at this school worked for children with additional needs, rather than to draw a generalization (Stake, 2005).

The original plan for this dissertation research was a cross-cultural comparative study of one elementary school each in the U.S. and Japan. Right after I visited a Japanese school that served as a research site of this study, I found that a difference in educational and cultural contexts in which U.S. and Japanese children with disabilities received educational support was much more than I anticipated. After the first wave of data collection in Japan, I had to make a decision whether or not to pursue the comparative study before beginning collecting data in the U.S. My concern was that by focusing on certain issues to compare, I would have to sacrifice important information that is necessary to understand the meanings of participants’ experiences in each country. For this reason, I chose to focus on one elementary school in Japan as a primary research site in order to understand the meanings of disabilities and special education services in
more detail.

**Research Site**

S Elementary School served as the primary research site of this study. A purposive method was used to select a public elementary school that met national standards for elementary schools (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2002d), implemented newly introduced educational services for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, and had at least one special education classroom. City A was selected from which to identify a potential research site, because my parents’ house is located in this city, and I stayed there during the period of data collection. In addition, I had attended one of the schools in this city as a child, which helped me to initiate conversations and establish relationships with some of the educators. Educators knew the name of the elementary school I graduated from and some of them knew the community around the school. Several educators also recognized me as a “child” who grew up in the city, rather than a graduate student from the U.S.

City A is also one of the cities recognized by educators as providing high quality special education services. Within the city, all public elementary schools have at least one special education classroom, which may not be typical in other cities. During the school years this study was conducted, the city budgeted to hire one part time teacher in every public elementary school. S Elementary School assigned this teacher specifically to work with children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, for example, providing pull out instruction at a resource room and co-teaching in regular education classrooms.

S Elementary School was identified with the help of the local board of education of the city. The most important criterion for me was accessibility to my wheelchair, because observing children and their interactions with peers and teachers in classrooms was critical in this study. Japanese public schools usually are 2-4 stories with classrooms on the upper floors. Elevators or
accessible entrances are not yet common. Recently, the needs of children with physical
disabilities have been recognized, and several schools have remodeled the buildings. In City A,
as of 2004, about 10% of elementary schools had elevators in their school buildings. A director
of special education and consultation at the board of education introduced me to the principal of
S Elementary School. As suggested by the director, I visited the school one day in June, 2009 to
observe Japanese children during a school day in my role of graduate student from the U.S.
without mentioning this study. I observed a resource room and one regular education classroom,
and ate school lunch with children in the classroom. After observing the school and sharing
information about schools in the U.S. and Japan with the principal, I explained to the principal
about the study and obtained her permission to conduct it at her school. When the principal heard
that I would like to interview educators, children, and their parents, she suggested that I work as
a volunteer everyday. If children and their parents knew me as a teaching assistant, she thought
that it would make it easier to introduce my study to them, rather than introducing me as a
graduate student. Since the principal was looking for a teaching assistant to work with children in
a resource room, I started working as a volunteer teaching assistant beginning two days after my
first visit. In addition, I asked the principal to make an announcement in a way she considered
appropriate to parents of children, as well as educators, that informal observations would be
conducted during the period of the study.

City A

City A is one of the largest cities in Japan (Population: over 1,000,000). Within the city,
there exist distinct areas served under the same local government, including business and
industrial district areas, newly developed residential areas, and traditional areas. The local board

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1 This information was obtained from the website of, or publication by, the local board of education. In order to
maintain confidentiality of the research site, I have excluded these information sources from the reference list of this
study.
of education takes the leadership role in public schools within the city. In traditional areas, people help each other and raising children is part of the responsibility of the community, although the connections and interpersonal relationships among residents are thought to be weakening. It is common that three generations live together in the same house. Recently, children tend to leave their parents’ houses once they have their own families, still they have places in the community to come back to occasionally for family gatherings. In contrast, the majority of residents in newly developed residential areas live in nuclear families. These areas were created as a result of industrialization and urbanization in the past 10-30 years. Since these areas are new and residents moved in from elsewhere, generally, connections between community members are thinner than in traditional areas.

**S Elementary School**

S Elementary School is located in the traditional area near the borderline between City A and the adjacent city. This school is one of the smaller schools in City A, enrolling about 200 children from 1st through 6th grades. At the beginning of the school year 2009-2010, 204 children attended this school, but the number fluctuated as students transferred in and out of the school during the school year. Each grade level had one classroom of 30-37 children, except 2nd grade which had two classrooms of about 20 children. 2nd grade was the only grade that had more than 40 children. The latest amendment of the national law, the law that determines the standards for class size and the number of staff members in compulsory public education in 2008, specifies that in regular education classrooms, one classroom teacher is assigned for every 40 children in the grade level. Further, the law provides the standard to calculate the number of educators assigned to each school depending on the number and types of classrooms, either special or regular education classrooms (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2008b).

At S Elementary School, during the school year 2009-2010, there were two teachers who
did not have classrooms\(^2\). These two teachers were assigned to work with children as sub-classroom teachers for 1\(^{st}\)-3\(^{rd}\) grades and 4\(^{th}\)-6\(^{th}\) grades, respectively. These sub-classroom teachers primarily taught PE and co-taught Math with a classroom teacher of each grade level. When Math was taught in small groups, a sub-classroom teacher taught half of children in the classroom. Since 2\(^{nd}\) grade had two classroom teachers, Math and Japanese language were taught by the classroom teachers in each classroom. The two classes were sometimes combined in other subjects and taught by both teachers.

Besides regular education classrooms, there was a self-contained special education classroom and a resource room. During the 2009-2010 school year, five children from 3\(^{rd}\) to 5\(^{th}\) grade were in the special education classroom. Once a week, the resource room was used by a part-time teacher who taught children pulled out from regular classrooms individually or in small groups. During the 1\(^{st}\) semester, the resource room was used primarily for two children who were not able to remain in their classrooms due to interpersonal problems. They studied at the resource room with the part time teacher or teaching assistants. There was one other child who came to the resource room to study once a week. After the two children moved to the special education classroom in the latter half of the 1\(^{st}\) semester, this resource room was used as part of the special education classroom. During the 2\(^{nd}\) semester, three more children started studying with the part time teacher once a week at the resource room.

There used to be two types of special education classrooms at S Elementary School, one was for children with “mental retardation,” and the other was for children with “autism and emotional disorders.” During the school years this study was conducted, all children belonged to

\(^2\) The law that determines the maximum classroom size also specifies the number of educators assigned to each school. In addition to educators who have classrooms, several teachers are assigned to assist in classrooms. The number of additional educators varies by the number of classrooms. Each school can decides how to use these teachers.
the classroom for children with “autism and emotional disorders,” but their disabilities varied from autism spectrum disorders, including Asperger’s syndrome, to learning disabilities. These five children, including two children who moved to the special education classroom in the middle of the school year, were taught by two classroom teachers. By law and regulations, schools can receive support to hire one classroom teacher for 8 children in special education classrooms; however, the local governments may assign additional teachers for special education classrooms as needed (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2008b).

School Building

S Elementary School includes a school building, gym, swimming pool, large playground, flower and vegetable gardens, animal cage, and fish pond. It enclosed by walls and fences. The playground has a free space with succor ball goals, basket ball poles, and other equipment such as a climbing pole, and is also used as a track during PE classes. There is a gate near the school building. For security reasons, the gate is open only during the morning and evening when children are coming and leaving. During other times, visitors have to call the staff office using the inter com located near the gate to unlock the gate. There are security cameras around the gate so that staff members can monitor people who visit and leave the school in a staff room where all staff members have their desks and prepare for instruction.

The first floor of the building is used for offices. On the west side, there are rooms for staff members, including the principal’s office, a staff room, a school nurse’s room, a business office, and a locker room for staff members. About half of the east side is occupied by the school kitchen, and there are several rooms in the remaining area including a printing office, a studio for in-school announcements, a counseling room, and an office for a parent volunteer group, called “Team S,” described below. Parents frequently gathered and worked in this office or another office for the parent and teacher association (PTA) located on the 4th floor.
There is an elevator between the east and west sides of the building. This school building did not have an elevator when it was built originally. The elevator was installed several years ago to accommodate a 1st grader with a physical disability. Teachers and other staff members frequently use the elevator to go to classrooms, but children are not allowed to use it without permission. When I worked with children, there were times I had to go to other floors with them. Other children saw the child coming out from the elevator with me. Several children later asked me if they could come with me, and I had to handle the situation as a “teacher.”

The 2nd to 4th floors are used for classrooms, including regular education classrooms of each grade level, a special education classroom and a resource room, and special rooms for science, crafts, home economics, and music. Classrooms are located in a way that children in the special education classroom are able to interact with other children in regular classrooms. Libraries are located on the 2nd and 3rd floors. The library on the 2nd floor mainly has fictional books, and the library on the 3rd floor has science, history, or other books, such as a children’s encyclopedia to be used for research projects in science or social studies classes. In addition, there is a classroom for small group instruction, a computer room, and an English classroom. The computer room is used for classroom instruction as needed, as well as club activities. The small group instruction room is primarily used during the 2009-2010 school year for math instruction, since math is taught in small groups in several grade levels. The English classroom does not have desks and chairs, so children can move around during the activities, such as music and dance. Either a regular classroom or the English classroom is used for English instruction, depending on the day’s activities.

When I went back to S Elementary School in the following school year, during the 3rd wave of data collection, this classroom arrangement had changed. Now, there were two small group instruction rooms, one for upper grade levels, and another for lower grade levels. In
addition, the resource room that used to be located next to the special education classroom was incorporated into the special education classroom as the number of children had increased. From April (the new school year), a counseling room located on the first floor was used as a resource room, and the same part time teacher who came once a week taught children there in small groups.

Participants

Participants for individual interviews were selected from individuals nominated by the principal. My initial criteria to select participants were children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, their parents, and educators directly working with these children. As I worked with children and educators and learned that most educators had interactions with children with developmental disabilities, I expanded the invitation to all educators. Accordingly, 15 educators who were available during the period of data collection, three children with developmental disabilities, and their parents who had accepted their children’s disabilities and were able to talk about their experiences participated in this study.

Children and Their Parents

The principal was concerned about singling out children for individual interviews, and explaining the study to parents, especially those who had not fully accepted their children’s disabilities. The principal and I discussed that I would focus only on children who had been receiving support individually. I would use the word, “difficulties” instead of “disabilities” unless children and parents used “disabilities.” Selection of potential child and parent participants and arrangement for individual interviews would be made by the principal.

Four children with developmental disabilities whose parents had accepted their children’s “difficulties” were nominated by the principal as potential participants, and three children and their parents actually participated. The three children who served as primary participants were
Dai (3rd grade: autism spectrum disorder), Kakeru (2nd grade: autism spectrum disorder), and Yusuke3 (5th grade: language disability and learning disability). Their clinical diagnoses of disability vary, but these disabilities fall in the category of developmental disabilities used in Japanese public education. Another child nominated by the principal was absent most days while I was at S Elementary School. I decided not to invite this child and his parents.

All these three children were boys, and there was no girl whose parents were ready to talk about their children’s potential “disabilities” or “difficulties,” according to the principal at the time when I initiated this study. These three children along with one other child all were transferred to the special education classroom during the period of data collection. Another child, a girl, was not invited to participate in this study. I did not know that she was a child who needed additional support until I went back for the second wave of data collection and found her studying at the resource room once a week.

The three children were also selected for in-depth case studies, because I worked as a teaching assistant with them and had opportunities to communicate with their parents, peers, and educators, and observe their interactions. These three children provided an interesting context to examine, in which they established their identities as “different [from other children]” and received support.

Dai is a 3rd grade boy with autism spectrum disorder. He studied in his regular classroom since he was in 1st grade, and began to study at the resource room in 3rd grade, due to interpersonal problems with peers and the increasing demands of study. He uses polite language more than other children do, which sometimes sounds like reading aloud a book. He can express himself verbally to communicate with others. Yet, he seems to have difficulties in “reading” what other people may think, and his responses sometimes cause interpersonal problems. He

3 All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.
knows his strengths and can take the initiative to expand activities he is interested in, but is cautious about trying anything new. If he receives appropriate support to deal with his difficulties, he functions well at school. However, conflicting expectations for him between school staff members and his mother made it difficult for him to handle situations, and he struggled throughout his 3rd grade year.

Kakeru is a 2nd grade boy. He also has autism spectrum disorder, but has different experiences from Dai. He is proud of his knowledge about “bugs,” and other children acknowledge it. This motivated him to make an effort at school and enjoy studying and playing with friends in his regular classroom. He has difficulties in paying attention to others, and needs assistance in following directions and staying on task. His behaviors in the classroom, such as talking at inappropriate times, can be distractive, but he begins to notice that these behaviors make him different from other children. Under the protection of his parents who understand his needs and his classroom teacher who provides support in his classroom, he made a decision to transfer to a special education classroom.

Yusuke is older than two other children and begins to understand and accept his learning disability and speech problems (stuttering). He knows about himself, especially, that he cannot read and write at the level of other 5th graders. This negatively impacted his self-esteem. He lost motivation and described himself as “hopeless.” As he interacted with children in a special education classroom and learned about his “difficulties” and his parents understood and accepted his disabilities with the support provided by educators, Yusuke became to view his disabilities positively and enjoy playing and studying with other children. Although disabilities and needs of these three children varied, support they received was embedded in their social contexts at home and school.
Educators

My initial request to the principal included referral of educators who were knowledgeable about special education and/or worked with child participants. Accordingly, during the first wave of data collection, I interviewed seven educators working with child participants as educators, an administrator, or a coordinator of the support children received. When I went back to S Elementary School for the second wave of data collection, I expanded the invitation to all educators, and a total of 15 of 17 educators participated in the individual interviews, including two administrators, a school nurse, a teaching assistant, five classroom teachers, four current and former special education classroom teachers, and two part time teachers working with children with developmental disabilities.

Mrs. S, a school nurse, also served as a special education coordinator. A school nurse in Japan is trained as an educator and does not necessarily hold a nursing certification (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2008c). Their responsibilities include overseeing children’s health and their physical and mental development, working individually with children who have problems in their physical and mental health, providing health education in classrooms, providing first aid, and referring children to appropriate health care agencies (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2005d).

Procedures for Data Collection

I collected data in three phases; specifically, during the summer of 2009 (6 weeks), the winter of 2010 (5 weeks), and the following summer, 2010 (5 weeks). Methods included: participant observation as a teaching assistant; in-depth case studies of three children with developmental disabilities drawn from observations, record review, and interviews with children, their parents, and educators; informal observations of and discussions with children’s peers in regular education classrooms; and individual interviews with children’s educators and parents.
regarding their beliefs about disability and experiences of providing/receiving special education services. In addition, I reviewed policies, laws, histories related to special education, and guidelines that determine services and support for children with developmental disabilities and procedures to provide special education services established by the local board of education.

**Field Entry: Introduction to Educators, Children, and Parents**

Morning meetings and activities with all children from 1st through 6th grades were scheduled weekly on Mondays and occasionally on Fridays. One of these morning meetings was scheduled on my first day as a teaching assistant, and I was told to come to the meeting to be introduced to staff members and children. At the end of the meeting, the principal introduced me as a student from the University of Illinois in the U.S. who came to S Elementary School to learn about an elementary school in Japan. She told children that I would come to the school every day until the summer break as a teaching assistant, and encouraged them to ask me any questions when they saw me in their classrooms or the Challenge Room. She also officially introduced the Challenge Room, a resource room, which was newly created at the beginning of the school year in April. She explained that the room was a place where children could study one-on-one with a teacher when they had something difficult to understand.

At the beginning of the following week, there was an in-school workshop about autism and other disabilities that cause social and learning difficulties. At the end of the workshop, the principal officially introduced me to staff members. She indicated that I had learned about special education in the U.S. and would work as a teaching assistant primarily for children in the resource room until the summer break.

During the first wave, every time I visited a new classroom, children asked me questions

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4 Children experiencing difficulties in learning in regular classroom may be referred to receive small group or individual instruction at the Challenge Room. The only requirement during this school year was parental permission.
whenever possible. Some children even asked me questions during instruction periods and I had to tell them to ask me later after the class. In such cases, I felt that my presence might be interfering with their learning. As they got used to my wheelchair, I was able to go to their classrooms without distracting them from classroom activities. Classroom teachers also encouraged children to ask me questions. Several children asked about the U.S., but most questions were about my wheelchair. This made it easier to initiate conversations with children and establish relationships.

**Participant Observation**

I participated as a teaching assistant for children experiencing academic and interpersonal difficulties at school. Field notes described physical and social contexts of the school, including interactions and relationships between educators, children, and their parents. In addition to field notes, photos of school buildings and other facilities were taken. Field notes also described children with developmental disabilities during interactions with peers and educators, including how and where they received support. I carried a small notebook with me while at the school and took brief notes when children were not around. These notes were the basis of the field notes I wrote each day at home.

Informal conversations with children, educators, and parents and observations of their interactions were also described in field notes. During the first two waves of data collection, field notes described my daily interactions with children including those unrelated to the three participant children, for example, informal observations and conversations with several boys in the special education classroom and 12 children (4 girls) receiving individual support in either their classrooms or at the resource room. Their interactions with peers, educators, and parent volunteers were described in field notes whenever I visited their classrooms.

The third wave of data collection occurred during the first semester of the following
school year. S Elementary School had the same administrators and a special education coordinator. Yet, under the directions and instruction of new classroom teachers, dynamics within the classrooms had changed. Therefore, my field notes focused on the interactions and communications that involved children who had problems that needed immediate attention. I continued to follow three participant children in the special education classroom whenever I saw them, for example, in the hallway, playground, and regular and special education classrooms. In comparison to the first two waves of data collection, I was not involved in the daily lives of participant children, except on the two days I visited the special education classroom to observe them. I did not want to distract them, since the new classroom teachers had specific ideas about how to organize and manage their classroom and rules for each child to follow. Unless otherwise indicated, materials presented in the results chapters will describe primarily on my observations and interviews during the first two waves of data collection.

My Roles as a Teaching Assistant

Typically, I arrived at the school around 9am, before the 2nd period began. While children were at school, I spent time in classrooms and sometime in the staff room where all teachers had their own desks. I visited all classrooms as a teaching assistant. Subjects of the classes I visited included math, Japanese language, craft, English, international studies, integrated studies, social studies, science, home economics, music, and moral education. In these classrooms, my roles varied from moving around the classroom to help children who were struggling to working one-on-one with children identified by teachers.

After children went home, I wrote in the daily log for teaching assistants indicating what I did in each class period, my reflections, and any questions to the principal and the special education coordinator. I typically left school at around 4-5 pm. Occasionally, I talked with the coordinator about children I had worked with before leaving school, or in the morning next day.
The principal and the coordinator read the log and put comments and suggestions as needed. During the first wave, a copy of this daily log was filed in a folder of each child I worked with at the resource room, Yusuke and Dai, and circulated on a daily basis to teachers involved in support for them, including their classroom teachers. Yusuke and Dai were not able to remain in their classrooms and needed special attention. Their folders were prepared so that all staff members involved in supporting them could share information. As they moved to the special education classroom at the end of the first wave of data collection, my role as a teaching assistant shifted to assisting in regular classrooms. This allowed me to expand my observations to children in regular classrooms while following up with Yusuke and Dai. Accordingly, during the second and third waves of data collection, my daily log was only shared with the principal and the coordinator.

**Visiting Classrooms as a Guest Teacher**

No observations in arranged settings and formal communications with children, educators, and parents were conducted unless I obtained consent. If the conversations were initiated by children, I listened to them and answered their questions about my wheelchair. Two exceptions were made during the second wave when educators and/or parents asked me to talk with children about my experiences in a wheelchair. The first case was that the special education coordinator asked me to talk with Yusuke individually after talking with his mother, because he was beginning to suspect that he might have some sort of disability. I had worked with him individually as a teaching assistant, but it was the first time to arrange a meeting to talk about “disability.” Even during the individual interview, I did not specifically ask about his difficulties. Instead, I asked how he felt about his regular classroom, the “Challenge Room [resource room],” and the “Rainbow Room [special education classroom].”

The second exception was when I visited classrooms from 1st through 6th grades as a
guest teacher to talk about my experiences in a wheelchair. My participation was requested by the principal and was part of “moral education,” one of the requirements described in the National Curriculum Standard. One of the goals of the year was learning about human rights, and the principal requested that I visit the classrooms to share my experiences in a wheelchair. She told me that it would be a good opportunity for children to hear from someone who actually had experiences of coping with a disability. Each visit was about 45 minutes. After I shared my experiences briefly, children asked me questions. I brought extra wheelchairs to several classrooms, and children enjoyed “riding” on them. After the visits, children gave me reflection letters. This dissertation includes some of the letters and discussions with children that are related to the research questions of this study.

**Individual Interview Procedures**

It is important to create an environment and atmosphere in which participants feel comfortable and to ask questions appropriately in a way in which they do not feel obligated to answer (e.g. Briggs, 1986), as most Japanese people are not familiar with individual interviews. I made the interview conversational and asked questions whenever appropriate during or after activities, such as when participants brought up issues related to my research questions. When the questions are asked during daily activities and conversations, I was not able to record their responses. In such cases, I had to rely on my notes taken during or after the conversations. Later, I described as much as I remembered in my field notes based on my notes.

I also did not interview until I had established relationships and learned specific terms used at school, for example the names they used to refer to their classrooms and terms regarding types of support for children with developmental disabilities. During the first three weeks, I focused on my role as a teaching assistant and on establishing relationships with children and staff members. I did not actively “collect” data by asking questions or interviewing, but kept
field notes regarding my informal communications and observations of daily interactions among children, parents, and school staff members. During our conversations, I made sure that my questions were related to my role as a teaching assistant, not as a researcher. From the 4th week, I started interviewing individually.

Individual interviews with adult participants were semi-structured. The following issues were probed during the interviews (See Appendix F and G for the interview protocols for educators and parents, respectively): 1) the meanings of children’s disabilities, 2) their experiences in special education as an educator or a parent, 3) how beliefs about disability affect the lives of children with developmental disabilities, 4) challenges and the ways to handle them, 5) strengths and weaknesses of the current special education services, 6) satisfaction with services, and 7) suggestions for improvement.

Individual interviews with children focused on the services they receive, why they receive them, and how they feel about them (See Appendix H for the interview protocol). Since they did not know they had “disabilities” or received “special education” services, I did not use these terms during the interviews. Instead, I used the room names of the resource room and the special education classrooms.

**Interviews with Educators**

All but two educators participated in individual interviews. Two educators were not interviewed because of the scheduling. My field notes described informal conversations with these two educators as part of participant observations.

The interviews were scheduled at the educators’ convenience, usually after school. The first interview was conducted with the principal. She then explained about the interview to other teachers and asked them if they had time to participate. Once teachers agreed to participate in the individual interviews, I explained the purpose of the study and obtained their signatures on the
consent letters. The principal allowed us to use a counseling room or her office when she was not there. Interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. All interviews but two were audio recorded for the purpose of transcription. One interview was conducted through e-mails, and supplemented with field notes describing our daily conversations. I decided not to ask permission to record the interview with the other participant. I worked with this educator on a daily basis and I wrote the stories he shared with me in field notes. I thought, however, it was not appropriate to ask if I could record our conversations because of our age difference.

**Interviews with Parents**

All three interviews were audio recorded and lasted about 30-40 minutes. The first two interviews were arranged by the principal. I had met and spoken on a daily basis with the first mother. I had not met the mother and father who participated in the second interview, but I had observed their child in his regular classroom. The third interview also was with a mother I spoke with on a daily basis. The principal told me to interview her anytime when she was available, but to let her know when the interview occurred in case of an adverse emotional reaction. The first two interviews were conducted in the principal’s office, and the third interview in the resource room that was familiar to the mother.

**Interviews with Children**

During interviews with parents, I obtained consent to interview their children, and the latter assent from their children. By the time I interviewed children, they had become used to talking with me individually. I framed questions for them as an extension to our daily conversations. These interviews were conducted in the resource room where I usually spent time with them.

Formal interviews in individual settings were done only with Yusuke and Dai. I had been working with them since the first week and talked with their parents on a daily basis. I was able
to arrange the interviews easily and the principal also allowed me to interview them when I worked with them individually. Individual interviews lasted less than 10 minutes, and I only recorded the interview with Dai. When we recorded the interview, Dai started and stopped the recording so that he was able to have a control over the recording. The interview with Yusuke was not recorded, because his parent was concerned about recording. He was shocked to hear his recorded voice in the past and she told me that he might not prefer to record the interview.

Another child, Kakeru, studied at a regular classroom during the first wave of data collection. I observed him in his classroom and occasionally talked and interacted with him, I did not, however, have an opportunity to talk with him individually for the interview without “singling” him out. Instead, I asked the principal and the special education coordinator for permission to observe and work with him in his classroom as a teaching assistant. I kept a record of communications with him and my observations in my field notes. The interview with Kakeru happened informally, during the second wave of data collection, when he was studying with me individually at the resource room. His parents had given me permission to record, but I did not have time to prepare.

I took notes of conversations I had with these three children as much as possible during my observations and included these in my daily field notes. The children talked to educators and teaching assistants about what they thought about school much more during daily activities and interactions than during the formal interviews. Therefore, input from children largely comes from my field notes.

**Review of Case Records**

I obtained parents’ permission to review school records of the three children who served as primary participants. Parts of children’s case records, such as results of evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services, were reviewed during individual interviews
and informal conversations with the principal. I took notes as needed, including their diagnoses. However, I did not review documentations regarding their academic performance and other school records, because some of them were kept by classroom teachers and I thought asking them for these records might make it difficult for me to balance my roles as a teaching assistant and a researcher. Instead, when I studied individually with these three children, I took notes about the materials these children worked on and their level of understandings, in addition to comments from their classroom teachers and parents. My daily logs as a teaching assistant, which were kept separately from my field notes, also involved comments and responses from the principal and the special education coordinator regarding children’s problems and progress, and suggestions for me to handle situations I faced in classrooms.

**Other Data Sources**

I obtained information about S Elementary School from educators as well as the school’s web site, including mission statements, goals, and funding. In addition, I reviewed guidelines and instructions related to special education established by the local board of education. These materials were provided by the principal and the local board of education, or obtained from the website of the local board of education. Field notes also described discussions with individuals outside of S Elementary School, such as educators in other schools and a staff member of the local board of education, who gave me suggestions during the course of conducting this study. Further, I reviewed laws that determine special education in Japan, as well as the history and policies related to special education services for children with developmental disabilities (See Chapter 2 for the review of history and policies in Japan).

**Data Analysis**

In order to prevent misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the meanings, all analyses were conducted in Japanese. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Using
analytic induction techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Goets & LeCompte, 1981), the meanings of participants’ experiences and beliefs were examined through repeated readings of the transcribed interviews and field notes. Codes were identified from recurring topics in field notes and thoughts shared by participants during interviews. Codes that had close meanings and were inter-related were grouped to generate themes. Photos and drawings children gave me were used to illustrate identified themes visually.

As the analysis progressed, codes and themes were re-defined and re-categorized until the definitions made sense to all cases. Negative cases were used to expand and revise initial interpretations of codes and themes. This process allowed me to obtain deeper understandings of the meanings of participants’ experiences and beliefs. Several themes were generated based on research questions, while other themes emerged from the observations and interviews. For example, greeting a child with “Itte-rasshai” and “Okaeri-nasai (welcome back)” to create an accepting atmosphere for children with developmental disabilities was identified as a code. Later, the definition was expanded to all children being pulled out of their classrooms for additional support regardless of disability. Participants tended to take these greeting words positively. One parent, however, objected because she viewed the practice as differentiating her child from other children. This negative case gave me an opportunity to consider her past experiences as a parent of a child with a disability, and how it had impacted her beliefs about disability and special education.

Culturally specific meanings of identified codes and themes were also examined by using interviews with U.S. educators from my pilot study and the existing literature in the U.S. (e.g., Morson & Emerson, 1990; Quinn, 2005). These outsider perspectives, along with my experience in the U.S., helped me to identify culturally specific practices and beliefs in Japan. For example, as the mother described above indicated, being greeted by their peers could result in singling out
the child, which was also suggested by a U.S. educator. This reminded me of a meaning attached to the Japanese ritual words children used to greet her child. Japanese people use these words to individuals when they regard the individuals as members of their group. The difference between this mother and the U.S. educator was that the mother knew the meaning of these words and yet felt that this practice was discriminatory. The meaning of these ritual words helped me examine expectations and functioning of peer relationships for Japanese teachers, children, and parents in further detail.

**Credibility of the Study**

My role as a teaching assistant impacted this study, including data collection and my interpretations of observations and interviews. The majority of participants, especially children and their parents, recognized me as a teaching assistant, rather than a researcher. This status put me in a unique position between teachers and children. Although children called me “Teacher” and I gave them directions as needed, I had less authority than teachers. This made it easier for me to initiate and establish culturally appropriate relationships with children, their parents, and teachers. Responsibilities as a teaching assistant frequently outweighed my role as a researcher, and I had to balance these two roles. Nevertheless, these dual roles helped me to interpret participants’ stories and their interactions with others simultaneously as an insider and an outsider.

As we got to know each other, participants shared more of their thoughts and treated me as a “resource” to provide support for children as staff members, for example, asking me to be a guest teacher and to share my own experiences in a wheelchair with a child who was struggling. These interactions provided me with additional information to “triangulate” and make sure the themes emerging from the stories I heard during individual interviews and other occasions were credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and also to minimize leading effects as a result of using the
researchers’ stories (Charmaz, 2002). The following attempts were made to enhance the credibility of my interpretations of participants’ experiences and beliefs, as well as Japanese-English translations.

**Peer Debriefing**

A Japanese MSW student in the U.S. who had practice experience as a social worker for individuals with disabilities in Japan was asked to give me feedback on the adequacy and consistency of the coding, and Japanese-English translation. Further, feedback from individuals who have professional and/or academic experiences in the field of school social work or special education in Japan were used to examine the credibility of interpretations regarding policies and practices in these fields (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Prolonged Engagement**

I was at the research site for a total of 16 weeks across two school years. This “prolonged engagement” enabled me to examine the credibility of my interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Going back to the site occasionally and keeping in contact with participants, including sending e-mails and thank you notes, helped me to maintain trusting relationships and accordingly to obtain credible information.

**Persistent Observation**

Conducting interviews and observations over the period of a year provided me with opportunities to clarify, support, or discount themes identified in preliminary analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, during the first wave of data collection, I was frequently confused with the support system for children with developmental disabilities at S Elementary School, due to the differences from practices I studied in the U.S. As I worked with Japanese educators and learned how they interacted with children, I became to understand how the support system works in the Japanese cultural context. Their responses to my questions in daily activities also helped
me clarify my interpretations of the practices and identified themes.

**Member Check**

Occasionally, a summary of the findings was shared with some of the participant adults. Their feedback was used to examine the credibility of interpretations from the perspective of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the issues identified by a participant educator was the differences of perspectives from parents. In the summary I showed the educator, I did not specify who brought up the issue. The educator described differences in the perspectives of parents and educators and further elaborated her perspective of special education services. This member check provided additional data as well as enhancing credibility.

**Triangulation**

The use of multiple data sources, children, parents, and educators, as well as the use of multiple methods, including interviews, observations, and a review of documents were used for the purpose of triangulation in order to produce credible findings and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By integrating perceptions of children and adults, more credible and detailed understandings regarding disability and special education were obtained. Differences and similarities in the perspectives of children, parents, and educators were explored and further analyzed to provide explanations for these differences and similarities. Furthermore, integration of data from interviews and observations provided consistency of interpretations. For example, my observations of one child suggested that the child was more comfortable when he was in the resource room. One of his peers as well as several teachers indicated this in informal conversations. During the individual interview, this child described why he liked the resource room more than his regular education classroom. These observations and interviews provided reasons why the child felt comfortable in the resource room from multiple perspectives.
Research on Disability by a Researcher with a Disability

Disability is a sensitive issue to discuss. Unless people with disabilities are asked about their experiences, their voices may never be heard. My experiences in a wheelchair, as well as the existing literature, suggest the potential use of my experiences in a wheelchair as a way of eliciting children’s experiences of disabilities. Tregaskis and Goodley (2005) noted that not many researchers with disabilities recognize the advantages of using their personal experiences in order to develop studies regarding understanding disabilities. Their previous personal experiences, including fear and pain related to disabilities, are useful in analyzing and interpreting experiences of research participants. They can understand the experiences of oppression and discrimination “instinctively,” which is a useful resource for researchers involved in disability studies.

In addition to analyzing and interpreting participants’ experiences, researchers’ personal experiences of disability can be used in other phases of research studies, including data collection. In qualitative studies, disclosure of researcher’s experiences is generally useful in developing equal relationships with participants, building rapport, and facilitating participants’ sharing of experiences (Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006; Linde, 1993). Therefore, it is reasonable for researchers with disabilities to share their disability stories when exploring participants’ experiences of disability.

In her book about American life stories, Linde (1993) explains that sharing one’s life stories is a process involved in the development of personal relationships, such as close friendships. In a research setting, participants’ perceptions of relationships with researchers, such as degree of intimacy, also influence their decisions of which story to tell. Researchers from universities may be viewed as outsiders by participants who are in vulnerable situations due to the difference in social, economical, and cultural status, age, or other reasons. They may feel that
their relationships are not equal. If researchers disclose their personal experiences, it may help participants feel closer to the researchers and make it easier to talk to them about their experiences (Abell et al., 2006; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputton, 2007).

Listening to other people’s stories also reminds us of our own stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is natural for researchers to remember similar experiences while hearing participants’ stories. Sharing such stories with participants may encourage participants to elaborate their stories. Similarly, participants may remember their stories by hearing researchers’ stories. Therefore, sharing researchers’ stories may be useful in introducing new topics, especially when asking about sensitive issues, such as disability. Researchers can ask about sensitive issues indirectly by sharing related experiences.

At the same time, when a researcher shares their experiences, it may affect participants’ responses in unintended ways. Telling and hearing stories may cause risks for both participants and researchers. There may be psychological consequences as a result of remembering painful experiences and feelings associated with disabilities, such as anxieties and fears, which usually do not come up in daily life (Tregaskis & Goodley, 2005). It should be the participants who decide if they tell their stories. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to minimize negative consequences not only for participants, but also for researchers.

One of the ways to prevent psychological consequences for researchers may be by preparing stories before meeting with participants. Individual interviews with researchers in the field of health care showed that some researchers intentionally disclosed personal experiences in order to develop rapport. However, accidental disclosures made researchers feel confused and out of control. There were also researchers who were not comfortable with disclosing their experiences during interviews with participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). These responses suggest that it may be better if researchers plan the level of disclosure before meeting with
participants, especially when the research focused on sensitive issues including disabilities. Participants also should be informed that they will be asked to share their stories ahead of time and that they do not have to if they feel uncomfortable.

Further, if the researchers’ self-disclosure is excessive, directive, evaluative, or too brief, it may negatively affect participants’ responses. Such self-disclosure may lead participants to respond in a way researchers expect, or may cause misinterpretation and misunderstanding by participants (Abell et al., 2006; Charmaz, 2002; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Therefore, unnecessary and irrelevant disclosure should be avoided. Researchers should evaluate the effect of revealing their own stories critically (Poindexter, 2003).

Excessive disclosure may give participants an impression that researchers are trying to attract their attention, and may prevent the development of equal relationships. Since the purpose of the interviews is to hear participants’ experiences, researchers’ stories have to be considered carefully, so that they do not interrupt participants. In order to avoid participants’ misunderstanding and misinterpretation, it is necessary to provide adequate and relevant information. For example, it may be helpful for researchers to describe how they come to know about particular disabilities by using own experiences, so that participants understand that they share something in common. Inviting participants to ask questions may also be effective in making sure that they understand the researchers’ stories.

When researchers’ use of their own stories is directive or evaluative, participants may remain silent or try to find similar responses to researchers’ stories (Abell et al. 2006; Charmaz, 2002). Smith (as cited in Charmaz, 2002) suggests that participants’ experiences can be separated and objectified from their real feelings and thoughts when they hear researchers’ interests, questions, and interpretations. After hearing researchers’ stories, participants’ stories may be modified and separated from their real experiences. For example, if I share my
experiences of being in a wheelchair, such as the way I deal with difficulties, these accounts may facilitate children’s discussion of their own difficulties in their classrooms. However, if I tell them how I feel, my disclosure may narrow their responses. Their responses may not be what they really feel or think, especially if they are different from mine.

Yet, interviewing is a series of interactions between participants and researchers. It may be necessary to decide how much to disclose depending on participants’ responses during the interview. At least, if researchers know which story has the potential to lead participants’ responses, a strategic, thoughtful, and deliberate plan can be made. In addition, leading effects may be reduced if researchers spend enough time with participants to hear the same stories several times, and to develop trusting relationships with them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Stories may have several versions, but the core message of the stories should be maintained.

**My Wheelchair as a Tool to Communicate with Participants**

In order to minimize these risks, I developed interview protocols involving my personal stories (See Appendix F, G, and H), which served as a guideline for me to decide when, what, and how much to disclose (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). In addition, I used participants’ curiosity to initiate and establish relationships with children, their parents, and educators. My previous experience suggests that people, especially children, are interested in and curious about my wheelchair. For example, when I visited another elementary school in Japan as a guest speaker, many children came to look at my wheelchair and asked questions. This became one of the strengths of this study to hear children’s stories and experiences. Before going to the research site, I prepared materials, including a toy wheelchair, in addition to the interview protocols containing my experiences, so that I was able to use them to facilitate conversations with children and adults about their own stories and experiences. Yet, I was concerned about the extent to which children would make connections to their own experiences, because they had
different disabilities from mine.

Once I went to S Elementary School, I found that I did not have to use these materials at all. Even before I attempted to interact with children, they came to ask about my wheelchair. One child’s immediate reaction when I went to his classroom may represent children’s curiosity. The child asked me to show them my “driver’s license” for a wheelchair. The wheelchair itself had a large impact on children. Even if they did not remember my name, as soon as they recognized my wheelchair, they came to see how the wheelchair worked and asked questions. Overall, my wheelchair helped me initiate interactions and conversations with children and hear their stories about difficulties they experienced in the past. Therefore, I did not share my experiences in a wheelchair, until participants asked about it, even during individual interviews.

I had three different types of interactions with children, specifically, interactions in less structured settings, such as during recess and 5-minute breaks between classes when I visited classrooms as a teaching assistant; structured and official conversations with children when I visited their classrooms as a guest teacher who shared experiences about life in a wheelchair; and a conversation with a child in a structured and individual setting. I observed different dynamics between children in these settings. Children, however, commonly shared what they thought about wheelchairs. Several children volunteered their stories.

**Individual Informal Interactions**

Whenever I visited their classrooms, children came to me and asked questions about myself or wheelchair. Several children told me about their grandparents who were in wheelchairs and showed me how they helped by pushing my wheelchair around. Generally, younger children tended to be curious about my wheelchair itself, how it works, and asked me questions without hesitation. For example, 2\textsuperscript{nd} graders asked me if they could push me around the hallway, but 1\textsuperscript{st} graders touched my wheelchair before asking for my permission. Older children were curious
more about the reasons why I was in a wheelchair. They did not come to see me as soon as I entered their classrooms as younger children did. They came to ask questions once they got used to my presence. There were also children who asked me if I needed help.

Dyson (2003) indicated that children move back and forth between their official and unofficial worlds. They use what they know in the unofficial world at home when writing at school, but they have to modify their experiences in a way that it is appropriate in the official world of school. I saw similar reactions when I visited a first grade classroom in Japan. They used their knowledge in the unofficial world to make sense of why I was in their classroom. When they saw me the first time, 1st graders did not consider me as a person who belonged to the “official” world, at school, even though they recognized other adults as either teachers or parent volunteers who helped them. One child actually looked at my wheelchair and asked me, “Can you really teach?” Once a classroom teacher introduced me as a teaching assistant and started giving instruction, children treated me as a person who would help them. My wheelchair was always on the borderline between their official and unofficial worlds.

While many children were curious about how my wheelchair works, several children told me about their “difficulties” and “disabilities.” For example, when I visited a 1st grade classroom and ate lunch with the children, a boy sitting next to me asked about my wheelchair, “Do you have a disability? I have a disability, my leg is…” and shared his experiences of being in a hospital and using a wheelchair. It surprised me, because I didn’t expect that a 1st grader knew “disability” and also that he used the term without any hesitation. He was the only child who used “disability” to refer to his own “difficulties.” There was another child who used “disability” to refer to children in the special education classroom, but did not use to describe his own “disability.”
Interactions in Structured and Official Settings

Usually, stories about my wheelchair belonged to the unofficial world, limited to recess or breaks. It became official when I visited as a guest teacher. When I visited classrooms as a guest teacher, children “officially” asked me questions and wrote letters to me. What surprised the principal who requested this guest lecture was that some children reflected on their own difficulties and shared their experiences with peers. Younger children asked more about how my wheelchair works and how I perform daily activities differently from them, such as cooking, grocery shopping, and driving a car. When I visited a 6th grade classroom, children shared their own experiences when they had problems. Once a child shared her story of when she had a bruise on her face and had to handle the situation, other children began sharing their experiences. Another child shared her thoughts about her sister with a disability. There were several children who asked me what I would do if I felt down or if there were times I felt like throwing everything away, avoiding everything, and hiding from everyone. Even younger children with disabilities asked me questions like, “It must be hard [to do everything in a wheelchair]. Why do you want to?” Letters children wrote to me after the class also illustrated how much they were curious about my wheelchair and how much they enjoyed learning things that interested them. Some children asked me additional questions in their letters.

Later, one classroom teacher told me that he was surprised that children shared that much of their own experiences in the classroom. Usually the class is quiet and not many children answer voluntarily, when he asks questions. Not only children who shared their experiences, but also children who listened to other children, seemed to learn about their peers. Another example was that children in one classroom were curious about restrooms for people with disabilities. I told them that there was one in the school building that was accessible to people in wheelchairs. There was one child who shared with the class that she had used this restroom. A few days after I
visited their classroom, I heard from one of the staff members that a group of children came to check on and observe the restroom.

The principal told me that children can learn from listening to people who actually experienced something difficult, rather than only learning from books. My visits seemed to have served as an opportunity for children to think about people who have problems, including their peers with special needs. Through listening to and interacting with other children, they learned from one another.

**Individual Communication in a Structured Setting**

During the second wave of data collection, Yusuke began suspecting that he had a “difficulty in learning.” Upon the request of Mrs. S, the special education coordinator, and his mother, I talked with him individually about my wheelchair. During the week when Mrs. S and his mother asked me about this, he was frustrated, because even though he was working very hard on reading and writing, he still could not read and write. Mrs. S explained to me that his disability and my disability were different, but he might be able to learn something from my experiences.

By the time I spoke with him, he had already heard from his mother about his “difficulties,” although she did not use the term, “learning disabilities.” After both of us shared our stories, I asked him if there was something he’d like to talk about or that he found similar. He indicated that we two had problems we had to deal with.

Although my disability and his disability are different, both of us have difficulties and need assistance in performing daily activities. For him, that is assistance in learning how to write and read, and for me a wheelchair to move around. Before this meeting, several teachers indicated that it might be too difficult for children of his age to make the connection between my difficulties and his own. As with other children who heard my stories and reflected on their own
past experiences, he found similarities between us. I will describe this episode in more detail in his case study.

**Implications for Research**

I have seen many people who are interested in my stories about living in a wheelchair both in the U.S. and Japan. Especially, children are very curious about a wheelchair itself. At the same time, sharing my experiences of being in a wheelchair may affect participants’ responses. Instead of actively sharing my stories, as described above, I decided to use their curiosity to initiate and establish relationships with children, school staff members, and parents, which was the application of the “reactive” method of field entry that Corsaro (1997) developed in his research with children. As he waited for children to react to him and ask questions in the play area, I waited for them to react to my wheelchair.

Accordingly, I did not attempt to initiate any of these interactions. I tried to refrain from bringing up my research project when I worked as a teaching assistant, unless they asked me. The only time I asked questions regarding my research project was with the principal, who helped me to arrange interviews, and during the individual interviews with children, parents and educators. Nevertheless, children kept asking me questions, and adults actively utilized my experiences in a wheelchair, or in the U.S.

Further, the exchange of similar personal experiences can allow participants to know that researchers are able to understand their difficult situations. Especially when people talk about sensitive issues, they choose audiences, who will not deny or ridicule their stories (Charmaz, 2002). When they feel secure and know that researchers are capable of understanding them, it facilitates participants’ further disclosure (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Linde, 1993). For example, when introducing herself, Clark (2003) told her participant children with asthma that she had asthma. Although her experiences as an adult are different from those of children, it is important
for children to learn that they have something in common to initiate their relationships.

Even if researchers’ stories are not directly related to participants’ experiences, their stories may be useful. Clark (2003) also talked about her asthma when interviewing children with diabetes to let children know that they had a shared concern, their illnesses. In addition, by revealing that she did not have the same experiences and that she wanted to learn from them about their experiences, she helped to motivate children to tell their stories. In other words, what was important might be to share something common with participants by expressing it explicitly or implicitly. Similarly, my wheelchair created and gave me opportunities to engage in conversations and establish relationships. Many children reflected on their own experiences and found something similar, their grandparents’ wheelchairs or their own difficulties. A wheelchair is one example to show implicitly that we share something in common, which eventually becomes a chance to share explicitly by answering their questions.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results: Children’s Lives at Elementary School

In this chapter, I will describe the contexts in which children develop and are socialized through daily experiences at school. These results are based on individual interviews with adults and participant observations at S Elementary School. Children spend approximately 5-7 hours per day at school. Their “lives” at school are different from the ones in their own families, for example, they interact with classroom teachers, peers in their classrooms, and children from other grade levels. They also interact with parents of other children who are helping in their classrooms. Through these experiences, children learn social and interpersonal skills, as well as academic skills. At the same time, the small size of S Elementary School creates a home-like atmosphere, and children have close relationships with other children and teachers. In addition, the town in which S Elementary School is located holds traditional beliefs about raising children together in the community, and has a supportive environment for children. Residents in the community, as well as children’s parents, frequently participate in activities with children at school, including assisting in classroom instruction, which is not yet common in Japan. In this educational environment, children with disabilities are accepted as members of the school, and participate in activities together with other children while receiving additional support to meet their needs.

Children’s Daily Lives at School

Generally, children in elementary schools spend most of their time at school in their classrooms, and are taught by the same classroom teachers. Depending on the classroom teachers’ specialization and children’s grade level, several subjects, such as crafts, music, home economics, science, and physical education may be taught by other teachers. Special rooms for these subjects are also used depending on the day’s activities. In addition, at S Elementary
School, Math is co-taught by two teachers and children may be divided into small groups and taught in different rooms.

Children come to school every morning by 8:25. Most children walk to school but some commute to school using a local bus service. Children who come early play and talk with friends in front of the door, until staff members open the door of students’ entrance at 8:10. In the entrance, there are rows of shoe shelves and children have their own space to store their outdoor and indoor shoes. After changing their shoes, children go to the hallway leading to the stairs to go to their classrooms on the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, or 4\textsuperscript{th} floor. When children get to their classrooms, they put notebooks, textbooks, a pen case, and other materials in their desks, and put their school bag in the assigned shelf at the back of the classroom. Besides the school bag, children store other materials, such as a recorder for a music class and a box containing paints and brushes, in their own space.

The formal school day begins with a morning meeting and ends with a “going home” meeting led by classroom monitors, who are assigned on a rotational basis. During the morning meeting, the classroom teacher reminds children of the schedule and special events of the day, such as a swimming class, and children report their health conditions and other things they want to share. For example, one girl reported to her 3\textsuperscript{rd} grade classmates on an injury to her arm, which was in a sling. The classroom teacher asked her if she could do cleaning. Some other children voluntarily offered to exchange the jobs with her so that she could participate without using her arm. She also shared with the class that she was happy when one of the classmates helped her to prepare for the class. That classmate then shared that she helped because it looked hard for the child with a sling to take things out of her school bag and put them in her desk. After several more children reported on who helped whom before the morning meeting, the classroom teacher let the monitors close the meeting, and then the 1\textsuperscript{st} period of the day started (field note,
When I went to S Elementary School during the following summer in 2010, the school’s goal of the month was “Find something good about your friends and yourself.” I happened to be in the 5th grade classroom when two children led a class discussion concerning how to do this. The classroom teacher also was there and made suggestions, but the final decision to write what they found on a piece of paper each day during the going home meeting was made by the children (field note, 7/5/2010). Several days later when I went to a 2nd grade classroom, the classroom teacher asked children if they had found something good about themselves. The morning and going home meetings are used not only to discuss the day’s schedule, but also to unite the classroom as a group.

Each class period starts with the monitors’ request to, “Please be quiet!” The other children respond in chorus, for example, “We will start the 1st hour of the study, Japanese Language.” When the classroom teacher announces the end of the class, all children again say, “We will finish the 1st hour of the study, Japanese Language.” Some children will go out for a rest room break and others will chat with classmates until the next period starts. One class period lasts 45 minutes, and there are 4 periods during the morning and 2 periods after lunch. Depending on the day and grade level, children go home after 5th or 6th period. There are 5 minute breaks between 1st and 2nd periods and 3rd and 4th periods, and two 20 minute recesses between 2nd and 3rd periods and after lunch. During recess, children spend the time as they want within the school building, for example, in their classrooms and libraries, or on the playground. They also may go to the resource room to use the toys and other materials used by children in the special education room. Children enjoy playing with these items, for example a tricycle and a vaulting box.

After the 4th period, children start preparing for lunch. By the end of the 4th period, staff
members working at the school kitchen deliver lunch to each classroom in a wagon. The wagon has large containers of the main dish, side dish, milk, rice, and utensils for the class. A group of 5-6 children rotating weekly are in charge of serving lunch. They put on white caps, smocks, and masks. With teachers’ and kitchen staff’s help, they carry the containers from the wagon in the hallway to a serving table in their classroom. Each child serves one of the items, such as chopsticks, soup, rice, salad, and the main dish. During this time, other children move their desks to make a table of 4-6 children and get in a line to receive their lunch when their group is called by the servers or the classroom teacher. When their group is called, each child takes a tray from the serving table and goes through the table to receive all items, and goes back to the seat and waits for other children.

Once all children sit with their lunch trays, monitors of the day announce the class, “Please be quiet,” and children say in chorus, “With many thanks, Itadaki-masu (literal meaning is ‘receiving’),” and start eating. Classroom teachers eat with the children. Generally, children want to have a teacher or other visitors in their group, so a classroom teacher usually rotates daily to different groups. After lunch, the classroom monitors announce that it is time to say, “Gochisou-sama-deshita (literal meaning is ‘it was a delicious meal’),” and start putting dishes back to the wagon. Itadaki-masu and Gochisou-sama-deshita are ritual words Japanese people use before and after eating meals. Lunch time lasts 45 minutes until 1pm, including serving, cleaning up, and brushing teeth.

15 minutes after lunch time is spent cleaning. Children go to the places they are assigned, such as their classrooms, the hallway, a bathroom, a school nurse’s room, the entrance, and the playground. After the cleaning time, children have 20 minutes recess until the 5th period begins.

The purpose of the daily cleaning time is not cleaning perfectly, but establishing a habit. Classroom teachers sometimes clean together with children, but not always. There were also
children who played with cleaning cloths and brooms, and younger children were not able to clean the floor perfectly. Usually, children clean with peers in their own classrooms, but once a week, they clean in groups of children from 1st through 6th grades. Each group is responsible for cleaning one classroom. On such occasions, older children teach younger children how to clean, and if younger children do not participate, older children give them directions. Before long breaks, such as summer and winter breaks, children spend about an hour cleaning and evacuating the classrooms. With teachers’ directions, children carry desks to the hallway and clean the floor, so that teachers and volunteer parents can wax the floor after school.

Following the afternoon classes, children gather in their own classrooms for a “going home” meeting. Again, the class monitors announce to their classmates that the meeting is starting. Usually, the meeting begins with announcements, comments, and reflections on the day from children followed by their classroom teacher’s announcement for the next day. The meeting takes about 10-15 minutes, depending on how much the teacher and children have to report.

The 5th and the 6th periods end at 2:25pm and 3:10pm, respectively. 1st graders are dismissed after the cleaning time 2-3 days a week, and the rest of the days they have a class during 5th period. Most days, 2nd graders are dismissed after 5th period. 3rd-6th graders have a 6th period class 1, 2, 3, and 3 days a week, respectively.

Additionally, club activities (3rd-6th grades) and committee meetings (5th and 6th grades) are scheduled alternatively on Friday afternoons. At the beginning of the school year, children in 3rd grade and older sign up for one of the club activities offered by the staff members, such as basket ball, computer, Japanese drum, cooking, craft, and science. Children can pick different club activities every year. Since it is the first experience for 3rd graders, a tour is arranged for 2nd graders at the end of the school year, so that they can visit each club and find out which club they want to join next year (field note, 1/29/2010). Activities of the day are led by staff members, but
the activities may be chosen based on children’s input.

Similarly, 5th and 6th graders sign up for one of the committees, such as recycling, health, and animals, and work with teachers throughout the year. For example, children in the animal committee take care of animals, such as rabbits, in a school cage. Children in charge for each day feed the animals and clean the cage. The recycle committee decided this year to collect plastic bottle lids and pull-tabs of soda cans. If they collect enough, they can send the proceeds to an agency which donates wheelchairs. In the middle of June, the committee members explained the purposes of their project to all students during the school meeting and placed boxes to collect lids and pull-tabs near the students’ entrance.

**Activities throughout the Year**

The school year starts at the beginning of April. The first semester ends in the middle of October. After a few days break, the second semester begins. There is a long break during each semester. Summer break begins at the end of July and lasts for approximately 5 weeks. Winter break begins at the end of December and lasts for about 2 weeks. After the second semester, children also have a spring break for about 10 days before the new school year begins in April. The new school year starts with the entrance ceremony in April that welcomes new 1st graders and ends with the graduate ceremony in March to celebrate and bid farewell to 6th graders. In addition, all children attend the ceremonies at the beginning and end of each semester, which are held separately from the entrance and graduate ceremonies.

Throughout the school year, children enjoy, work together to prepare, and report on various activities, for example, a day trip, a sports festival, 2-3 day field trips for upper graders, a summer camp, a summer festival, open house/classroom, and presentations of projects children have worked on during the school year. These activities, including entrance and graduation ceremonies, are part of the “special educational activities” determined in the National
Curriculum Standard developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2008). The intention is to facilitate children’s development not only through formal classroom instruction, but also through their various experiences throughout the day.

The National Curriculum Standard is developed based on The Fundamental Law of Education and The School Education Law, which are the two basic laws regarding public education in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2008). According to the National Curriculum Standard, the purpose of these group activities are “to promote children’s balanced development of mind and body as well as personality, to facilitate voluntary and practical attitudes towards better lives and interpersonal relationships as group members, and to cultivate abilities to think about their own lives and to make the best use of self (p. 112).” Therefore, children are encouraged not only to enjoy these activities, but also to think about their own goals in participating in them, and reflect on what they have learned.

A parent-teacher conference is scheduled in each semester. Classroom teachers meet with parents of children individually after school. Once a year, during the first semester, classroom teachers also visit the homes of all children in their classrooms. In addition, there are “Open Classrooms” scheduled several times a year, where parents are free to observe classrooms during instruction. Typically, this open classroom is scheduled in the afternoon and is followed by a parents-teacher meeting after children go home. These are usually exciting events for children. They look forward to their teachers’ home visits and to seeing their parents coming to see them at school. As a child, I also looked forward to home visits and waited excitedly for my classroom teacher. When children see their own mothers and other parents they know at school before class, they run to parents to say hello. Even during the class, some children look towards the back of the classroom and wave to their parents.
Available Support for Children with Special Needs

At S Elementary School, three different types of support for children with disabilities and children experiencing difficulties in regular classrooms are available; in-classroom assistance, pull out support and instruction at the resource room, and individualized support at the special education classroom. The resource room and the special education classroom were known among children as the “Challenge Room” and the “Rainbow Room,” respectively. Educators used both room names and official terms such as “pull out” or “special education,” during individual interviews and daily conversations with educators. Parents may or may not know the official names. For example, one parent asked me what was a “special education classroom,” after she talked with educators about the classroom. She understood immediately when I told her it was the Rainbow Room. When talking to children, educators as well as parents referred to the support by using the room names. In the subsequent chapters, these room names are replaced with “resource room” or “special education classroom” when adults used these room names, in order to minimize confusion. In excerpts illustrating conversations with children, I use the room names as children addressed them, instead of “special education” services, because the room names represent how children understand services and support they receive.

Classroom Based Support

S Elementary School utilizes teaching assistants to help classroom teachers in regular classrooms. This practice may not be common in other schools in Japan, even in other schools within the same city. Teaching assistants are usually college students taking courses required to obtain teacher certifications, retired teachers, and other individuals the administrators consider having professional knowledge and experiences to work with children. In addition, the local board of education has a volunteer program for college students who want experience working with children. After individual interviews, volunteer students are registered and sent to schools
as teaching assistants. They receive about $10 per day for travel expenses.\(^1\) One of the teaching assistants working at S Elementary School was assigned through this program.

Teaching assistants come to school one to several days a week. Accordingly, I worked with different teaching assistants every day. There was one day in a week I was the only teaching assistant. The other day, we had three teaching assistants. Mrs. S, a special education coordinator, supervises teaching assistants and assigns them to classrooms that need assistance. On a whiteboard located on the back side of the staff room, there is a space where classroom teachers post weekly schedules of their classrooms. If they have a request for assistance, they put notes indicating the day and class period they need teaching assistants. Under the classroom schedules, there are small white boards Mrs. S put teaching assistants’ schedules. Mrs. S. assigns teaching assistants to classrooms primarily during math and Japanese language classes unless teachers have posted another request.

Teaching assistants’ responsibility in classrooms varies by classroom teacher, for example, working with certain children individually at the request from teachers, answering students’ questions during group or individual activities, and assisting teachers during instruction and classroom management. Beginning in July, 2010, S Elementary School started a project in collaboration with the local board of education and several other schools to establish a system of utilizing teaching assistants. Volunteer teaching assistants who have completed training programs offered by the board of education are assigned to work with a certain classroom, so that they can work with the same classroom teacher and children in a consistent manner, rather than being assigned to classrooms randomly. They are paid about $30 a day.

In addition, S Elementary School hired part time teachers to work in a 1st grade classroom.

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\(^1\) This information was obtained from the website of, or publication by, the local board of education. In order to maintain confidentiality of the research site, I have excluded these information sources from the reference list of this study.
co-teaching with a classroom teacher on a daily basis after the summer break, since the classroom required assistance persistently. The classroom teacher oversaw the whole classroom, and the support teacher worked with individual children who needed assistance academically, as well as daily skills including organization of children’s personal materials and maintaining relationships with peers. A part time teacher who provides pull out instruction at the resource room also goes to regular classrooms to assist in classroom teachers when no child is scheduled to study with her.

**Pull-out Support/Instruction**

When children need assistance individually or in small groups, they are pulled out to study with Mrs. Y, who is a part time teacher and comes to the school once a week. She primarily teaches math and Japanese language. Children come to see Mrs. Y at the Challenge Room once or twice on the day she comes depending on their needs and their classroom schedules.

Children are usually identified by classroom teachers, but parents also can make a request for the support. According to Mrs. S, the school used to require documentation from the local board of education, which assesses children’s functioning academically and socially and evaluates eligibility to receive special education services. Currently, the only requirement for this pull out support is parental permission. The school keeps “assessment sheets” for each child receiving pull out services, but it is the classroom teachers’ responsibility to evaluate and inform parents of children’s progress, usually in report cards.

Classroom teachers may provide individual support in their classrooms, during recess or after school. For example, teachers may tell children who are behind to complete assigned tasks in their classrooms during one of the 20 minute recesses of the day and work together to complete the tasks. After school, one teacher also studied with one of the children in her
classroom who needed one-on-one assistance.

**Individualized Support at the Special Education Classroom**

If children need more intensive support, they study at the self-contained special education classroom. In City A, three types of self-contained special education classrooms are available in regular public schools; classrooms for children with mental retardation, autism and emotional disorders, and visual impairments. Schools are able to create any of these classrooms if children with corresponding disabilities attend the schools.\(^1\) S Elementary School has currently two classrooms for children with “autism and emotional disorders.” These classrooms are combined and taught by two teachers. Children who study at the special education classroom also have seats in regular education classrooms of their grade level, called “Interaction classrooms.” Children receive instruction and participate in activities either at the special education classroom or their regular classrooms depending on their needs.

In order to place children in self-contained special education classrooms, children are required to obtain documentation from the local board of education suggesting that they need individualized support. Regular classroom teachers work with a special education coordinator when they find that a child may need more intensive support and suggest to parents that their children may have to be assessed at the local board of education. Parents are also able to initiate a communication with the board of education when they find that their children are struggling. Before placing a child in a special education classroom, schools have to hold a meeting with parents and other staff members working with the child, such as regular classroom teachers of the children, special education classroom teachers, administrators, and a special education coordinator. These individuals are informed of the reasons why the child should be placed in a special education classroom and how the children can benefit.\(^1\)

Once a child is placed in a self-contained special education classroom, the child officially
transfers to the special education classroom from the regular classroom, even if the child keeps his or her seat in the regular classroom. During this process, S Elementary School waited to officially transfer children to the special education classroom even after children began studying there, until children, their parents, and staff members recognized the special education classroom was the best fit for the children. In such a case, these children are counted as children in regular classrooms on paperwork. At S Elementary School, once a child is transferred to the special education classroom, an individualized education program for each child is created, primarily by classroom teachers and approved by parents.

When a child has a diagnosis that requires additional support before starting first grade, it is a parent’s responsibility to communicate with the principal of a local school, either or both regular and special education schools, and the local board of education regarding the child’s placement. They discuss which school is the best fit for the child, either a regular or a special education school, and whether or not the child will be placed in a special education classroom.¹

Several schools in City A also have special education classrooms that provide pull out support for children attending schools near by. Four types of pull out special education classrooms are available in this city, specifically, for children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, language disabilities, and emotional disorders.¹ These children usually attend their own schools but go to other schools that have the pull out special education classrooms, for example, once a week at the assigned class period. In such a case, parents are required to take their children to the special education classrooms in other schools and take them back to their schools after the class. Some programs offer individualized support, such as in language disability classrooms, but children may be taught in groups at emotional disorder classrooms. Similarly to self-contained special education classrooms, children who study at the pull-out special education classrooms also have individualized education programs.
One of the participant children, Yusuke, goes to a pull out special education classroom once a week for his speech problems. S Elementary School, however, only has a self-contained special education classroom. In this study, a special education classroom refers to a self-contained classroom unless otherwise indicated.

**Unique Educational Environment**

Children’s days at school follow a similar timeline across schools and every school has similar annual events, such as entrance and graduation ceremonies and a sports festival. Yet, these activities also reflect the unique educational environments and characteristics of each school. In other words, educational practices at each school are modified and adjusted to meet the unique expectations in the community in which the school is located, including available community resources, within the framework determined by the National Educational Standard. Along with the principal’s emphasis on special education, close relationships with the community create a supportive environment for children with disabilities.

**Neighborhood**

S Elementary School is located in a traditional residential and agricultural community. The community has resources that support children, including children’s families, residents in the community, and neighborhood associations which organize activities within the community. The area this school serves is divided into several areas organized by neighborhood associations, and most families belong to the organization of the area they live. The neighborhood associations support the school in several ways, for example, by planning and organizing a summer festival at the school ground. People living in the neighborhood also support the school individually. They are frequently invited as guest teachers to teach skills in their field, such as growing vegetables. The principal described the community:

This neighborhood is spacious and has enough room…so, it is called a special
agricultural district or like that. Within this ward [of the city], this school serves the widest area and has the second smallest number of children. So, there are families of farmers-going-back-three-or-four-generations, and this kind of area may not be common in this city. These families are like… living with great grandfather and great grandmother, and grandfather and grandmother. [Children are] watching what they do, such as farming, growing something or things like that. And also because they’ve been living with these older people who have seen many children different from one another and who have lived through various historical events, they are able to accept a wide range of… [They know] there are many different types of people, or something good at this moment may not always be good in the future, or like that. [They are] very open-minded (kanyou). This is because [they] have experiences. ….. There is a relatively wide range [of ways of thinking]. It is something like we are together, doing something together peacefully (nakayoku).

Before urbanization of cities in Japan, this type of intergenerational interactions was common in Japanese communities not only within families but also between residents in the community. Recently, however, children have less opportunity to interact with other people in their community. The principal compared this neighborhood with other areas in which interactions between residents are uncommon.

I don’t know well, but I think, in newly developed areas, they are all the same nuclear families [living in] their houses [instead of apartment], and they are narrow-minded, like thinking that children have to study hard and efficiently, otherwise, there is no future for them. Neighborhood, if living in a place neighbors and parents are all like this, the way of looking at [children] can be focused, and it is like a multiplier effect. But this school is in a community where there are many people including elders, and the way of looking at
things is a kind of “multi-layered.” … And also, it’s very open. We are in the same place in terms of raising children together, collaboratively. …. It is true that the civilization goes to the extreme, and there are [parents who] have never talked to children living in the next door of the same condominium [or apartment complex], but [this neighborhood] isn’t like that. It’s like, when [adults are] working in the farm and [find children walking and say], “Are you coming home?” It’s open. Because it is open, things can be dangerous, but, it is surprising that there are very few suspicious persons. It looks like they can’t come in. I think so.

Collaboration with the Community: Raising Children Together

One of the unique characteristics of S Elementary School is that people from the community, including children’s parents, frequently come to the school and work as volunteers. This school has participated since 2006 in a city program called “Pioneer School Project.” In order to raise the level of educational quality, the local board of education started this program in 2005, so that schools can try out new approaches in public education to better educate children in contemporary society. Currently, about 10% of the elementary schools of the city participate in this program. Each school participating in the program has specific themes, including collaboration with and utilization of community resources, English education, and science education. S Elementary School has a history of accepting volunteers from the community. Consequently, a goal of this school is to establish and strengthen an organization coordinating and utilizing resources in the community to teach children,¹ for example, volunteers reading books in classrooms, teaching children how to use computers, assisting in the supervision of children on field trips, and helping children grow vegetables in the school garden.

S Elementary School also accepts teaching assistants. The difference between teaching assistants and parents and volunteers from the community is that teaching assistants also assist in
instructional activities. A special education coordinator who assigns teaching assistants to classrooms explained the difference between parent volunteers and teaching assistants.

Misa: I see many parents working here.

Mrs. S: Yes, what they do, for example, is to read books to children and help teach English in classrooms, but people from the community have not been invited yet to help in classrooms during instructional time.

Misa: But, the other day, when 5th graders planted soy beans, someone [from the community] came to teach and help them.

Mrs. S: That’s right. We want someone from outside of the community, who does not have interests and relationships with children here, to help in classes like Japanese language or Math, because we can see children’s grades and levels of understanding clearly in these classes. But actually we need more people [to help us]. There may be a time when this school has to start thinking about, while making sure about maintaining confidentiality, inviting people from the community. There are several individuals [including parents] who have experience teaching at a cram school, who have teacher certification, or if not, who have been involved in Kumon [math, reading, and English learning center] or grading children’s written exercises, so we plan to invite these individuals tentatively during the summer school this year [which includes studying, swimming, and participating in activities such as craft, basket ball, and computer club].

As part of the Pioneer School Project, this school has established an organization called “Team S” operated by parents who assist in activities at school. In the brochure that the school distributed to children’s families and residents in the community, the team was defined as a group to create a learning environment for raising mentally and physically healthy children in
collaboration with families, the school, and the community. The team has worked at the school on many occasions. This year, the team opened an office within the school building and established a system to provide efficient support for teachers. Parents and residents in the community who are willing to participate are required to sign up for a membership. Once teachers place requests to the team, team members and teachers discuss how to make them happen, for example, how many parents teachers need on what day, and the team members who work at the office match and assign members from the list containing each member’s interest, specialty, and availability. If the support does not require special knowledge and skills, such as assistance in non-instructional activities, parents who have not signed up may participate in supporting the activities (field note, 1/22/2010).

After the summer break, several classrooms started inviting parents through the Team S to assist in, for example, Math and Japanese Language instructions. When teaching the concept of “weight,” 3rd grade teachers decided to use parents’ assistance. Parent volunteers helped children weigh various items from pens and erasers to school bags and to choose an appropriate scale to weigh them on. Children frequently got confused reading a scale correctly and writing “g” or “Kg,” because they had not yet learned the alphabet. It was also confusing for children to understand that weight can be added and subtracted. Children completed these activities in two weeks, and the same five mothers came in to the classroom four times a week to assist children in completing the activities. The fifth class was opened to teachers of other schools and parents to show how this collaboration worked. Some of the reflections from teachers after observing the classroom were that, “I couldn’t see who was a teacher,” “Children are able to get immediate attention when they need it, which minimizes children retaining incorrect information,” “Children can learn a lot through these activities,” and “It’s impossible to do this much variety of activities if there is only one teacher.” Parent volunteers also suggested that they were able to
“raise” other parents who observed parents working with children who were not their own. Children seemed to enjoy working with mothers and called them when they needed help. One teacher stated, “Generally, children like working with adults who get surprised with the children when they find something interesting together,” and “such children become adults who like school, where the good memories are, and come back to work together.” The assistant principal closed the debriefing meeting by saying, “I don’t say ‘thank you’ to Team S, because we are partners in raising children (field note, 1/22/2010).” These responses may reflect the Japanese practice of raising children in collaboration with community and families.

**Small School Size**

Several teachers indicated that due to its small size, the number of teachers available to provide additional support to children at S Elementary School is limited in comparison to larger schools (staff 7, 10; field note: staff 11, 1/22/2010). One classroom teacher who had worked at a larger school noted that she could ask other teachers to listen to children recite multiplication tables, but at S Elementary, teachers were too busy (field note: staff 11, 1/22/2010). So, she asked parents to come in to her classroom during recess to listen to children. Even administrators occasionally teach in classrooms as needed (field notes: January-February, 2010; field note: special education director, 1/26/2010).

At the same time, the small school size made it possible to create a “home-” or “family-” like environment. Most teachers know children’s faces and their names. When talking about the struggles of certain children during the staff meeting, for example, teachers know who the children are immediately, because they have seen and talked to them in the school building. Therefore, the children’s problems tend to be “our” problems, not “their” problems (staff 14).

The close relationships between teachers and children at S Elementary School can be seen in the in-school broadcast. As children prepared for their presentations for “S Festival,”
children who were the members of the festival organizing committee visited each classroom during recess with a video camera and a microphone. With teachers’ assistance, these members interviewed children regarding what each classroom would present on the Festival day and their progress. Each class had decided what to present at the beginning of the school year and prepared for about 9 months. For example, some classes were growing soy beans to make tofu, learning about the community by interviewing people living there, and creating their own movies. Children in the special education classroom opened a restaurant using vegetables they grew. During lunch time, children watched the “show” based on the interviews on a TV monitor. These shows occurred 3-4 times a week for two weeks proceeding the Festival day. Each day, interviews from two or three classrooms were presented, so that each classroom was featured on the show 3 times. When I watched the interviews at the staff room, teachers recognized the children in the show immediately and made comments about them. Children also enjoyed finding familiar faces in the “TV show,” and looked forward to seeing themselves on the show after they had been interviewed during the recess (field notes: week 10 and 11).

Children also have many opportunities to work with children in other grades. In addition to their classrooms, each child belongs to one of six groups consisting of children from all grade levels. These groups participate in regularly scheduled activities in which children learn and work together, such as cleaning classrooms and preparing for a school field trip and a sports festival. Two or three times in a month, they eat lunch together instead of eating in their own classrooms. When working in these groups, older children take care of younger children, for example, they help 1st graders get in line to receive their lunches, plan and lead activities during recess, and teach and help younger children clean their classrooms. For younger children, older children are their older brothers and sisters who help them at school. Even 2nd graders recognize themselves as “older brothers and sisters” for 1st graders, and enjoy introducing their school to 1st
graders who are new to S Elementary School (e.g., comments on the school website postings from 2nd grade teachers). Through these activities, children get to know other children in different grades and learn interpersonal and other skills, while learning from one another. One teacher also described classroom teachers as “mothers” for children at school (field note: staff 1).

The school and their classrooms are “families” as well as the places to learn academic skills.

**Educating Children in Groups**

In this “home-like” educational environment where children from various grade levels work together, children are expected to learn social and academic skills naturally. Children’s relationships with peers as well as educators are viewed as important educational tools. Educators utilize peer relationships in their classrooms, and try to accommodate children who do not fit in to peer groups.

**Peer Membership: Educating Children in Groups**

The principal stated during the interview, “Japanese education has valued [teaching children] in groups efficiently, while having a high degree of freedom, being able to take account of children’s individual needs. It’s a balance, because ‘free’ is at the same times difficult.” Too much freedom requires extra time to work with individual children and can sometimes make it difficult to oversee the whole school. Group dynamics within classrooms help teachers with classroom management. This reflects a statement on the National Curriculum Standard for elementary schools, which identifies academic skills, moral education, and physical education and health as the three basic components of elementary education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2008).

Under this guideline, the local board of education established goals in five areas of children’s development: learning (知), respect (德), life/health (体), [contribution to] the public (公), and openness [to others] (開). Further, S Elementary School has developed its own more
specific goals for each of these goals. They aim for children to 1) grow up healthy mentally as well as physically [Life/health]; 2) meet with people, question, and learn [Learning]; 3) interact, deepen, and try what they have learned [Openness]; 4) acknowledge what is good in others and learn from one another [Respect]; and 5) learn and participate in the community [Public]. As these goals suggest, interactions with others including peers and educators are regarded as a central part of children’s “school lives.”

Under these goals, teachers tend to prioritize children’s functioning in groups, especially when children are in regular education classrooms. They expect children to learn interpersonal as well as academic skills through their daily interactions with peers (staff 1, 11, 12, 13, 15; field note: staff 3, 1/20/2010). The following is one example of providing children with an opportunity to work as a group (staff 15).

In regular classrooms, because [we have to follow] the curriculum, [the instruction] should be like letting children think of various way to solve problems and complete tasks together with other children. For example, if there is a wall [in front of children], they will try anything they can think of [to go to the other side] from their own experiences, such as going up a ladder, using a rope, or making stairs. A teacher’s responsibility is to facilitate discussion after that so children can come up with the best way. I think math instruction is very close to this.

Several teachers further discussed that even if children had disabilities, they should be educated in groups (staff 1, 12; field note: staff 3, 1/20/2010). Teachers described some children as “children who are not able to learn in groups (staff 1)” or “children who do not fit in ‘group life’ (staff 11).” A classroom teacher who had experience teaching both regular classrooms and self-contained special education classrooms explained (staff 12):

Being in a regular classroom means [children are in] groups. Learning interpersonal skills
through living in a group is, as you know, important, and when interacting [with someone], we need certain rules, so [we have to] let children learn [these rules] in regular classrooms. And actually children learn by doing so. On the other hand, a special education classroom is basically, each child has different needs, so it is a danger to use the same rules, but they still have something in common they can do, at least, so it’s our job to find it, and we have to, I think. For example, one of the ways of using groups is to start from a small group, not a large group, may be beginning with a pair, at first, then a small group of 4 or 5, then finally the whole classroom, and then, change the contents of materials to learn so it can fit the group. It is like creating a place where children can accept the strengths of other children and get suggestions from one another. If they have that kind of interaction, they can guide themselves to the right direction [to raise] each other.

Even when children were taught in groups, teachers also considered individual children. One teacher described her relationships with children in regular classrooms. “It is more like I have thirty one-to-one relationships rather than one-to-thirty [as a group]. I also look at the whole class (staff 15).” Another teacher further elaborated on teacher-children relationships (staff 13). This teacher agreed that children were in groups, and that to some extent they also worked independently in their “social groups.” Within the groups, they may be able to solve problems by themselves and not require teachers’ support all of the time. These group dynamics make it easier to handle situations for teachers than working with each child individually. Still, teachers have to take care of individual children who can influence the dynamics of the whole classroom. For example (staff 13):

It was really hard when there were three children, who had different characteristics, in one regular classroom. They reacted to each other perfectly [laughing] … [explanation of
each of these three children], it wasn’t like they drew back from each other and became quiet, but it was like a multiplier effect. They tattled on each other for every little thing, saying, “He is doing this” or like that, and also, you know, physically fighting, like pushing one another down or pinching. It got noisy, and I couldn’t continue instruction. Therefore, I assigned them desks where they couldn’t see each other, or placed them where they could only see the blackboard.

**Children Who Do Not Fit in Groups**

While peer membership has an important function in children’s lives at school, it can be a burden for some children who have problems in relationships with other children. Children have 20 minute recesses twice a day. These periods are unsupervised by adults. Mrs. S., a school nurse, described children who were not involved in peer groups during the recess.

Some people don’t like a school nurse’s room like this and say, “What’s this room?” and ask me, “Can children come in during recess without any notes from teachers?” I was still told like that when I came to this school. Well, but, I say, “Isn’t it fine, because it’s during the recess.” You know, in classrooms during recess, there are kids who can’t find a place to belong and they are suffering. So, it’s ok that these kids come here and play, sit, listen to the music, or measure their height. Anyway, during that time, they have something to do… Only these kids who are here care about what other children think. Other children don’t think something like sorry for not having friends to play with, but kids here are worrying that their peers may think, “I don’t have friends and they think I am an unhappy kid.” So, I want to make this room a place where children can spend time without feeling like that. There are books, games, and music. I think this is fine, too.

Further, there were several children who were frequently absent or had been absent for weeks or months. I worked with two of these children, Yusuke and Dai, as a teaching assistant.
Both of them had interpersonal problems with other children. The increasing number of such children has been recognized as a problem in Japan. In this city, there are programs for these children, such as home visiting. Several schools also have classrooms for children who have attendance problems, which are open to children with similar problems in other schools within the city. Many schools also make rooms, such as a counseling room, available for these children so that they can come to school and study, even if they do not go to their classrooms. In many cases, children have to stay at the rooms alone or with their parents and work on worksheets without receiving instruction from teachers. When I visited the local board of education, I was told that S Elementary School was special in terms of arranging teaching assistants to work with these children as well as providing them with a resource room. At S Elementary School, these children studied at the resource room, played during recess, and visited their own classrooms as needed with teaching assistants.

**Recent Changes in Education**

Over time, the quality and characteristics of teachers, educational needs of children, and parents’ expectations for schools have changed (staff 4, 11; field note: Special education director, 1/26/2010). One classroom teacher described children 20 years ago as more patient (辛抱強い) and persistent in completing tasks. She feels that children are currently more childish and are not able to control themselves (我慢できる), and they dislike it if things are not going their way. She speculates that this may be because they grow up being told that they can do whatever they want. She also has recognized similar characteristics in parents, for example, parents may say, “Please respect my child as an individual,” or, “Look at my child.” She thinks that the “environment where children grow up is different in terms of historical and societal backgrounds, so children also have changed (staff 11).”

A retired teacher who had been volunteering at S Elementary School for years shared
what he thought about current teachers and children (filed note: staff’4). He explained that schools need to have volunteers working with children recently, because teachers can not handle children, for example, “When children go out of the school, such as going to a park near by, teachers need someone who can assist in directing children to walk in a straight line. But in the past, children used to be able to follow if a teacher said to walk in a line.” Not only children have changed, but also teachers’ authority seems to be weakening. Mrs. S also has observed children who came to her office for help.

It used to be that children came here [the school nurse’s office] when they found it difficult [to be in their classroom], and took a rest for a while. [They knew] they would be understood [by me] without saying anything, and told me when [they were ready to] go back to their classrooms. The number of children like this was much lower during that time and no one said “special education” or things like that, but I came to realize that it was not enough [and I had to think of other ways to deal with these children]. I mean, it’s getting busier in the field of education, and teachers teach children more and more, and such children are more and more marginalized and struggling. Then, I thought I had to learn how to explain to [other staff members] so they could understand [how children were struggling], but I didn’t know how I could explain, so I decided to go to workshops.

Due to these changes in education, teachers recognize the need to learn new skills and knowledge to teach children in classrooms. Even a classroom teacher who has 30 years of teaching experience felt that she did not know enough and had to learn more (staff 6). A younger teacher noted that it must be hard to adjust if the teachers had already established their own styles of teaching, “Even though they understand what they should do, they may be upset if they are busy and have no time (staff 13).” Another classroom teacher with 20 years experience articulated further (staff 11):
Mrs. I: Because the society keeps changing, I have to hang on and catch up with it. If I don’t, I can’t continue. I think [teaching] is this sort of job.

Misa: Isn’t it like always learning?

Mrs. I: Exactly, really, it’s like [you] keep learning for life

Misa: That must be hard.

Mrs. I: I think so, well, if I say it’s ok or that’s enough, I think it’s time to quit teaching. I’ve been reminding myself if I can’t change my thoughts and adjust [to new requirements and needs], it’s a sign that it is almost time to quit. Teachers in younger generations have come through receiving new education and learning new information. Even though they don’t have practice experience, I still find young teachers who have something attractive, so there are things we can learn from them, and I strongly feel that [is true].

**Transition to New Special Education**

One of the major changes in Japanese public education is the increasing number of children with developmental disabilities in regular education classrooms. This “increase” may also be because children who used to be recognized as “slow learners” or children with behavioral problems now are recognized as children with developmental disabilities.

Without knowing that certain difficulties and problems were caused by “disabilities,” classroom teachers used to deal with children’s difficulties within their classrooms. Teachers who had been teaching over 20 years indicated that there were children who might have had such disabilities in their classrooms, but they did not recognize that these children had special needs (staff 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14) and treated them as one of the children who were selfish (*waga-mama*), uncooperative (*katte-na*; staff 11), “different a little bit”, or unable to sit still (staff 14). One teacher thought back to children he had taught:
Thinking of all of the 5th and 6th graders I have ever taught, there were many different types of children. I remember well all of them, but now, we’ve started recognizing the importance of special education, and also there are workshops available, though it is told that Japan is behind in terms of such [supports for children]. These children are cared for now. To me, then, come to think of it, I’d seen such children a lot [in my classrooms]. Well, there was always one or two in a classroom who, I think, that kid might have been one of them, or that one might be too. In those days, may be the same as when we were children, we treated these children as a fidgety (ochitsuki-no-nai) kid or like that, and so, [we] scolded them or let them repeat, and I’d been doing the same thing [to these children], too. So, when thinking of that, I feel I’m sorry about what I’ve done, and if I can see these kids again, I know it’s impossible, but I’d be able to [treat them] differently.

On the other hand, young teachers started teaching knowing that there were such children in regular education classrooms (staff 5, 7). Several teachers indicated that these children came to be known as having a certain kind of disability or deficit, such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and Asperger’s syndrome (staff 1, 2, 6, 9, 11, 12 and 14), which are known as “developmental disabilities” in Japan. One classroom teacher described the recent change in perceptions regarding these children with social and learning difficulties (staff 11).

For example, children who are interested in one thing very much and don’t care about interactions with friends, is it called Asperger’s or something? There have been these children for long time, but well, there were more children [and the school size was larger in the past], and [children with disabilities such as Asperger’s] lived well in their own ways. I mean, [other people] might think that they were somewhat different, but they grew up together. But now, I feel the educational environment has been changing. There are the “names” of disabilities describing characteristics of these children, and parents
also have knowledge and read many books, and some of the children have diagnoses actually…I might have been interacting with [this kind of child] for long years, but it’s been about 10 years since I became to feel strongly like “this kid is this kind.”

Recently, children have become eligible for receiving special education services for learning disabilities, ADHD, or high functioning autism. Yet, it is a responsibility of classroom teachers to teach these children. When children continue to have difficulties in regular classrooms, they may be pulled out several hours in a week for small group or individual instructions by other classroom teachers in their planning time, or by part time teachers, such as former or retired classroom teachers. S Elementary School hired a part time teacher, Mrs. Y, who was a former classroom teacher, to teach these children individually or in small groups once a week at the resource room. If children need further assistance, parents as well as school staff members begin to consider placing these children in special education classrooms. Still, children are not able to receive these services outside of their classrooms without their parents’ permission. Further, not many parents have accepted and understood that their children need additional help, even if staff members recognize that children can benefit from the additional supports outside of regular classrooms.

As a result, more children with disabilities are placed in regular education classrooms. Some children may receive individual support within their classrooms from someone other than classroom teachers, and other children may receive the support in resource rooms or special education classrooms. Even if children are placed in special education classrooms, teachers create as many opportunities for them as possible to be educated in regular classrooms with other children. Accordingly, children may not realize that they are receiving additional support unless they are pulled out for individualized instruction. In addition, such support including pull out instruction is provided mainly by classroom teachers. Therefore, the boundary between “special”
and “regular” education seems to be unclear, especially if children are in regular classrooms.

Parents’ Choice of the School

Each school across the city serves a certain area around the school. Among the schools which currently participate in or have participated in the Pioneer School Project, several opened their schools to children living outside of the schools’ attendance boundary, in order for children to have the opportunity to receive an education at schools introducing new strategies for teaching children.\(^1\) In the school year, 2009-2010, S Elementary School accepted up to 10 children in each grade level from outside its attendance boundary. Yet, children have to live in the areas they can commute to school within one hour. Some of these children commute to the school by public transportation, such as bus.

There are several parents who have chosen S Elementary School for their children with developmental disabilities because of the small school size. Dai’s mother explained that before her son started 1\(^{st}\) grade, she visited the school he was going to attend near their home. The principal, however, told her that it would not be possible to teach him in a regular education classroom. She heard that it might be possible to place him in a regular classroom if he could attend S Elementary School. The assistant principal of S Elementary School at the time was willing to have him in a regular classroom, because they could make two 1\(^{st}\) grade classrooms if he attended S Elementary\(^2\) (field note, 7/7/2009). Kakeru’s parents also discussed the advantage of a small school during the interview.

Mother: Schools, as you know, Japan, or more exactly, near here, they tend to see children using IQ, especially in a large school. Larger schools tend to see that way.

Even in special education classrooms, for example, it is common that special

\(^1\)\(^*\) The maximum classroom size determined by the law is 40. If the school had 41 1\(^{st}\) graders, it was possible to create two small classrooms of 20 or 21 children.
education classrooms in large schools have more students. There are more children with disabilities, like 40 children [in one school], so each child is one of many children. Then, they have two classrooms, two kinds, for “autism and other emotional disturbances” and “mental retardation”, and they say there is no problem, but there is no “Ibasho [a place where they belong and feel safe and accepted]” for children who don’t fit in the categories perfectly and are on the borderline.

Misa: It must be difficult…

Mother: Yes, it is, but, if he was in that large school, to tell the truth, I thought it would hurt his pride [self-esteem/self-respect], and he would not be able to receive appropriate support, as teachers said. We were sure that he would not go to the [large] school everyday smiling. So, here, in this small school, we thought we’d give it a try for a year. ….. We are still lucky there is this school, letting us do like this, within one hour walk from our place…

In contrast, there is a concern regarding opening schools to children outside of the area the school is serving. One classroom teacher states that teachers will not be able to take care of children in their classrooms, if the number of children with disabilities or some sort of difficulties keeps increasing.

Mrs. K: It is ok that children are allowed to come [to S Elementary] from specially selected areas, and actually they come here, but it also means that the number of children in the special education classroom is increasing.

Misa: I see. Do you mean that the number of parents and children coming to this school increases because of special education?

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3 It is determined by laws that the classroom size of special education classrooms is 8 or less than 8. If there are more children with disabilities, schools create two or more special education classrooms.
Mrs. K: Yeah, yes. I think it’s increasing. So, I am wondering how [we] will deal with it if that actually happens. I know it’s different from a little bit.

Misa: I think I understand what you mean. If many [children] come here because they find that this school is good [for children with disabilities], it will be so busy.

Mrs. K: Yes, yes, yes. So, well, for children in regular classrooms, I think it is great for them if they can interact with children in special education classrooms… you know. If children do something together with these children [with special needs] since they are young, I think bias or that kind of thing will be eliminated a little by little. That’s why, I think it is great, but from the viewpoint of a person who is teaching, I wonder if it is good, if only the number of these children is increasing. If there are children of this type, and if we accept many of these children, and then, we are able to make two [small] classrooms… but if some children transfer to other schools and we have to combine these classrooms into one… If [parents] tell us [children] cannot be here anymore, it must be scary.

Nevertheless, classroom teachers consider daily interactions with children with disabilities as opportunities for other children to learn more than academic skills (staff 5, 7, 11, 12). This classroom teacher who was concerned about the increasing number of children with disabilities also acknowledged that it would be a good chance for other children to interact with peers with disabilities. Even though teachers identified conflicts between children with disabilities and their peers (staff 5, 9, 10, 11, 13), the basic idea was to raise and educate other children so that they accept children with disabilities voluntarily, spontaneously, and naturally (staff 10, 6, 7, 13). Another teacher noted (staff 14):

Currently, there is less concern in this school in terms of such biased ideas, I think… because this school has an “at-home (homey)” [atmosphere] and relationships between
grade levels are closer than other schools… This means children in special education classroom also have more chances to interact with other children. In a large school like the school size of 700 children, we have to make an effort so children can work together. They don’t even know children in other classrooms and other grades, so they know about children in special education classrooms much less. Also they don’t have a chance to get to know each other, unless these children come to their classrooms, and actually many classrooms don’t have such chances to interact with these children, so, there is less opportunity to learn why [they are in special education classrooms] or learn from one another, but in this school, these children are elsewhere in each child’s life. Yes, this is very good, I think, even if we find children having biased ideas, we are able to deal with it, teach them immediately and think about how to teach. This school has such opportunities more than other schools.

Discussion

Elementary education in Japan is designed so that children’s learning occurs during both academic and non-academic activities, which includes daily activities such as lunch time, cleaning classrooms, morning and after lunch recess and annual events children are involved in for an extended period to plan, prepare, and participate in, including a sports festival and a school learning festival. This is consistent with what is written in the National Curriculum Standard for elementary education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2008). This socialization practice within school can be seen more clearly in non-academic activities. For example, lunchtime is considered as part of education by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2008), called shoku-iku, which is literally translated as “eat and raise.” Mansfield (2000) discusses that children who serve meals learn personal responsibility for other children waiting for lunch and children waiting learn and
understand the demands of serving meals. Since children experience both sides, they learn to cooperate with one another. This facilitates stronger interpersonal relationships. In addition, children learn the proper way to eat at school, including rituals (itadaki-masu and gochiso-sama deshita) before and after eating, that are performed at home on a daily basis (Mansfield, 2000; Tsuneyoshi, 1994). Children learn to apply what they already know at home in official settings at school (Dyson, 2003). Lunch time at a Japanese school is on a borderline between children’s official, school, and unofficial, home, worlds, and teachers actually take part in teaching children skills that are supposed to be taught in their “unofficial” world.

S Elementary School is located in a neighborhood that accepts individual difference of children. Residents in the community, as well as children’s parents, participate in children’s educational actively. It is not unusual to see adults other than educators in the hallway and classrooms at S Elementary School. It may not be typical, however, in other schools in Japan, or even within the city. Parents and people from the community are part of children’s lives at S Elementary School. Further, the small school size makes it possible for educators as well as children to establish closer relationships, not only within the same grade level, but also across grade levels. Older children serve as big brothers and sisters of younger children and help them to adjust to the new environment and teach them skills. Consequently, it has created a “home-like” environment within the school. White (1987) and Walsh (2004) also observed “older brothers and sisters” relationships and discussed that Japanese schools provided children with a sense of “family.” Children learning in this educational environment also have many chances to interact with their peers with disabilities. This facilitates children’s awareness and acceptance of their peers with special needs.

At S Elementary School, there were several children who were absent for extended periods of time. Some of them have been afraid to go back to their classrooms and interact with
other children. When I revisited an elementary school in Illinois that served as a research site of my pilot study with vignettes illustrating support at S Elementary School (See Appendix B), all three educators, including administrators, shared stories of children who had attendance problems. For example:

Occasionally, we have had children who… had some problem of fear and didn’t want to come to school, but I can’t think of any… [that] they’ll actually had special needs. They just had something going on at the time, but we just work with the families and the children, and…to make them feel more comfortable.

Similarly, two other educators described reasons why children did not want to come to school and how they worked with individual children and their families. Once children found that the school was a comfortable place, their attendance improved.

Japanese educators focused on peer relationships as possible reasons for children’s attendance problems. Children at S Elementary School who had developed a fear of school could not remain in their classrooms, even when they came to school. Specifically, they were afraid and anxious of interacting with other children in their classrooms. In a group-oriented culture like Japan, Chen, French, and Schneider (2006) discuss that peer relationships may have an extensive influence on children’s individual behavior, for example, due to the emphasis on interdependence, group loyalty, and conformity to norms. To be recognized as a group member, children have to be sensitive to their peers’ evaluations and responses to their own behaviors, which also become peer group pressure that shape their personal relationships with peers. Groups can provide children with a comfortable environment, as well as pressure them to follow the group agenda.

Accordingly, Japanese children have to deal with both the desirability and pressure to go along with their peers, and the anxiety of being left out from the groups (Lebra, 1976). Hosaka
discusses that children have to maintain a balance between individualism and group membership. Some children, however, lose this balance. One behavior that shows that a child has lost this balance is dropping out of peer groups. In cultures in which conflicts are not expressed explicitly and are minimized in order to maintain interpersonal harmony, conflicts may be expressed by staying away from the source of conflicts, such as individuals a person has a conflict with (Chen, French, & Schneider, 2006). In spite of the therapeutic function of groups, such as mutual helping and interdependence, for some children, “being alone is what I like the most (Hosaka, 2005, p. 294).”

Dropping out of peer groups, however, may not solve children’s problems, and may put them in a more difficult situation. In Japanese culture, if children do not belong to any group, they are isolated from other children and may feel lonely (Kennedy & Yaginuma, 1991). Eventually this results in extended absenteeism (Hosaka, 2005). Azuma indicated that the strong emphasis on personal relationships with others in Japanese society requires new interpretations and approaches for children’s maladaptive behaviors, such as school absenteeism and refusal, bullying, and child maltreatment, which may be observed commonly in industrialized countries (Azuma, 2005).

The school nurse’s approach to opening her office during recess for children who do not fit in groups may be one example illustrating Japanese “interpretation” of additional support for children who are in trouble. Children play games, read a book, talk with someone, or just stay there during recess. Recess is the most flexible period of the day at school and children have more freedom. For those who have difficulties in interacting with peers, if they can deal with the free time during recess, they may be able to handle the rest of the day, which involves group activities in structured settings and has less flexibility. The school nurse’s office works as a great resource for these children. Still, there were children like Yusuke and Dai, who could not find
their places in regular classrooms and were absent from school extensively. They required more intensive and individualized support, in order to become confident enough to go back and interact with their peers.

The U.S. teacher described above also asked me why these children with attendance problems received special education services. Yusuke and Dai happened to have disabilities and found their “places” in special education classrooms. However, they received intensive support at the resource room, even before they transferred to the special education classroom. This flexibility may reflect how special education services are understood in Japan. The formal special education services for Japanese children with developmental disabilities impact children’s lives at school, not only for children receiving support, but also for other children and educators. Educators who have long experience teaching expressed confusion about the new requirement for the formal special education services for children in regular classrooms, and at the same time, acknowledged the benefits for these children. They have been teaching children with similar learning and interpersonal problems without using the label of “disabilities,” but they are now required to provide additional support for these children under the new special education system.

Some elements of the new special education system are borrowed from special education in other countries, such as IEP. In contrast to U.S. special education that has a rigid system requiring the completion of lengthy paperwork in order to provide services to all children in special education (e.g., Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009), the Japanese government only recommends the use of IEPs for children with disabilities in regular public schools (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2007a). The local board of education where S Elementary School is located requires schools to develop IEPs for children in special education classrooms, but not for children receiving support in resource rooms.\footnote{\label{footnote1}}
Lebra (1976) discussed that what makes Japan unique is that even though Japanese people borrow various ideas, concepts, and systems from other countries, they quickly are “Japanized.” This also applies to the new Japanese special education system. As the principal stated, they try to seek a balance between new requirements to address individual needs of children with the Japanese traditional education emphasizing the function of group dynamics among children. The priority for Japanese educators seems to be to provide special education services addressing the individual needs of children without labeling children with disabilities. In this context, Japanese educators and parents may not consider an IEP as a contract to provide/receive individualized support for children. This is parallel to what makes Japanese personal relationships unique. According to Azuma (2001), individual desires and pressure to maintain group harmony exist at the same time, and they are plotted on the same continuum rather than dichotomized. I will describe further in the following chapters how teachers provide additional support in their classrooms and what children, teachers and parents think about receiving such support.
CHAPTER FIVE

Results: Beliefs about and Attitudes towards Children’s Disabilities

During formal interviews and informal conversations, many educators and parents expressed hesitation about placing children in special education classrooms. Educators discussed that parents prefer that their children receive additional support in regular education classrooms. One underlying reason for this preference may be that Japanese elementary education focuses on educating children in groups. Isolating children with disabilities for small group or individual instruction may result in less opportunity for children with disabilities to interact with their peers to learn social and academic skills. Another underlying reason may be parents’ sensitivity to what other people think; that is, other people’s “eyes.” For parents, their children’s differences from others can be a source of stigma. Concerns with stigma can make it difficult for parents to admit that their children have difficulties or disabilities and make decisions to have their children receive additional support. Knowing parents’ concerns, teachers are careful about initiating conversations with parents regarding their children’s potential need for additional help at school.

As a teacher indicated in the previous chapter, with the increasing attention to children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, recently, many parents have read and heard about disabilities, including learning disabilities, autism related disorders, and ADHD. Parents of three participant children also have the knowledge of their children’s disabilities. Nevertheless, they pay more attention to their children’s ability in relation to other children than the neurological aspect of their disabilities. Their concern was on differences from other children, more than the labels of their disabilities. Accordingly, their understanding of disability seemed to be embedded in a social context. Their parents’ believes shared during the individual interviews and informal conversations were mainly about educational support their children received and how they dealt with and understood the differences, rather than beliefs about disabilities per se.
Parents’ Understanding and Beliefs about Children’s Disabilities

When parents find that their children have disabilities, have not met developmental milestones of the ages, or have not developed “normally,” parents have to accept that their children may have special needs and arrange necessary support for them. Yet, accepting their children’s disabilities is not sufficient. They also must understand their children’s needs and provide appropriate support. Parents of three participant children described their children’s developmental disabilities as difficulties in learning skills other children who are developing typically learn with less effort (parent 1, 2, 3). Yet, they noted that people may not notice their children’s struggle and how much effort they must make to keep up with others (parent 1, 2, 3). Even parents expressed difficulties in understanding their children’s disabilities. Dai’s mother described how it was difficult to understand Dai’s struggle.

The most difficult thing [for me] to understand was that even though I was told that he was struggling, to me, he didn’t appear to be struggling. It took a long time [to understand]. When he went to preschool, [he] smiled and looked happy. [Specialists] said, “He is going to preschool with a maximum of effort,” but I thought if it was really [true]…How to say, because his facial expression looked happy, it was really difficult to understand that what he looked like and how he actually felt are different.

Some parents also explained that what works for other children may not work for children with developmental disabilities. In order to learn skills to perform certain tasks and activities, they need different and additional support from other children. For example, Kakeru’s father described:

[His way of learning] is not obvious [like other children who are developing typically]. How much experience [he needs to learn] is very [different from other children]…Children like him don’t have a sort of intuition, and don’t [learn certain things as we
learn] automatically, how to say… It’s really hard to learn these skills “manually.” We are trying to analyze what we do automatically, [for example,] why I do [this, before teaching him].

Parents described another characteristic common among these three children: they were able to fit in regular classrooms until certain grade levels. Although specialists suggested that Dai and Kakeru be placed in a special education classroom before starting 1st grade, they were able to study with their peers in regular classrooms through 2nd grade. Aside from his language disability, Yusuke was a “normal” child, until 4th grade when he expressed difficulties in learning and interpersonal relationships and adults recognized his struggles. As they grew and differences from other children become apparent, parents and educators decided that these children needed to receive special education services or other additional support at school.

Yet, the ambiguities involved in interpreting the struggles of children with developmental disabilities made it difficult to determine their best interests. Dai’s mother described that even though she had accepted her son’s disability, she had seen that he was able to study in regular classrooms when he was in 1st and 2nd grades and thought that he would develop typically. This made it difficult for her to admit that he needed additional support in 3rd grade. Yusuke’s mother, who did not notice Yusuke’s learning disability until 4th grade, described:

Dai’s mother just looks like what I used to be. [She] keeps many many things [to herself], and [she is] fighting too much anxiety, because she doesn’t know how to do, right now. I feel like I’m looking at myself, what I used to be.

Yusuke’s mother now acknowledges that the special education classroom is the best place for him to enjoy learning and his life at school. It took time for her to think of this placement positively. She stated that she felt ashamed and wanted to hide that Yusuke was not able to come to school, and was not a “normal” child any more. Kakeru’s parents understood that Kakeru
might have to transfer to a special education classroom, but when this actually happened, his mother said that it was earlier than she anticipated.

These reactions illustrate how parents understand their children’s disabilities and needs for additional support. In spite of their understanding of the struggles of their children, they desire their children to grow up with other children as long as possible. Even when their children exhibit problems in regular classrooms, not many parents notice their “disabilities,” and they are treated as “normal” children. Receiving additional support, especially outside of their classrooms, can label the children as “different.” Although there exists a variation in parents’ responses, the possible stigma of being different may cause parents to resist acknowledging their children’s needs for additional support.

**Variety in Parents’ Understanding of Children’s Disabilities**

Parents’ understanding and acceptance of their children’s disabilities can affect children’s lives in various ways, including the services children receive. Teachers discussed variation in parents’ understandings and responses to their children’s disabilities (staff 1, 8, 11, 14). Some parents accepted their children’s needs and were willing to talk with teachers about the additional support their children needed, but there were parents who had not recognized their children’s needs or who had recognized those needs but did not want to accept that their children had difficulties and needed additional help (staff 1, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14). When teachers find out that children need additional support, but parents are not ready to accept their children’s disabilities, teachers have to be careful in bringing up the issue with parents.

The principal, who had taught children in special education classrooms, described parents who accepted their children’s special needs and were knowledgeable about their disabilities:

They don’t view [the disability] as a handicap, but think about how [their children can] function with their difficulties while living in society … They are very positive and enjoy
life [with their children] and also come to school to work together.

Another teacher gave an example of such a family (staff 14):

Kakeru’s mother is looking at [her child’s special needs] very flat [without any biases], and also encourages Kakeru and tells him that a special education classroom is a place for children who are very good at one thing, meaning a place for children who are excellent. But of course, there are individual differences and honestly, his mother is not typical, I think.

The principal described how she tries to understand and support parents who have difficulties in accepting their children’s disabilities:

The most difficult thing is that it takes a very long time until they accept their children’s disabilities. It must be hard... I can only imagine how hard it is, but I know I can’t understand completely how much effort it would take to take care of children every day. Well, I meet a mother whose face always looks unhappy, anxious, and worried, and she is like that even when she is with her child. So, I try to think, first of all, how I can [help] this mother to be able to smile when she is with her child, and then, I tell the mother how much progress her child has made and what amazed me …not about what the child can do or can’t do, but about the child, how wonderful he or she is. In so doing, mothers get to understand a little by little. Still it takes a long time, sometimes 3 or 4 years.

The principal also provided an example of mothers who had not been able to accept their children’s disabilities and expressed feelings such as anger to school staff members:

The most difficult thing for children is not only that their mothers can’t accept [their disabilities], but also that they become enraged because they can’t admit that such things have happened to them. They take their anger out on us, directly. So, we don’t make excuses, but just listen to them and say, “I think so,” and take it seriously and think
together about what is best and what makes the children happy, and try to understand each other.

Teachers also expressed difficulties in dealing with parents who have not noticed their children’s disabilities or do not want to “notice” (staff 9, 11), even though the teachers find that it is apparent that their children need additional support. One teacher shared how she dealt with this situation (staff 11):

When parents have already accepted their children’s disabilities, I will ask them what they want. Because I can learn the details of what the children are like ahead of time, so, there is no problem dealing with [their disabilities] or misunderstandings, because I can accept the children, as they really are, and I know how to take care of [problems caused by their disabilities]. But I think it tends to be that parents haven’t noticed or don’t want to notice. If this is the case, we want to be careful. There were many times I was not sure how to deal with [this situation]… But whether or not they accept, or more specifically, understand, or if they don’t want to understand, there is only one answer. [Their children need help]… If they see what their children are like at school, that will help them understand, I think.

I also observed a similar strategy employed with the parents of two children who did not acknowledge their children’s difficulties. These two children were always at the center of arguments and were not able to remain in their seats when their classroom teacher gave them instruction. The classroom teacher consulted with the principal, and they decided to invite their parents to school to show them what their children were like in the classroom. Later, the principal told me that the parents were surprised and did not know that their children were having difficulties until they actually saw their children in the classroom. She said that showing parents their children’s classroom behaviors was the best way to make sure parents were on the
same page with staff members and could start thinking about how they could help their children (field note, 7/22/2010).

**Being Different**

Teachers provided several reasons why it may be difficult for parents to accept their children’s “disabilities,” including a biased view and discrimination (*henken*; staff 8, 14) toward individuals with disabilities, concern with what other people may think (*seken-tei*: staff 14), and because the children do not appear different from other children (staff 2, 3, 7, 9, 15), for example, “they look just like normal” (staff 2). In other words, they think that children who appear to be “normal” should not be labeled as “disabled,” which has negative meanings in society. Two teachers specifically described the impact of negative associations with special education on children (staff 1, 15), for example, “What parents are concerned about is that children would think about themselves negatively because they have disabilities (staff 15).”

Teachers also indicated that there are parents who prefer to place their children in regular classrooms, even though children have been evaluated and specialists at the local board of education have suggested that they need additional support (staff 5, 6, 9; parent 1, 3; field note: staff 1, 6/17/2009). As of July 2009, at S Elementary School, there were about 20 children whom specialists had recommended to receive additional support, but who were still in regular education classrooms (about 10 % of children in regular education classrooms; field note: staff 1, 6/17/2009). When I talked with the principal about potential participants for this study, she explained to me that there were very few parents who had accepted children’s difficulties as “disabilities,” even though children had been evaluated and specialists had suggested that they could benefit from special education services. When we included parents who had accepted that their children had “difficulties” in regular classrooms, only three names were added to the list. Yet, parents of three participant children responded to their children’s special needs differently,
even though they all have accepted their children’s disabilities. Parents’ acceptance of children’s needs for additional support seems to have a larger impact on the decision making for their children, more than whether they have accepted their children’s “disabilities.”

Since the local board of education has distributed guidelines regarding services for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, there are parents who prefer to have their children receive additional support in regular classrooms. In fact, the principal stated, “We don’t have someone who can take care of this [in regular classrooms], because a special education coordinator has her regular work and a school psychologist comes only once a month (field note: staff 1, 6/17/2009).”

**Biased Views**

Dai’s and Yusuke’s mothers, whose children were in transition to the special education classroom from their regular classrooms explained how they came to the decision to place their children in the special education classroom. Dai’s mother said, “I didn’t think it was necessary to pull him out, because he’s been doing well ‘normally.’” Yusuke’s mother told me that when she found her son was different from other children, she was concerned with why her son had this problem. Once she accepted his disability, her way of thinking seemed to have changed:

The most important thing I’ve learned from this is that instead of hiding, why my child is like this or why he is not “normal,” I can say right now, “Look at my child!” and how to say… I am proud that [I can say that I am proud of my son], and so, I don’t feel “I’m ashamed,” or feelings like that any more.

These feelings of shame and stigma of being different may emerge from a biased view (*henken*: prejudice) about disability. One classroom teacher stated, “This is the society where you are called ‘stranger’ if you are a little different from others (staff 10).” Kakeru’s parents also talked about *henken*. 
Father: I also think there is [henken]. It is like this. This is for me too, I mean, I also have *henken*, honestly, so, for example, if other people have *henken*, there is nothing wrong, and this is a thing like in a society, growing up in the society. So if I meet with someone, I would have *henken*, so if someone has *henken* toward my son, I can’t blame them. … [story about his son’s understanding of his disability]… I can’t run together with him [and protect my son] all the time, so, how to say, it is true that there is *henken* in this society, so, I want him to learn a sort of sense of self, like he has to keep fighting to live without being influenced by *henken* toward him in the society.

Mother: I want to teach him [about how to deal with *henken*], and want him to be strong.

An example of *henken*, biased ideas regarding children with autism, was brought up by Dai’s mother who is still struggling with accepting her son’s need to receive special support:

*Henken* towards people with autism is still strong, like [people think they are] stupid. It was told that the number of doctors [psychiatrists] for children has been increasing, but I heard that there were only 100 some time ago. If there is an incident, and when the media says the person who is responsible for it has mentally something, always the secondary disabilities are emphasized too much [and it accelerates *henken*].

On the other hand, this kind of negative view of disability and special education classrooms seems to have weakened, as far as children with developmental disabilities who study in regular education classrooms. One teacher described *henken* (staff 11):

I feel there has been a lot more *henken* in the past. It was called “special classroom *(tokushu: special; gakkyu: classroom),” and I remember there were more children with mental retardation, and there was *henken* because they were in such classrooms. In terms of *henken*, now, it is paid attention to very carefully, and children are taught clearly, so it is not automatically considered special, rather, we tell children that they are studying at
the place that is good for them and they are doing the same way as other children, so, in this sense, it is not like children who need “special” or “individual” support are viewed as “different,” I think. If children were to keep saying things like that [and emphasize negative aspects of disabilities], then there would be something like a breeding ground for such an idea.

Sources of Biased Ideas: Parents’ Relationships with Other Parents

Classroom teachers were identified during the individual interviews as one source of biased ideas. Classroom teachers’ values and attitudes impact children (staff 1) as well as parents (staff 13). The principal explained, “It’s a culture, so, classroom teachers’ or the instructors’ way of thinking will influence children growing up [in their classrooms].” Another teacher discussed that sennyu-kan (subconscious influence, preconceived notions, or prejudice) expressed by classroom teachers affects what parents think about children who need additional support (staff 13).

It depends on the classroom teacher of the year. There are still many teachers who prefer children who are advanced academically, so, children [who are struggling academically] are described as “this child is difficult” or automatically considered as difficult or hard. They say, “What should I do?” but actually they don’t think what they can do, they tend to think like they are doing “this much”. ….. What do parents think about this? It varies, but one of the things is that it depends on the classroom teacher of the year, very much. I mean, it is how the school is explaining what it is like in classrooms, and in so doing, the classroom teachers’ attitudes and goals tend to come out. If [a teacher] explains it clearly, it can be understood. Well, for example, last year, the parents in my classroom this year had developed a sense like, “My child is not accepted at all,” “[My child is] very behind academically,” “My child is the worst,” or “The first and the second are this child and
that child.” I think this was because the classroom teacher had this kind of attitude, otherwise, that many parents wouldn’t look at [children] like that. This year, during the Japanese Language classes, many parents came to help, and they said, “[Children in my classroom] can greet us and talk to us properly,” or “[They] can be lively [active] like this” or, so, if there is a chance, it is possible to wipe out the sennyu-kan parents have unconsciously. ….. [Indeed], I heard from parents this year, for example, if it was a parent whose child was not able to read and write, she said, “This year, [my child] became able to do homework without being told.”

What other parents in the same classroom think about the parent’s child may be a problem for mothers whose children have difficulties. Mrs. S., a special education coordinator, described such a mother, “It seems that she doesn’t like to talk to me on the 1st floor [hallway], I mean, she looks away, so may be she doesn’t like [other people to find] her talking with me [because they will] find out that her child is different from others.” Another teacher listening to our conversation answered, “Parents have a strong network in that class” (field note: staff 3, 14, 7/3/2009; talking about parent 1). Yusuke’s mother described parents of children in Yusuke’s regular classroom:

The other day, I went to the parents’ conference and joined a group of parents of other 5th graders. I hadn’t been [in such a place] for a long time. I had a feeling that there was a gap, and then I found this was what made Yusuke unable to come to school, and I felt sorry that I hadn’t noticed it until now, and thought why I didn’t notice. Anyway, there is a distance that makes me unable to enter, even if I was willing to. I was very sorry, but I felt I wasn’t able to smile and go in to the world of parents of children in the regular classroom. I was really anxious and thought I wanted to run away from there….. What is this really? They understood but didn’t understand actually. Even though I explained to
them, their children are able to come to school everyday, and their children don’t have
disabilities, so, no matter how much I explain to parents of other 5th graders, and even
though they say they get it, they don’t get it completely. I haven’t noticed it until now.
Because they were worried about us, I explained to them, seriously, but I didn’t notice it.
I found the other day, I was explaining to the wrong persons.

Instead, she said that she felt easy when she was with parents of children in the special education
classroom, who had come through the similar experiences, and who were able to understand one
another.

**Close Relationships between Parents and Children**

Parents’ attitudes and understanding of their children’s disabilities also affect their
relationships with children, and accordingly, children’s functioning at school (staff 1, 3, 4, 6, 11,
12, 13). The principal explained, “If the parent-child relationship becomes difficult, it has a great
impact on children, their lives and development, because [parents are with children] from the
morning to the evening, so this is what concerns me most.” Parental attitudes are especially
important when children are young and close to their parents (staff 1, 3). Mrs. S explained:

Anyway, we can’t do anything if parents don’t bring their children to school. As

I’m telling you many times, in elementary schools, mothers and children are very
close, so if a mother feels she doesn’t like this person or this place, the child

senses it quickly and thinks that they should do the same way, unconsciously

though….

Several staff members described the relationship between Dai and his mother. Dai had
difficulties in adjusting to school, such as anxiety in interacting with peers (staff 1, 3, 12, 13;
field notes: staff 2, 3). One teacher described his mother and her relationship with Dai (staff 13):

In this case, his mother’s anxiety has affected [him] largely. His mother, so to speak, is in
the world she believes. Something what she tells him would give him the same anxiety
she has at the same time.

Disagreements within families also may affect children, as well as how parents work with
school staff members (staff 10, 11, 12; parent 2). One classroom teacher stated that if only one of
the family members, such as a mother or a father, understands the child’s disability, this is not
enough, because it is going to be very difficult to take care of the child unless other family
members work together (staff 12). Another classroom teacher shared her experience with a
mother (staff 11).

The mother had many chances to come to school, so she had noticed that her child didn’t
fit in groups, looked a little different from other kids. But the child’s father and
grandparents definitely didn’t admit it, saying the child’s father was just like that when he
was little, but he grew up to be an adult, an excellent employee of a company. So, there is
no problem. Like this, it’s not unusual that there is a disagreement between parents.

If the one who understands or accepts a child’s disability has to take care of everything,
that person’s responsibility may be too large to handle within the family. This individual needs
support so that the child can receive the necessary support. Yusuke’s mother described her
family:

… [Story about her child’s disabilities, LD and ADHD]… and also there was a problem
between my husband and me because of these kinds of problems with children and other
things, and you know, Yusuke was very anxious, not only because of his problems at
school, but also at home. The family was almost broken, and he was worried and scared
that, “Mom is gonna be leaving,” or, “What if I find that Mom is gone when I get back
from school?” Anyway, his father didn’t understand Yusuke’s problems at school,
because he hadn’t seen what Yusuke was like all day long and also didn’t want to admit
that his child was like that, so what he said was things like, “He looks normal,” or, “Why disability?” So, we couldn’t get along, and Yusuke had seen us arguing and said, “I wish I wasn’t born,” or a lot more, so I can’t apologize to him enough.

After his parents reconciled, Yusuke’s attitude began to change.

We argued and talked a lot until recently, and finally, we got to understand each other, and also he [her husband] is able to listen to me about Yusuke. Since then, we have seen Yusuke smiling naturally. Yeah, honestly, if there is something parents don’t understand about each other, children will know, immediately.

Over the year this family was struggling, Yusuke’s mother received various supports at school. It was a teacher who told Yusuke’s father how he and his mother had been working hard, and helped him to understand the needs of his child. His mother also described the support she received from school staff members:

I really appreciate Mrs. S. I don’t know how many times I screamed and cried in front of her. I didn’t know what I should do. The other day, Mrs. S told me she was able to help me, or do something for me because I didn’t give up and went to see her. I thought [what I did] wasn’t wrong. So, I talked with Mrs. J, a school psychologist who comes here every month, yesterday too, but I thought I didn’t have anything to talk with a psychologist about at first. They knew what to do. Mrs. S told Mrs. J to help me. It started like that, and then she called me and arranged that I was able to make an appointment, naturally. Mrs. J told me recently, “You were under so much tension and there was no room to get in, but if we didn’t do something, [not only] Yusuke, but you’d be burned out,” so, then Mrs. S and his classroom teacher [in his 4th grade], all of them made a route for me to go to see Mrs. J.
Teacher-Parent Relationships

As Yusuke’s mother shares, school staff members are careful not to coerce parents when they recognize that children and their parents need support. Mrs. S and the school psychologist created a situation where his mother was able to make an appointment with the psychologist, but it was her decision.

The other teacher expressed difficulty in talking with parents about the need for their children to be evaluated for special education, “There are many children, who I think may have [developmental] disabilities, but it is necessary to consult with specialists to have children evaluated, and also it is not easy to do so, if parents don’t bring it up with us (staff 12).” Teachers seem to be expecting parental initiation for the process to begin. As described above, Mrs. S’s roles as a special education coordinator include explaining to parents about the availability of support for children. Yet, she let parents make a decision to consult with her. The principal clearly described the importance of parents’ readiness to accept children’s needs for special education services:

I hadn’t heard from Dai’s mother for a long time [although his mother had kept in contact with Mrs. S on a daily basis and the principal had heard from Mrs. S],* but if there was no contact, I was going to call her to talk with [her] this week, but it was good I heard from her. I’d been thinking it’s about time, but it doesn’t work if it’s too early. His mother also needed us. It shouldn’t be like she had to come here because she got a call. I think it’s best to talk with her when she thinks that it may be a better idea [to place him in a special education classroom] while she observes her child for long time in this support system [at the resource room].  *added from field notes (7/7/2009)

In order to figure out the “right way” and the right time to communicate with parents and to help them accept that their children need extra help, it is necessary to learn about children’s
family members as well as the children. One classroom teacher discussed the importance of their relationships with children’s families in terms of providing additional support and special education services (staff 10).

Mrs. S knows everything, not only about the children themselves, but also the children’s family environments. If we want to do “special education” at school, we have to get parents’ permission, I mean, consent. There may be a misunderstanding if I say this, but we have to go along with parents, I mean… we have to be able to interact [with parents] naturally, when we find [that children need special education], and Mrs. S knows everything, like that child’s mother is such and such.

The principal further articulated characteristics of the relationships that make it easier for parents to communicate with school staff members:

As an administrator, [my relationships with parents] are a little different from those of [classroom teachers], but I think when children’s problems become apparent, I would think whether I should be the first one, and then, someone else [as a representative of] the school, or a classroom teacher to deal with, and when thinking about that, if we lose trusting relationships [with parents], we can’t do anything, so it is necessary to make trusting relationships and make connections with them. ... I mean, [we need] relationships [in which] parents are comfortable with speaking and [letting us know] what they want us to do [for them] as much as possible. Also there are times classroom teachers should make personal relationships with parents, beyond their relationship as classroom teachers.

There are parents who request for additional support to school staff members. For example, Kakeru’s parents asked if he could receive pull out instruction at the special education classroom and arranged a meeting with the principal. Yet, if staff members identify children who are struggling, they may not say straightforwardly to parents that their children should receive
additional support. Rather, they wait until parents are ready to accept their children’s special needs. However, this does not mean that staff members just wait and do nothing. For example, during the time in which the principal waited to hear from Dai’s mother, she communicated with his classroom teacher and other staff members including Mrs. S, who exchanged information with his mother on a daily basis (field note, 6/17-7/7/2009). Mrs. S played several roles for Dai’s mother, including listening to her whenever she had a problem; giving suggestions about what she could do at home; taking care of Dai occasionally, such as letting him eat lunch with her in her office and playing with him and other children after school; and explaining Dai’s needs. While observing and interacting with Dai and his mother, school staff members guided his mother so that she was able to initiate steps for Dai to receive the necessary support.

Both parents’ attitudes towards children’s special needs and teachers’ acceptance of children’s disabilities and tendencies to avoid pushing parents to acknowledge that their children need additional support, may reflect sensitivity to what other people think, or other people’s reactions to their actions. Being different can be a stigma, not only for the children, but for their parents. If her child receives special education, it is going to be apparent to other mothers that “my child has not developed normally.” Teachers anticipate how parents will think and respond if they talk about children’s needs directly. Therefore, they try not to push parents too hard, but give them time to be ready, while assisting them in other ways. It seems that under the surface, invisible communications between parents and teachers are going on and their thoughts, emotions, and desires, are exchanged.

At the same time, parents as well as teachers have recognized and understood the importance of addressing children’s individual special needs. Teachers are required to do so after the new special education service started in 2007, and they have opportunities to learn what they can do, for example by attending workshops and training sessions organized by the local board.
of education or other organizations. Still, parents may have difficulties in balancing children’s individual needs with other people’s “eyes.” Dai’s mother was one of them. In contrast, Kakeru’s parents understood that their child might not be able to fit in regular education classrooms when he got older, but they wanted to give him opportunities to learn in the same classrooms with his peers for as long as possible.

One of the solutions for teachers in dealing with the problem of parents’ hesitancy I observed was to educate other children and raise their awareness of their peer’s disability. “Educate” may not mean to teach explicitly what the disability is, but to create an atmosphere in which social and emotional supports for children with developmental disabilities is available. In such a place, feelings of stigma and shame may be lessened.

**Educators’ Understanding and Attitudes towards Special Education**

During the individual interview, Mrs. S listed her roles as a special education coordinator and how she played these roles. This illustrates and summarizes how special education and support for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms are understood at S Elementary School.

**Information Gathering:** In order to collect information [on children who need support in their classrooms, I] hold a meeting [where all staff members meet together and share information of children in each class who are struggling academically, socially, and emotionally], meet with classroom teachers and parents who have concerns, and listen to the principal. She tells me ideas about how we can do. It’s almost everyday, so, thinking about what I can do with this. These are for gathering information to understand what is going on.

**Teacher Education:** I have organized workshops so teachers can get a sort of sense what special education is like, and lent books [about special education in her office] to
teachers, or talked individually with them. For example, this teacher thinks that “equality” means to give the same amount, the same thing to everyone, so, if [she] gives one to this person, to make it equal, [she] has to give one to everyone, but special education is like, this is what I understand and I don’t know if I’m understanding correctly. At least, this is what I think, what I want her to do is because everyone has different [abilities], so, if this person needs one, one is enough. It’s ok, but if another person functions at the same level if the person needs three, give that person three. If there is a person who doesn’t need any, it’s ok not to give any, but keep eyes on this person. This is “equality” for me, so that’s why I tell her stories like this. When I told her the first time, her face looked like, “What?” But it’s ok if she doesn’t get it for the first time. I’m like, “It’s like that,” but it doesn’t mean I give up, keep telling her occasionally. Another role is to think about a strategy to let them learn, for example, we need more teachers who understand [what special education is] or who can be a special education coordinator. First of all, it’s important for them to be able to have critical eyes regarding special education, but they may resist [and feel intimidated] if they notice that their level of understanding is getting higher, so, I’m pretending like “I don’t care,” and ask them, “What’s going on?” It’s like consciously chatting with them.

**Relationship Building and Coordinating Support for Children:** I have to think how I can do actually [for children], such as keeping in touch with parents as needed, making relationships with children, and also when teachers pulled out children and taught them in small groups in their planning time [during the previous year], it was important to establish relationships with teachers, so that I was able to ask, “Would you be able to teach this period?” and if they said, “No,” I could tell them back like, “I’m counting on you.” It’s part of coordinating support for children. Also, thinking how to assign each
teaching assistant to classrooms is my role too…[It’s important to] “set the antenna high” for children and their parents, so I can find out what they are struggling with and make it easier for them to tell me anything. [If they tell me what they want], I can start thinking what to do. If parents tell me something, it’s impossible to make it happen all of them, but I’m trying to solve one or two, at least.

Referral to Special Education: [When she find a child who may need additional support], I would talk to the classroom teacher [of the child] first, and then ask the teacher to talk with parents and suggest that they may want to stop by my office, usually, but when parents are told to stop by, but if they decide not to come, I won’t keep telling them or chasing or like that. Instead, I’m always trying to be friendly, with an “I care about you!” aura, if I see familiar faces in the hallway.

Discussion

There is individual variation in parents’ understanding and acceptance of their children’s disabilities. Teachers’ levels of understanding of disability and skills in providing support for children with additional needs also vary. In addition to teachers’ knowledge and skills in working with children with developmental disabilities, whether or not children’s needs are met in the educational and home environments partly depends on parents’ willingness to have their children receive additional support and their knowledge of how they can benefit from such support.

Further, the presence of individuals who can coordinate the necessary support among children, their parents, and educators is critical, especially when children’s needs are not met in regular classrooms. Even if parents are willing to proceed to implement additional support for their children, they are not able to receive the support when their classroom teachers do not have experience in teaching children with disabilities. The coordinators need to find a way to make it
happen, for example, educating classroom teachers and making a route so that children are able to receive pull out instruction and other support as needed. If parents are not ready to accept their children’s special needs, they need someone who can listen to them and inform them that their children can benefit from the support.

In so doing, trusting relationships between parents and educators become important. Since “disability” can be a sensitive issue to discuss, educators have to be careful when communicating with parents, especially when they are not ready to talk. Several reasons for sensitivity to the stigma of being different were discussed during individual interviews and informal conversations with educators and parents. In addition to negative views attached to “disability” in society, parents are sensitive to other people’s reactions to their children’s disabilities. When children receive special education services and additional support, it becomes clear to other children and their parents that they are “different” from other children who have developed “typically.”

Sensitivity to stigma attached to their children’s disabilities may not be unique to Japanese parents. One U.S. educator who participated in my pilot study discussed his thoughts about receiving special education services from two different perspectives, as an educator and as a parent. He assumed that if he learned that his children needed special education, as an educator, “I’m not sure prior experiences tell you advice like if my son or daughter needed services, I wouldn’t feel a stigma, right?, Because I mean, what I do for a living, I see this every day.” However, he said he would respond differently, if he was not an educator, specifically:

…but now, if I worked at a job… like a contractor and did home construction, I may be a little, my, my perception of it is like, you know, I mean, I hate to be point blank like this, … “What are you saying? My son is retarded?” You know what I mean, like people might feel the stigma out of it, like you know, are you retarded? And it’s not really like
that. Ah… I think that has a lot to do with that, and really, if time goes on and more and more people do see the benefit of services, may be that would be it.

Stigma still exists in the U.S., where individuality is valued, especially, when people do not know the benefit of receiving services. In addition to sensitivity to stigma, knowledge about available services and how they can benefit from the services affects parents’ decision making. Therefore, parents have to balance the stigma attached to special education with how they can benefit from special education. According to Goffman (1963), stigma can impact people at both individual and interpersonal levels. For example, when an individual has “an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated (p. 5),” this person possesses a stigma. This difference from “normal” can affect their self-identity, how they understood themselves in relation to others, and accordingly, how they will interact with others.

In a culture in which people are sensitive to other people’s eyes and responses to what they do and say (e.g., Doi, 2001; Lebra, 1976), parents have to deal with their children’s potential disabilities at two different levels. As individual persons, parents have to accept that their children have a disability and can benefit from additional support. If they understand their children’s special needs, this does not mean that they are ready to handle situations that happen interpersonally, for example, they may worry about possible negative messages they may receive implicitly or explicitly from other people. In this sense, Japanese parents of children with disabilities may have a harder time in acknowledging the benefit of receiving support for their children than parents in a culture in which individuality is valued.

Again, in order to help parents go through this process, establishing trusting relationships is necessary. Japanese educators considered their relationships with parents seriously and allowed parents to take time to be ready to talk about their children’s needs while considering ways to provide necessary support for children. To make it happen, educators may inform
parents of their children’s needs implicitly and guide them to make a decision for their children
to be able to receive necessary support. Educators also make an effort in establishing
relationships with them, so that they are able to hear from parents what they think.

The meanings of “special education” may vary if the support is provided in regular
classrooms or other places, such as a resource room or a special education classroom. As far as
children who receive support in regular classrooms, their “differences” may not be as obvious,
and children receiving the support and other children may not notice that they have “disabilities.”
Still, they may know that these children are “different” through their daily interactions. Children
receiving support certainly know the differences, for example, it takes longer than other children
to complete the same tasks. Other children may know that they are different, for example, if they
see unusual behaviors exhibited by these children. At the same time, children have the abilities to
adjust and provide support for children who are struggling. I will discuss peers’ as well as
educators’ support for children with developmental disabilities in subsequent chapters.
CHAPTER SIX

Results: Meanings of Special Education for Educators

Many participant educators discussed the advantages of individualized support for children, either pull out or in-class support. In addition to improving children’s academic achievement, educators believed that such support motivates children. Yet, several educators expressed concern about singling out and stigmatizing children by providing them with additional support outside of their classrooms. Therefore, the support should be provided in a way in which children feel comfortable, so that they can fully benefit from the extra support. To do so, their individual preferences, for example, where and how the support is provided, should be considered. Further, several experienced educators emphasized the importance of setting long term goals for children to make a decision for these children in a consistent manner.

There is a variation in classroom teachers’ knowledge and skills in providing such support. As they learn how to teach and interact with children with disabilities, their attitude towards children changes and they view the additional support for these children more positively. Therefore, continuing education of teachers regarding special education becomes important. Experienced teachers also serve as a resource for these inexperienced teachers to deal with problems caused by children’s disabilities in their daily practice. Teachers also emphasized the importance of providing the necessary support in regular classrooms in a way that all children can benefit regardless of disability without singling out children experiencing difficulties. To do so, several challenges are indicated, including large classroom size, shortage of staff members, lack of professional knowledge, and low budget.

Looking at What is the Best for Each Child

School staff members consider the best way to provide support for each child. Teachers indicated various goals for providing additional support for children, for example, help the child
become more independent (staff 12), facilitate self-esteem (self-respect; staff 15), create an environment in which children with disabilities feel comfortable (at home: igokochi ga yoi; staff 5), create a place where children can be relaxed (calm, quiet: ochisui-te; staff 6) when they study, and teach specific skills (staff 1). One of these teachers talked specifically about pull out support (staff 1). Although she is hesitant to pull children out, she acknowledges that there are intervention programs or technology, for example, computers, that help children read or learn other skills. Such pull out support may be justified. Yet, it has to be done in a way that children can leave their classrooms without feeling out of place (iwa-kan), or inferior to others (retto-kan).

Even when support is provided in regular classrooms, it has to be done carefully. When I asked how I should work with children as a teaching assistant in regular classrooms, another teacher advised, “It depends, there may be a child who likes to work with a teacher one-on-one, or there may be a child who prefers that [a teaching assistant] sits behind [him or her], so it looks like [the teaching assistant] is helping two or more children, alternatively (staff 3).” Four other teachers expressed concerns about providing additional support. Some of the reasons are that children receiving support should not be “special” among their peers (staff 7). It is difficult to make a decision concerning whether or not it is better for children to be in regular classrooms, or spend sometime outside of their classrooms so they can be relaxed and study at their own pace (staff 2, 6). In addition, it must be hard for children if they are asked by peers why they are going to other places (staff 8). Yet, the last teacher also discussed that it may be fine to pull children out, if it works better for the children (staff 8):

When I heard [a child’s mother called and said] things like, “He doesn’t want to go to school, today,” I realized that it might not necessarily be good [for this child] to be in a regular classroom and endure (gaman; endure, bear). For example, there is a 5th grade girl who used to be in a regular classroom all the time [as other children are]. After she
started going to the resource room [for pull out support], she is beginning to enjoy and have interests in studying. Also, I heard that a 2nd grade boy is studying with a teacher one-on-one, and doing better. When I heard these stories, I thought it was good for them to work [with teachers outside of regular classrooms]. Someone may ask, “Why are they going to [the resource room]?” … I used to think they should not be pulled out or felt sorry [that they had to], but now, after I heard that they were enjoying [the support], I think it must be good for them. Perhaps, it’s really hard if they can’t ask questions and there is no way for them to understand, but if it’s pull out and there is one teacher for one or two children, they must be able to have more experiences like, “I see!” and it’s very good for them.

A classroom teacher of another grade also talked about a child who started going to the resource room once a week, “She says, ‘It’s fun,’ because she can understand, understand and be praised.” This teacher further articulated (staff 10):

When it’s getting difficult, is there anything harder than listening to something [we] can’t understand? And then, they are told to do and if they don’t, [the teacher is going to say], “It’s homework.” There is no way. Instead, it must be fun [for a child if a teacher] lowers the level so she can understand and start from where [she] understands, though it’s only once a week. Of course, [we know] the differences from other children, but [the child can] learn at her own pace, like, “Look look! I did this.” There are kids saying, “What’s about that?” but [we say,] “Good job!” Yeah, it’s like this.

My field notes also described how a child responded to me providing individual support for her in her regular classroom.

When I visited the classroom, she was struggling to follow the teacher’s explanation, and a girl sitting next to her taught her how to solve math problems. When I visited the
classroom next time, she was sitting with her friends [Math was taught in a small group instruction classroom, and children picked their seats as they came from their classroom]. Later, she was told by the teacher to sit apart from them and study with me. The following day, she sat by herself apart from other girls without being told to by the teacher, and smiled at me and waited for me to come. While working on math problems, she explained that she would have a meeting for the festival [coming in a few weeks] during recess, so, she had to go back to the classroom early, together with other classmates. On that day, she finished all questions assigned by the teacher, in order to make the meeting. Still, she was behind the other children, but she proudly showed what she had done to the teacher. (field notes, January, 2010)

As discussed above, many teachers suggested the need to consider individual children’s needs no matter whether the children are in regular education classrooms or receiving pull out support. These needs may include their level of understanding (staff 2, 8, 10, 12), an environment where children can study at their own pace without distraction (staff 2, 6, 8, 10, 13), and children’s preferences, strengths and progress (staff 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, 13). One of these teachers described what she did in her regular classroom (staff 6):

I need to know about the children [in front of me]. I mean, every child has likes and dislikes. For example, [this child] doesn’t like to be treated like this, or if I do this, this child looks happy, or that kind of things. There are many times I find I should not have said this to this child. If I say so, the kid will never hear me, but when I don’t have time, I know I tend to push the limit and let the kid cry. Therefore, I’d like to learn more about how to give them directions in a way children are willing to hear.

She gave me an example of one child.

When this child got excited, if I say, “Can you tell me [your] story? I want to hear,” I can
see the child calms down immediately, and also if I say, “It’s great!” and praise him, he looks very happy and is able to work more and show progress, it’s like that.

As this teacher shared, talking to children in a way that they can follow directions smoothly and are willing to hear what teachers say may require learning about each child. It also means that teachers have to change the way they interact with each child depending on their needs, even when they are in a large group. This process is similar to the way teachers “guide” parents to accept their children’s needs for additional help discussed in the previous chapter. Educators did not force parents to accept that their children needed additional support. Rather, they provided parents with opportunities that helped parents to understand their children’s needs, for example, by establishing trusting relationships, listening to them, and telling parents to observe their children at school.

Further, three teachers who had experience working with children with disabilities mentioned, “hearing children’s minds (staff 1, 3, 9).” For example, Dai’s mother shared what she heard from the principal (staff 1). When Dai began having a problem at school, he did not say anything at home, but his attitudes at home were different, so his mother decided to talk with the principal.

The principal said he would never talk to us if we keep asking him, so, she told me, “It may take a while, but he will tell you from himself, if you stay close to him and how he feels.” I did as she told me, and then soon after that I found he told me [what he thought before I asked him]. Since then, he has been able to tell us when and what he was struggling with.

Mrs. S described in detail, “hearing children’s minds”:

We often say, “Stay close to children,” but it is more like looking at children’s minds, rather than what teachers expect of [the children]. There was a child, who said, “I wanna
run with others.” Then we talked, “Let’s practice together,” and set the date to practice, but on that day, he said, “My legs hurt.” Then after that, he said he’d like to participate in a program called “Road Run,” and again, on the day to practice, he said, “My ankle hurts.” Now, there is a “Kids marathon” in March. He was going to practice with Mr. K, but again, he said that his legs hurt. When we asked him, he said he was really looking forward to it, but we wondered if that was what he really thought. His body was honest, and showed what he really thought… like too anxious or might be struggling between what he really wanted and what he wanted to be, so, I’d like to find and look at what children really think. (field notes, 1/27/2010)

She also talked about being an “interpreter” for children experiencing social and interpersonal difficulties.

It’s been 20-30 years since I started working as [a school nurse]. Since then, I’ve been seeing many kids who were experiencing difficulties in “living,” or kids who were not able to be understood by classroom teachers, or who were unable to fit in the frame such as “square” like other kids. … There were many, but I’d been wondering why [teachers] didn’t understand, probably, because I was this kind of person. [They] may look moody, sulky, grouchy, or disobedient, and as a result, [they are] misunderstood, but it isn’t like that. When they look like that, they tend to have problems, and get stuck and can’t do anything, but [other people] don’t understand. … Because I can understand how they feel very well, I want to translate, why this person is doing like this, to classroom teachers, but people who become teachers are usually excellent persons, and have lived through without any major problems, so, they just behave in a way they get accepted in society. That’s why they don’t understand why [children with problems] behave like that, but I understand why [they] have to do like that. Therefore, I wanted to translate, but [I]
didn’t know how to do it. … I didn’t know how to express it in words so other people were able to understand, and then I went to workshops. … I learned there were terms and language to express feelings or symptoms or things like that in a way other people were able to understand.

Two other teachers also talked about their experiences of being an “interpreter” for children who have problems, so that other children understand what the children really mean and accept them (staff 6, 9).

Yet, one experienced staff member described that special education or additional support is different from spoiling children by giving choices children prefer (staff 4). The principal also made it clear that looking at each child’s needs and accommodating them were different from allowing them to disobey rules that other children had to follow, for example, remaining in their seats during instruction. Within the framework of the basic rules and expectations at school, children receive the support they need.

Parents of three participant children discussed that staff members at S Elementary School listened to parents and understood the children’s problems very well, and appreciated teachers’ support for their sons. However, my field notes described struggles of Dai’s mother in her relationships with teachers regarding their’ expectations of Dai (See his case study in Chapter 8 for a more detailed discussion). As a parent, Dai’s mother understood her child’s needs, but her requests did not always fit the goals teachers had for Dai, and teachers also were confused about how to deal with her requests (field notes: child 1, classroom teachers, and his mother, January-February, 2010). One teacher discussed that as an educator, she understood children’s special needs, but if it was her own child, it would be very difficult to handle (staff 2).

There may be a difference in attitudes towards children when viewed objectively, as a third person, or subjectively as an individual teacher who is responsible for the children (staff 2,
13). For example, one teacher said, “[This school emphasizes] looking at children, not only academic skills, but how they look, such as strengths. So, maybe, we are able to look at children like this if they are in other classrooms,” but “teachers may have pressure if children are in their classrooms (staff 13).”

**Long Term Goals for Children in Special Education**

Different responses to children’s difficulties also may result from different perspectives on children’s progress, especially whether emphasizing immediate or longer term outcomes. Teachers’ efforts, especially when not directly related to academic achievement, may not be understood by parents. Three experienced teachers (staff 1, 3, 4) shared that children and their parents acknowledged their support years later, for example, “This is not what we are anticipating [as a result of] teaching, but I believe [they] understood it later, ‘this is what I was taught that time (staff 4).’” Five teachers (staff 1, 2, 3, 12, 13) also discussed the importance of long term goals, what children should be able to do when they get older, by considering children’s strengths and current level of functioning, especially if children receive special education services.

Communications between Dai’s mother and Mrs. S illustrate the teachers’ perceptions regarding long term goals for children with special needs. The following excerpt is reconstructed based on my field notes describing what I heard from Mrs. S and her notes on my daily log as a teaching assistant of the day, which involved copies of text messages she exchanged with his mother.

Before going to the resource room in the morning, Mrs. S found me and told me that she got a text massage from Dai’s mother. It said that Dai didn’t want to come to school. Yesterday, she ate lunch with Dai and happened to talk about today’s lunch menu. They found that one of the things on the menu was *edamame* [boiled green soybeans, one of
the popular snacks in Japan during the summer], which he did not like. He asked her if he had to eat them. She asked him, “Can you eat just one piece of bean? I will eat the rest of them.” His mother and Mrs. S. had communicated by text messages since yesterday, because he did not want to come to school today. Mrs. S. had heard from his mother the other day that being with Dai at home during the time he was supposed to be at school stressed her (field note, 7/3/2010), so, Mrs. S suggested that she not force him to come to school today, but instead, take time with him so both of them could relax. With the suggestions from Mrs. S, his mother played with Dai as much as he wanted last night. In the morning, Mrs. S showed me the text message from his mother, “It looks like [Dai] wants to go to school, but [can’t go]. I didn’t ask, but he said, ‘Mom, do you know why I don’t want to go [to school]? Because I have to eat one piece of edamame.’ I asked him, ‘So, if you don’t have to eat that one piece, [what do you want]?’ He replied, ‘I’ll go.’ Then, I told him, “Ok, I will ask Mrs. S.’” To this message, Mrs. S suggested, “If you keep asking him what he wants to do [about school] many times a day, you will have to worry all day. So, why don’t you take it easy and have your time with Dai?” His mother then responded to Mrs. S. that after she told [him] about the message from Mrs. S, he smiled happily, but still did not say he would go to school. She asked Mrs. S., “He asked me if we still had time. Is he waiting for me to say, “It’s time [to go to school]?” Mrs. S replied that it should be his mother who could make a decision what to tell him, whether “I will ask Mrs. S” or even “Mrs. S told me you don’t have to eat,” because she was the person who was in front of him and observed him directly. She should be able to make a decision while considering his facial expression and what he was doing. In her message, Mrs. S also told his mother, “At this moment, the hurdle, coming to school and enjoying meeting goals, seems to be too high for him.” Later, his mother sent her a message, “I
also think so. It’s easier for me to get his ‘permission’ to go to school every morning, but what you told me is exactly right. Because I am always like this, there is no progress since the preschool, is there? Classroom teachers [in regular classrooms] see him only during the period of one year [they teach him], but I’m glad to have conversations with you, looking at his future goals.” He did not come to school today after all, but his mother commented, “I used to be stressed out when he didn’t want [to go to school], but I couldn’t believe that I even took a nap today,” and “I’d like to practice with Mrs. S” so she became able to give Dai as many experiences as possible so that he could learn that “he can do” and be more confident. She appreciated Mrs. S’s suggestions and feedback in order to deal with Dai’s absence as well as her problems.

These examples show that additional support for children with special needs are provided as an extension to, or part of, regular education. However, not all teachers can do this in their regular classrooms, if they do not have the knowledge and skills. Teachers who have less experience identified support sources, as described below, in order to work with children with additional needs in their classrooms, including experienced teachers within the school and in and out of school workshops.

**Variation in Classroom Teachers’ Skills and Knowledge**

After the implementation of the formal special education services for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms, most classroom teachers recognized the need for additional support for these children. For those who have long experience teaching children in regular classrooms, it is necessary to re-learn skills and knowledge about special education. In other words, classroom teachers are required to shift their understanding of, and ways of teaching, these children.

Teachers’ lack of knowledge may contribute to their attitudes towards children with
disabilities. Four out of six teachers who had experience teaching children in special education classrooms discussed that as teachers learned how to teach and interact with children with disabilities, including their special needs, their attitudes towards children would change (staff 1, 5, 9, 12, 13, 15). One teacher (staff 5) clearly indicated that it might be too late if teachers met with children with disabilities for the first time after they started teaching. Teachers’ lack of experience makes it difficult for them to “educate” these children. She continued that experiences with children with disabilities could widen their “values” and allow teachers to be better able to understand children’s perspectives, rather than insisting children meet teachers’ expectations. Similarly, another teacher discussed (staff 13):

Differences between teachers are still significant. How can I describe?…I think it is because I have experience teaching children in special education classrooms, but there are teachers who are not able to adjust to children’s own pace, and this is the fact, so, I can’t say anything about this, but for these teachers, even though they love children [who have difficulties in their classrooms], children are suffering. I think both of them are suffering, but if they know what to do specifically, they may be able to deal with [the situation]. If the only thing teachers can do is to tell children, “Do it,” and then feel that “I’m telling them this much,” but children don’t do, can’t do. It’s very [stressful] for children, too, because teachers keep telling a lot, but nothing changes, so it’s stressful [for both of them].

Another teacher also described (staff 1):

A little more thought as to how to [support children with disabilities], and we can maintain dignity as humans. But when we don’t know, or haven’t been able to figure out what to do and how to support … It’s also our responsibility, but it’s not easy, so, the first thing teachers do may be to attack and regard it as if that’s not their responsibility, to
make themselves feel better.

According to educators, if teachers do not have the knowledge or experience of working with children with disabilities, they may think negatively about children who are struggling and treat them as difficult children. Teachers who have less experience and knowledge about special education expressed anxiety in dealing with children with disabilities who have interpersonal problems with other children (staff 6, 7, 8). For example, one teacher expressed anxiety from not knowing what she should do (staff 6).

Honestly, I know I have to learn more. Well, it’s like I’m worried about it. It’s like learning together with [children] at the same time, so, I feel somehow, you know, I don’t know what the best is for these children, and feel sorry for them. It shouldn’t be like this, but the only thing I can do is to understand them, or accept them [as they are].

However, if teachers recognize that they need to learn more, it makes it easier to seek support. Teachers are required to participate in workshops that are regularly organized by the local board of education. In addition, support is available within the school. For example, one of the special education classroom teachers (staff 15) stated that she kept in mind working together with other teachers who knew about children in her classroom, such as children’s previous classroom teachers and their regular classroom teachers, so that she was able to look at children from various viewpoints.

**Support Sources for Inexperienced Teachers**

Teachers with experience teaching children in special education classrooms can be resources for less experienced teachers. For example, one regular classroom teacher stated (staff 11):

There have been times, many times, when I wasn’t sure how I should deal with [a child]. I usually consult with an “authority” within the school. In the schools [I have taught],
there were at least one [who knew very well about special education], so I asked them like, “Today, [a child] behaved like this and did that, so, what could I do for [the child]?”

Because I am with the child for a year, I think it’s my responsibility to ask for suggestions if I don’t know what I can do, even if I have to ask every day, for example, how a child felt when the child behaved in a certain way and what I could do. This works much better than whatever I can think of that might work, and also children can stay calm.

This teacher shared a successful example:

I had a child who wanted to stick to a time [schedule]. He can’t bear it if we go on a minute over or less, if I give them the specific time [to work on tasks]. I didn’t know that, so I just told them like, “Ok, let’s finish by…” and the child told me, “One minute over!”

So, I was told that if I gave them the specific time, I should tell the child to stop working, even though other children kept working. It makes the child feel better. Since then, whatever happened, I let them finish the tasks at the time I had informed [the class] of, or do whatever I said I would.

When teachers are asked to identify resources that are useful when they have children with special needs in their regular classrooms within the school (staff 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14), many of them identify the same individuals: Mrs. A, the principal; Mrs. S., the special education coordinator; or teachers who have studied special education.

The principal, Mrs. A, has experience teaching children with disabilities, and one of her policies as a principal is to establish a system that makes it possible to provide as much support as possible for children who need additional support (field note, 1/20/2010). She frequently goes to classrooms, and knows the children well. She talks with children as well as parents, individually, when they need assistance. When Dai’s regular classroom teacher did not know how to deal with his case, she said, “Mrs. A told me she would explain to [other children], so,
I’m relieved now.” When I asked her with whom she could talk when she had a problem, she named Mrs. A and Mrs. S and said, “Mrs. S knows everything [about children and what each child needs].”

Mrs. S does not teach in classrooms, but has been working with children who need additional support, emotionally and socially, for years as a school nurse. It seemed natural that she was chosen to serve as a special education coordinator when the government and the local board of education announced that one of the staff members in each school had to serve as a special education coordinator, after the new special education system was implemented.

Her role as the coordinator and how she is helpful are well known among teachers, but one teacher indicated that there might be teachers who think that the coordinator roles should be taken by teachers actually teaching in classrooms, in order to be able to use the coordinator’s knowledge to teach children (staff 13). Mrs. S herself was concerned about her position as a school nurse:

I thought I was not qualified to be the coordinator. Because I can’t teach children in classrooms, I’ve been thinking a professional, who can manage classrooms, should serve as the coordinator. But now, [after working as the coordinator for several years], I’ve noticed that if children are always with me, I can’t see the whole. So, it might be, I think, it worked out for the best because I, who can’t teach, served as the coordinator. I can see the whole, but I can’t work with individual [children]. Of course if it’s an emergency, I would take care of a child and study with children individually, but I think it works better if [we] decide that [the coordinator] does not work with children individually [on a regular basis], because if the person who assigns which person does this or that is involved in the place [that requires support], this person will have the whole responsibility and become overwhelmed. As a result, the whole system will not be able to
function at all. I think so, I’m beginning to think that other people, like me, should serve as the coordinator, recently.

Educational Use of Teachers’ Assignment

Teachers who teach children in special education classrooms do not necessarily have a special education teacher certification. Although there is one teacher who has the certification at S Elementary School, this teacher also serves as a regular classroom teacher. Most teachers learn how to teach children with disabilities from their own experience of teaching and attending workshops organized by the local board of education and other private or public organizations.

Teachers who have experience teaching children in special education classrooms (staff 1, 5, 9, 12, 13, 15) shared their experiences of teaching children with disabilities. They viewed their experiences also as useful when teaching children in regular classrooms, for example, their ability and sensitivity in identifying the needs of individual children and providing additional support for children who need help while overseeing the whole class. In the following quote from the interview, the principal described what she hopes for other teachers regarding special education from her perspective as an administrator.

Most classroom teachers do not know what children [with disabilities] need, because they don’t have [a special education] certification. I am also one who doesn’t have the certification. While working with [children in a special education classroom] for three years, I wondered what I could do, and then, I went to workshops after school. I had to pay, because it was not offered by the [local] board of education. I also bought books. It was not that cheap, but I wanted to learn to be a professional, as much as possible. There were in-school workshops or study groups at the board of education, but I learned by myself. What I found during that time was that if I had skills and knowledge, I’d be able to help children who were struggling. So, now, I’d like as many staff members as
possible to learn this kind of stuff.

Serving as a classroom teacher in special education classrooms is one way to have such experiences. Consequently, administrators may assign teachers who need more experience to special education classrooms. Mr. K, the assistant principal, recalled that he was advised that he should teach children in special education classrooms at least once before being an administrator, but he did not have the opportunity. He further elaborated:

Not many people can have the experience. Well, there is nothing better than experience. Our own experiences are the best [to learn anything], so, I want all teachers to have the experience [of teaching children in special education classrooms]. However, every teacher has their own specialty, or preference, which route they would choose as their own career. Thinking about the strengths of each teacher and things like what he or she should learn more, and also their ability [to teach] vary, so, it’s impossible to give all teachers equally the chance to teach [children with disabilities] at least once. It isn’t easy to assign teachers [to classrooms] to educate themselves. When I was teaching, I taught 1st graders once, and it was an educational assignment for me. I really appreciate now. It was the first school I worked at [teachers at public schools transfer to another school every several years]. It was the 5th year, and before teaching the 1st grade, I had taught 5th grade twice and 6th grade twice, and I was told to teach 1st graders…, but I didn’t like it. I thought 3rd grade might be ok [because they are closer to 5th or 6th grade than 1st grade], but I couldn’t understand why it was 1st grade, so I asked the principal why I was assigned to the 1st grade classroom. The principal said, “Probably, you won’t be able to teach 1st graders again, so, that’s why I’ll let you teach 1st graders now.” I thought it might be true, and accepted it, but when thinking back now, what I experienced during that one year was very valuable. So, like what the principal did to me, it’s very good if all
teachers have this chance to teach children in the special education classroom here, but it isn’t easy. And also we have to think what parents are hoping. They are hoping the same teacher teaches their children for years, but if their children are taught by different teachers every year, that’s children who have to adjust to a new teacher every year, and they may lose what they have already learned.

I talked about this educational assignment with Mrs. S during the third wave of data collection in the next school year. She told me that a good example from that school year was an experienced teacher who had not taught children in special education who was assigned to the special education classroom with an experienced special education teacher (field note, 7/13/2010). While working together, this teacher, who struggled with classroom management during the previous year, was able to learn from the other teacher knowledge and skills to better attend to the needs of individual children, which can be used and applied when teaching in regular classrooms.

**Special Education and Additional Support**

Since children experiencing social and learning difficulties have been educated in regular classrooms, it might appear reasonable for classroom teachers to take responsibility to provide additional support for them. Accordingly, at S Elementary School, special education for children in regular classrooms is provided as an extension of regular educational activities in regular classrooms. I will describe how such additional support is actually provided in classrooms at S Elementary School.

**Special Education in Regular Classrooms**

Many school staff members state that currently in Japan, the preference is for special education services to be provided by classroom teachers in regular education classrooms, as much as it is possible and as appropriate for children’s needs. Even when children need
instruction in small groups or individually, called “pull out” support in resource rooms, such support is usually provided by classroom teachers in their planning time or part time teachers, such as former or retired classroom teachers (staff 1, 3, 9, 10; field notes), and it is not common that these teachers have a special education certification (staff 1, 2, 9, 10, 12; field notes). The principal who has experience teaching children with disabilities explains:

[We] have to bring out the personality [or individuality: kosei] of each child efficiently in groups, so I think special education is something that classroom teachers have to do in their classrooms, in group instruction. And then, if [we can make] teachers’ skills high enough, we don’t have to pull children out [for small group or individual instruction]. I mean, we can do good enough without special education.

According to the principal, then, it is the classroom teachers’ responsibility to provide additional support for children with special needs, in collaboration with other staff members. Teachers also must design classroom activities and instruction so that all children can enjoy learning (staff 1, 2, 3, 12, 14), for example by using visual aids (staff 5, 8, 9) and gestures (staff 5). Further, these strategies must not result in a lower level of education, such as making the content easier. Classroom activities and instruction also must be attractive to all children, including those who can complete tasks easily, the so called fast learners (staff 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 14). Fast learners have to be paid attention to, because if the instruction becomes too easy for them, they can get bored and may not pay attention (staff 2, 3, 8, 12; field notes). They need something to work on while other children receive additional support (staff 2, 8, 12; field note: staff 3, 1/20/2010; field notes, Jan-Feb, 2010). For example, one teacher described his thoughts on fast and slow learners (staff 8).

There are children who get things quickly, and those who do not. So, for those who can finish quickly, just let them go ahead working by themselves, because they can do with
less attention from teachers. So, I can take time for slow learners. I didn’t think about letting children do [worksheets] at the same pace because there would be children who would have to wait for [slow learners to catch up] and these children may start talking or stop listening to me.

Another teacher suggested that there are commonalities in instructions that are enjoyable for slow and fast learners (staff 14):

I know there is no such thing as “perfect” instruction, but if there was, I believe that it would contain elements of special education. The real perfect instruction should be satisfying and enjoyable for everyone. There may be individual differences, but the instructions have to give all children pleasure and make them want to participate. So, I am beginning to think that the elements, or the way of thinking about special education and the elements to develop such instruction [that is enjoyable for every child], are nearly equal. For example, this child has understood this, so give the child suggestions doing this or that, or this child’s level of understanding is average, so it’s ok for now, or this child can be motivated more if I tell this. It’s like taking care of each child by focusing on [the progress of] each child, isn’t it? Support depending on individual needs like this and those of special education, such as meeting each child’s needs, are almost the same, I think, so if I want to make this school better, the only way we can do so is by raising the teachers’ abilities to give instruction.

In addition, other children also can benefit from the support given to children with disabilities (staff 3, 5). One teacher who has taught in both regular and special education classrooms said, “If the additional support makes it easier for a child with a disability, almost all children in the same classroom can understand (staff 5),” for example:

Probably children with disabilities in regular classrooms have difficulties in copying what
is written on the blackboard into their notebooks, and listening to teachers. What I am doing is to put a magnet sticker meaning “write” on the blackboard where to start writing and say, “Write.” If I do like that, children can write. The shape of the sticker should be age appropriate, [I use different ones] for 4th graders and 2nd graders. For example, I use a “pencil” for 2nd graders. Other children can write whenever I say, “Write from here,” and that’s fine. It doesn’t matter for other children if there is a sticker or not, but I have learned that for children with disabilities, they can write if something useful for them is there naturally [futsu-ni: normally, usually], without drawing too much attention [sarigenaku: casually, unobtrusively].

A teacher who recently began studying special education described his experience of implementing what he learned in his math instruction for children who need additional support (staff 8; field note, January, 2010):

I heard that children get very anxious if they don’t know how things are going on, so, recently, I tell children [at the beginning of the class] something like, “We do this and this and this and then, do this next, and this is done, done.” [In the 1st grade classroom, this teacher put the day’s schedule on the top of the white board at the beginning of the class, and when each task was done, he crossed it off.] It seems that it makes it easier for children, I mean, children can easily see how much is left.

For fast learners:

I tell them such things at the beginning of the class, so, children stopped asking me “What are we gonna do today?” or like that. They know the teacher will tell them once the class starts. Also they don’t ask me, “What’s next?” any more, because they know what comes next [if they look at the white board]. For example in first grade, there is a large difference in how quickly children understand Math, so, before [I did this], children
who had already done asked me, “What do we do next?” or “What should I do?” But now, without my direction, they come to turn in [a worksheet] and I tell them, “Then, go get that [extra worksheet]”, so I have more time for children who need additional instruction.

**Support Education for All Children**

As these teachers mentioned, for school staff members, special education may not be only for children with disabilities (staff 1, 3, 10, 11, 12, 14). A teacher who had been in several other schools described S Elementary School (staff 12):

If there are children who need additional help, not only classroom teachers of special education classroom, but the whole school, we all share the children’s information, and raise these children together. That’s the priority in this school, so, it’s not whether or not [children have disabilities], of course, if [they] have disabilities, we’d take care of it. It’s like we are going to make a system that whenever there is a need, we will take care of it, as far as I understand.

Special education seemed to be considered as a tool to teach children with various needs in school. For example, one teacher listed academic support, social skills training, and emotional support as what she thought of as special education. She stated, “Even chatting with a teacher might be ok if the child can calm down and go back to [his or her] classroom happily (staff 10).” Another teacher also gave me examples (staff 11):

There may be a child who is behind only in Math and should be pulled out. On the other hand, there is a child who is emotionally unstable, and you know, [we can] calm down if we are in the place where it is quiet and there are only small number of people, don’t you think so? [Similarly,] if the child can spend at least one hour a day in such a place, it makes a difference, for example, there is one in my class. He calms down immediately if there is one-on-one time with [a teacher] even once a day. … I thought he could benefit
from pull out services once a day, but we talked about why he had to be pulled out [considering his academic performance]. So then we decided it might be better to meet with him after school. I’m working with him after school\(^1\), studying together, and it works for him, calming down and being happier, but it may be a little different from special education though.

This idea of providing support for children regardless of the type of “difficulties” may not be uncommon in Japan. The principal showed me a report distributed by F Elementary School she observed and explained that this school was a model school that implemented “support education.” She emphasized that there was no “special” in this system, and any child with additional needs regardless of disability was able to receive the necessary supports (field note, 2/6/2010).

According to the report, “support education” is implemented not only in this school, but the prefecture this school is located in has decided to use the term, “support education,” instead of “special education,” to meet the needs of every child who needs support. Even though there is a difference in whether or not to focus on children’s disabilities, these two concepts are nearly the same in terms of taking care of children’s educational needs.\(^2\) A principal in another city also mentioned “support education” for children who needed some kind of additional support regardless of disability, including children from other countries whose native language is not Japanese (field note, 6/25/2009).

Another example is what Mrs. S does with children as a school nurse. She explained that

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\(^1\) This teacher did this during her regular working hours after children are dismissed. Classroom teachers’ working hours are from 8am to 4:45pm. After children are dismissed, around 3:30pm in typical days, teachers spend their time preparing for instruction, staff meetings, and other activities, such as participating in study groups and workshops. Not many teachers go home at 4:45pm, and many of them work “voluntarily” until 7pm or later.

\(^2\) This information is from a guideline developed by F elementary school.
in her career as a school nurse, she began to think, “Children who can do by themselves are fine,” “Rather, I wanna pick up children who are left out.” For example:

Mrs. S: This room is ready for emergency, I mean, whenever children have problems, they can come in to get help. If there is a kid who hasn’t had breakfast and looks like falling on [the floor], I offer the kid chocolate or something like that, but other kids don’t say anything if they find this kid is eating chocolate. They know that this kid has a problem, and Mrs. S does what this kid needs. It’s a “special [exception],” but they also know, “Mrs. S will help me if I have a problem.” So, they seem to have understood it is special when I do something special, so they don’t say anything [like they want chocolate, too].

Misa: It must be because they know from their experiences.

Mrs. S: Yes, it is, right, so, I don’t blame them if they think “What?” or “Why?” if they see other kids eating chocolate or bread, or having tea [at school], but they understand that there must be something and try not to touch on this.

During the third wave of data collection, there was one child who did not eat breakfast and had difficulty in concentrating on tasks in his classroom. In response to my comments on him in my daily log, the principal wrote, “Let me know if you find [him] like that next time, there is a snack to give children.” Mrs. S also noticed him and discussed with another teacher working with him.

**Challenges and Future Directions**

Even though S Elementary School has resources, including teachers who have the knowledge and experience teaching children with disabilities, educators expressed challenges to providing appropriate support and accommodations for children with disabilities. These include large classroom size, shortage of staff members, lack of professional knowledge and experiences,
a need for a more systematic way to provide support, and low budget.

Three teachers indicated that if they had a smaller classroom size, they could provide the necessary support for every child in a classroom without special education and labeling children as “disabled.” The principal stated that if a classroom teacher has the skills and the classroom size is small enough, around 20, it is possible to provide an education in a way that all children can benefit regardless of their level of understanding and achievement. Mrs. S explained using Dai’s classroom. During the previous year, there were two small classrooms in his grade. In these small classrooms, teachers could take care of children better and look at each child more closely. Accordingly, children were stabilized in regular classrooms even if they had disabilities. I observed a similar situation when I went back to S Elementary School in the following year. 2nd graders in the previous year who studied in two classrooms were in one large classroom of about 40 children. There were several children who could not remain in their seats and a classroom teacher struggled to take care of these children. When they were in smaller classrooms during the previous year, they tended to distract others, but their behaviors were in a range teachers were able to handle.

In conjunction with a smaller classroom size, 11 teachers suggested a need for more staff members so that they are able to take care of the needs of every child (staff 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15), and/or a need for more professional knowledge and skills to actually provide such support (staff 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15). One experienced teacher explained that recently teachers are busier than in the past. Therefore, it is necessary to have a clearer goal to focus on and learn more to achieve the goal (staff 14). Another teacher also indicated that she was too busy and did not have time to study how to help children who need additional support, although they participated in workshops regularly during semesters as well as breaks (staff 6). Therefore, two teachers (staff 5, 9) indicated during the interviews that teachers should have learned about
children with disabilities while at college, when they had time to learn. It may be too late to start learning after they start teaching at school, considering their daily workload and responsibilities.

At the same time, several teachers (staff 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13) indicated that they have to be more prepared to provide necessary support for children experiencing difficulties. Even if they identify children who need additional support in their classrooms, not all children are able to receive the support currently, because there is no person who can provide it and there is a lack of system and procedure to provide such support. At S Elementary School, a system to coordinate special education and additional support for children experiencing difficulties works to identify children who are experiencing difficulties and put them on a route to receiving extra support. Yet, the support is provided within the available resources. Educators have to make decisions to prioritize support, to whom and where they will provide support. Mrs. S, a special education coordinator, explained that they noticed children who were struggling in regular classrooms, but had not initiated communication with their parents because at that time their priority was to provide support for Yusuke and Dai, whose problems were more severe. After Yusuke and Dai moved to the special education classroom from the resource room, several other children started studying at the resource room.

One teacher specifically talked about the need for a more rigid procedure and system to provide special education services for these children (staff 13).

There are many [policies], a sort of trend and requests from society, and also because this is a public school, there are public policies we have to follow, but now, when I think of special education, if all children are in regular classrooms, it may not be easy to deal with. [We have to] think about inclusion and securing time to study for individual children. [Children who study] in regular classrooms also suffer, I believe. I also think if there is a school where children with autism or emotional disorders can go, it would be better, but
[such a school] may not be realistic when thinking about social welfare. If [we are going to pursue special education in regular classrooms], without a system to provide support, it’s very difficult.

Some educators (staff 1, 10, 13; field note: special education director, 1/26/2010) indicated that there is a lack of budget to respond to requests from teachers. Creating a law is not enough. It is only the first step in making the additional support available for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms. They need to hire more teachers to reduce classroom size and also need someone who can provide education for classroom teachers and help to establish systems.

**Discussion**

A special education teacher in the U.S. who was a participant of my pilot study and who went to kindergarten and elementary school in Japan described her experience as follows.

Well, I, I had… such a wonderful experience in a Japanese kindergarten, and the 1st and 2nd grade and 3rd grade, and even though the classroom was huge, and that’s, you know, very few teachers, especially in the kindergarten, I will never forget in, ah… the empathy, that I thought our teachers had for me. My case was like special education… I even couldn’t speak Japanese when I started Kindergarten when I was four years old, and so, ah… they treated me very gently, even though, I was very bad, sometimes [laugh] and ah… they really helped me to make that adjustment, … These teachers were doing everything, ah,… very sensitive, tender, **[spoke softly]** in their heart.

Mrs. R’s experience in Japanese kindergarten illustrates the way Japanese educators work with children experiencing difficulties. Several decades later, I observed a similar quality of interactions between educators and children at S Elementary School.

Many Japanese children with developmental disabilities were educated in regular
classrooms taught by their classroom teachers, who might not have knowledge and experience teaching children with disabilities. After the new special education law came out in 2007, schools were required to provide formal special education services for children with developmental disabilities. Accordingly, educators have been participating in workshops in and out of school regarding children with disabilities and the way to provide appropriate support. Nevertheless, there are teachers struggling with adjusting to the new requirements.

Special education services generally are designed so that children receive support that fits their needs. In other words, every child receives different support. Although they share common difficulties, their needs and problems vary. This philosophy of special education seems to contradict the Japanese traditional educational practice of teaching children in groups. In response to this, educators shared how to deliver content so that all children, both children with disabilities and “fast learners,” can benefit, for example, providing extra tasks for fast learners, so that educators were able to take more time for children who were struggling. In short, as one teacher stated, all children can benefit from instruction that is easy to follow. Whether or not children understand and retain content should be considered separately. If the content is too easy for fast learners, they get bored and may engage in inappropriate behaviors. Teachers have to adjust the level of expectation for children and the way of delivering content, in order to teach in a way that all children can enjoy. This is a balance between the benefit of learning in groups and individualized instruction. Unfortunately, this group oriented environment may not be ideal for some children. There are children who can benefit better from individualized instruction in small groups or individual settings.

In addition to children with disabilities, teachers may provide additional support for children who struggle for different reasons. Children may exhibit behaviors at school when they have problems, such as parents’ divorce and other family problems. In addition, achieving
fluency in Japanese is a recent concern, as the number of children from other countries has increased. There are several children at S Elementary School whose native language is not Japanese. They are not qualified to receive formal special education, but they can benefit from additional support, for example, time out at a resource room when they get frustrated, so that they are able to focus during classroom instruction. There is actually a local board of education suggesting “support education” at regular public schools targeting children with any problems including disabilities.²

When children receive additional support, it becomes important to think about children’s long term and individualized goals as a result of receiving support. As they have additional needs, they may have to take different approaches to meet the same expectation. Goals created for their “typically” developing peers may not necessarily be applied. Rather, providing support considering each child’s future goals becomes more critical, in addition to dealing with children’s current problems, especially when children are receiving formal special education services.

In contrast, special education services in the U.S. are provided by specialists. Depending on their needs, children receive support from multiple individuals who have different professional backgrounds. A special education teacher in the U.S. who participated in my pilot study described pull out support and instruction as follows.

… most children are included in classrooms…children [frequently are] coming and going from their classrooms very easily these days, for speech therapy, or, [for] a variety of reasons even for… a gifted program. So, children wouldn’t notice when people are coming and going.

If children leave classrooms for many reasons including gifted programs, and if there are many children receiving pull out support, other children become used to it. Children receiving
such support may not have to worry about what other children think. Actually, this teacher shared how children receiving special education perceive the support they were receiving; …just to tell you a little story about last year, I had some 5th graders… in [regular] classrooms, and I had pulled them out to do an intervention, and they came in and said, something about “Special ed?? What’s special ed? Are you special ed? I don’t know, Are you special ed?, I don’t know. What does special ed mean?” and one of the children said, “I think it means you take a lot of medicine.” … So, they are children who have been in special ed. … in 5th grade, and don’t even know it. They know that they are receiving services, and I think that’s the way we try to, to frame it.

Children receiving support also may not know that they are in “special education.”

However, if a child is the only one leaving the classroom, the child can not leave without other children noticing. Since the Japanese formal special education for children in regular classrooms is new, not many children are receiving pull out support either at resource rooms or special education classrooms yet. There is no other pull out support such as gifted programs. As a result, once the child starts receiving pull out support, other children immediately recognize that the child may have a problem and their curiosity can make the child “different.”

Children with developmental disabilities may be seen as “different” to some extent by their peers, regardless of whether they receive pull out support. Other children observe that they struggle academically and/or interpersonally in their daily interactions at school. Accordingly, these children, who are different from others, receive more attention from peers as well as educators. Through these experiences, educators expect that children with disabilities learn interpersonal and other social skills, and their peers learn how to work together with them, including solving problems caused by disabilities. I will discuss how children with
developmental disabilities and their peers perceive the children’s “difficulties” in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Results: Social and Emotional Support

Staff members who are currently teaching in classrooms (staff 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13) discussed the classroom interactions of children with special needs with their peers. Although teachers’ thoughts about having children with special needs in their classrooms vary, they expressed a desire to create classrooms where children with special needs are accepted and children help one another. Teachers described several strategies they used to create a supportive environment in their classrooms, for example, involving other children in a support system for a child experiencing difficulties, explaining the child’s difficulties and needs to other children, and being an interpreter of the child whose behaviors cause conflicts. Some teachers called this practice “raising other children,” where other children learn to be able to deal with problems by themselves and help one another, while children with developmental disabilities receive support and learn how to interact with peers.

Still, children’s responses to their peers with developmental disabilities may not always be positive, and children with disabilities may experience secondary disabilities, which may be exhibited by externalized or internalized behaviors. Accordingly, classroom teachers’ role involves providing social skills training. Several teachers emphasized that ideally such training should be provided using children’s real problems in their daily lives. By turning children’s needs, conflicts, and misbehaviors into opportunities to learn social skills, children are able to retain what they have learned and are motivated to use the learned skills voluntarily.

Explaining Children’s Special Needs

Two teachers (staff 7, 9) reported difficulties in explaining the special needs of certain children to their peers. One teacher stressed that individuals who knew the child’s difficulties and/or disabilities well, such as parents and special education teachers, could explain and answer
peers’ questions better than classroom teachers. For example, they could tell children stories about disabilities and special education, such as brain functioning like “his brain is a little ‘bigger’ than yours,” and “he is doing things like this” in his special education classroom (staff 7). Another teacher (staff 9) also described that instead of talking about disabilities or difficulties, she would explain to other children how a child with special needs was feeling and the meanings of the child’s behavior when he or she was in trouble. These teachers also mentioned that the child’s parents may not want them to discuss the child’s disability with other children (staff 7, 9). Mrs. K explained how she discussed Dai’s transition to the resource room with children in her classroom while respecting his parents’ wishes for privacy regarding his disability. To help him come back from the resource room “naturally” without feeling “I am different,” peers started greeting Dai by “Okaeri-nasai.” Mrs. K explained:

[I asked about “Okaeri-nasai (welcome back)” during the interview.]

Mrs. K: I thought how he wanted to be treated when he came back to the classroom, so, I explained to children like that. I told them it would be great if we could make our classroom… like where we say Itte-rasshai (Come back here) and he says Tadaima (I’m back). That was the only thing I could tell them [because of his parents’ wishes].

Misa: He said he liked it.

Mrs. K: Really? I’d like to continue it.

Other teachers (staff 5, 6) also tried to attend to children’s feelings. Mrs. O described one child, Yusuke, who was not able to remain in his classroom and spent most of his time in the resource room. In order to make it easier for him to come to his classroom, she explained to his peers in her classroom how Yusuke felt about not being able to enter the classroom, and described what he was doing in the resource room. She hoped this would help children accept Yusuke when he returned to the classroom.
All of these teachers are making efforts to create an atmosphere in which children experiencing difficulties are accepted and feel comfortable and safe in their classrooms. In so doing, they both attend to the feelings of these children (staff 5, 7) and became an interpreter between children with developmental disabilities and their peers (staff 6, 9). Both of these practices stemmed from empathy.

**Children with Disabilities Learn from Their Peers**

In this supportive environment, two teachers (staff 12, 13) described that through daily interactions, children learn and accept the strengths of their peers. In addition to academic skills, these strengths include interpersonal skills and the ability to say, “I don’t understand” (staff 13). Mrs. T described that if teachers can create opportunities for children to show their strengths and receive comments from other children, they will be accepted by other children and also will be able to accept themselves that, “I’m great!”

Several teachers (staff 3, 5, 10, 13, 12) described that the confidence and self-awareness/self-esteem of children with additional needs are enhanced through learning in regular classrooms with their peers. Mrs. N stated, in regular classrooms “children are able to learn how to interact with friends and may learn how other children think, more than when they are [taught] individually.” Mrs. S also emphasized the importance of being with peers. For example, “slow learners” who study with “fast learners” can learn how fun it is to understand and complete tasks, and become inspired. When children have something they are confident with and proud of, their interactions with peers become more positive. Mr. M shared his observation of Dai who was in his classroom during the previous year, “It makes a difference whether what a child is confident about is valued [by peers]. Last year, Dai was called, ‘Mr. Fish,’ by the other children who admired his knowledge of fish. He also told them a story of fish during lunch.” I observed similar interactions between children when I visited another child’s classroom. His classroom
teacher observed that Kakeru knew a lot about bugs. I visited his classroom right after they came back from a field trip to a park near by to observe and capture bugs. They were drawing and writing what they had observed when a boy from another 2nd grade classroom visited him:

A boy [who went on the field trip] came in with his classroom teacher. The boy said,

“Excuse me, sorry for coming during class. I have a question to Kakeru. Can you teach me the name of the crab you found the other day?” Kakeru said the name of the crab immediately [with confidence]. The child said, “Thank you,” and Kakeru said “You are welcome,” and the boy left the classroom. His classroom teacher told Kakeru, “You know very well!” (field note, 7/14/2009)

Kakeru is a boy who speaks out during the class and needs intensive attention from his classroom teacher to focus on his tasks, but other children understand that if they have questions about bugs, they should ask him, and Kakeru also is proud of his knowledge.

**Teaching/Raising Other Children**

In addition to working with individual children who need additional support, Mrs. O discussed the importance of “educating other children.” She described a child who was frequently involved in problems with other children and who, despite her repeated efforts, did not learn to behave differently. Therefore, “I had to educate other children [to deal with this]. So, I described the child’s strength to other children as well as to him,” and “praised him more when he did well [because he is always the one who is disciplined], so he can be in the group of children smoothly.”

Similarly, other teachers (staff 5, 8, 10, 13) discussed the need to “raise” and educate other children regarding the special needs of children with developmental disabilities. One of these teachers (staff 13) emphasized that teachers have to explain to other children what a child with special needs is able to do and what support the child needs, in order to help other children
recognize and understand the child’s needs. Still, this does not necessarily mean that teachers discuss with peers the disability itself. For example, Mrs. N shared her experience of teaching 1st graders in another school. She explained individual differences to them by using a metaphor, a “cup” of tolerance:

I explained to them that everyone has a different amount that they are able to bear/tolerate (gaman). Everyone has a cup [of tolerance], but it’s different one by one. Someone has a large cup, but there is someone who has a small cup. We can’t change the size of our cups easily. So, there is a person who wants to “gaman” but can’t. Last year, it was a child with ADHD in first grade… When the child melted down or got upset, other children said, his cup had overflowed.

Ms. A, who had taught in both regular and special education classrooms, discussed how children felt about being together with peers with special needs in regular classrooms.

I understand how children feel, because we are always together [in the same classroom]. I know how they feel, therefore sometimes I get lost… this is what I have to look at closely. Well, I know children who have diagnoses are working harder, twice as hard as other children, but I also know how it is difficult to let other children know about this. On the other hand, children who listen to [what I tell the child with a disability] also want to get accepted [by me]. You know, there were times when I felt it was difficult to keep the balance. The child [with a disability] can get along with other children in a regular classroom, if [a classroom teacher] provides additional support, and it’s going to have a positive impact on the child. I also want to work with them in a way that other children can learn something positive by getting to know each other, so, I’m trying to sense/gather what children feel. When I find from their faces and other things that this child also wants to get attention [while I work with a child who needs additional support], I will try to
think how I can follow up, such as playing with the kid during recess, or something like that. If the child can play with me, he or she may feel better. But the best way is to tell something to children. They all want teachers’ attention, I mean adults other than their parents. I’m trying to do so, but there are times when I can’t discern children’s voices and feel it is very difficult.

These teachers commonly talked about facilitating other children’s awareness of the needs of children receiving additional support. One teacher explained that children with special needs were integrated into the life of other children, so they could learn from one another (staff 14). Other teachers (staff 5, 6, 8) also described that children can benefit from interacting with children who require additional support. For example, children may recall their friends with disabilities when they get older (staff 8), and if they had interactions since they were young, they may not develop discriminatory attitudes (staff 7).

Several other teachers (staff 5, 6, 11, 12, 13) shared their observations of children’s interactions in their classrooms. Children who know how to interact with children with special needs occasionally provide them with the support they need (staff 5, 11, 12, 13). One teacher observed that some children knew children with disabilities very well, in some cases since preschool (staff 11). In addition, Mr. M indicated the characteristics and personalities of children as one of the factors that create the supportive atmosphere in classrooms. He described the classroom he taught the previous year as a group of children who were less competitive [than children in another 2nd grade classroom], and Dai was able to receive support from peers when he needed it. Still, there were times children had conflicts, which he believed that children had to learn and overcome. Accordingly, Mr. M and two teachers (staff 5, 12) indicated that teachers had to work on facilitating positive interactions with children with special needs in their classrooms. Further, Ms. A indicated that it was important to guide children little by little so that
one child would not take too much responsibility, and as many children as possible were able to provide support without feeling overwhelmed. Mrs. T shared her explanation to children in her classroom:

Mrs. T: When there is a child with a disability in a classroom, the classroom becomes kind to other people, and I try to make it positive, not negative. However, I didn’t let children interact in a way that would prevent the child from being independent. They are able to learn what the child can do. Well, I [told children] to let the child do by himself whatever he can do, and other children help [him] only with what he can’t do.

Misa: Involving other children [to provide support]?

Mrs. T: Yes, in this sense, the classroom was very peaceful. In other words, the child was not over-protected. Whenever the child is in trouble, if [other children] see the child has a problem, they are able to help. We worked together like this.

However, Mrs. O identified difficulties caused when children had been together with a child with special needs for years.

What is difficult is that they have been together since 1st grade in the same classroom, so, you know,… [when someone has a problem], they feel like [the child] has always been like that, so why now [they have to do something]? So, it’s very difficult to change what they think, let them think and look at [the child] differently.

Secondary Disabilities and Peer Relationships

Mrs. O was concerned that other children’s responses may have negatively impacted children with special needs. Similarly, Mrs. K was concerned that other children might guess and comment on the child going to the resource room. Three other teachers (staff 9, 10, 11) talked about children with developmental disabilities who had problems with peers in their classrooms, especially when these children exhibited behaviors which harmed others physically and
emotionally, such as verbal and physical attacks and behaviors that might look odd to other children. One of these teachers described (staff 11):

I saw many children who didn’t have good [relationships with peers], but it may be a misunderstanding if I say, “didn’t have.” Anyway, it depends on what a child has. If the child just can’t organize properly, it may not be a big problem, but if a child has something emotionally, like “developmental disabilities [definition under new special education services, includes ADHD, autism, and learning disabilities],” they tend to have interpersonal problems. They are very sensitive to what they are told by others and easily hurt, but they give their friends relentless words. So, other children don’t know the child is such a child [with a disability]. Therefore, they look at the child as an “equal” friend, and, the child becomes a “nasty kid.” Both of them don’t know [about the child’s disability], and they keep attacking each other to protect themselves.

Once children understand that “this child is like this,” such children may be avoided by peers (staff 9) and isolated like, “[We don’t care] whatever he does (staff 10).” My field note also described children who tended to be in the center of arguments and problems within their classrooms, and other children looked at them arguing and said, “It’s them, again” (field notes, 6/25/2010, 7/22/2010). As Mrs. O indicated, once a child is recognized as such a person, it is difficult emotionally for other children to accept the child, and also for the child with a disability or a problem, it is challenging to make an effort to get along with peers (e.g., fear of being picked on and teased; field notes, June-July, 2010). If this continues, the child may say, “I don’t want to go to school (staff 10).”

When children with disabilities do not exhibit problem behaviors, they still may have interpersonal difficulties if they internalize their problems. Two of the children I worked with as a teaching assistant, Yusuke and Dai, were not able to remain in their classrooms. They spent
most of their time at the resource room with me and other teaching assistants while they were at school. A teacher who taught Math in Dai’s classroom thought he looked like he was doing well in the classroom and did not notice he was struggling (staff 8). His classroom teacher also said (staff 7):

I’m confused to find that he looks very active and lively in the special education classroom. But I thought he was doing well [in her classroom]. It made me realize that he had been bearing (gaman), and once I knew he was forced to manage [in the regular classroom], I can’t say anything [like he should come back to my classroom]. That’s what I feel right now.

Further, some children who do not have specific disabilities also have interpersonal difficulties. For example, when I observed a study group meeting where teachers discussed various issues including classroom management and teaching strategies, a classroom teacher who was in charge of leading the group showed scores of social skills assessments of all children in her classroom and shared how she understood the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in her classroom. After she gave us names of children who usually had leader roles and several other children who tended to be left out by other children, teachers discussed what the classroom teacher could do. During the discussion, Mrs. S shared her observations during recess that these children who were left out usually came to the school nurse’s office. Whenever I stopped by her office during recess, I saw more than 10 children from various grade levels chatting, reading books, and playing cards and other games (field notes, July, 2010). Some of them were children discussed during the study group.

Other Children’s Responses Regarding a Child with a Disability

Nevertheless, my observations suggest that over time, many children did accept, change their attitudes, and re-learn how to interact with children with special needs. Right after Dai went
to the resource room, other children in his classroom were confused and curious about what he was doing in the resource room. When I went to his classroom to eat lunch with him and other children, I heard the following conversation:

After eating lunch, a girl sitting in front of Dai asked him why he was going to the resource room. He smiled at her, but didn’t answer. Another boy in the same group said, “That’s because he is behind.” Then, a boy who was from another group came and asked him, “Who are you studying with?” After thinking a while, Dai answered, “I am studying with many teachers [teaching assistants].” (field note, 6/19/2009)

Dai was very quiet in his classroom, but in the resource room, he was very articulate and able to express what he liked and what he did not want to do. A month later, during the individual interview with his classroom teacher, I reported to her his conversation with a 3rd grade boy when he came to the resource room during the cleaning time. The classroom teacher was concerned that children might get confused when they saw Dai acting very differently from what they knew in their classroom.

Misa: The other day, a 3rd grade boy came to the resource room to play, but we had not finished cleaning, so we told him to help us and we cleaned together. [Dai who was quiet in the classroom also gave directions to the boy]. The boy then said, “Dai is strong here!” There was no response from Dai, but they run together around the room after we finished cleaning.

Mrs. K: Kids are amazing.

Misa: They have good eyes to observe.

Mrs. K: Yeah… Their observations, but I mean their abilities to adjust and accept [Dai’s transition to the resource room].

I also observed similar interactions when I went to the 1st grade classroom as a teaching
assistant during Math. I worked with a child who was struggling with addition and subtraction.

When we were working on the worksheet, another child [stopped by and] asked, “Are you still doing that?” So, I told him that the child wanted to take time to think. Later, the other child came and asked the same question. This time, a girl who was sitting in the same table [and overheard my explanation] told that child, “She wants to take time to think.” She repeated what I had said and explained to the other child. (field note, 1/14/2010)

Children learn about disability and how to interact with children with special needs through daily interactions with them.

**Social Skills Training and Moral Education**

In addition to academic skills, providing social and emotional support for children is an important role for classroom teachers. Several teachers discussed the need for social skills training in school (staff 3, 10, 13) and some of them had actually implemented it in their classrooms (staff 5, 12). Further, the local board of education has established social skills training programs containing various activities that can be used at regular public schools. The programs involve activities facilitating self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and collaboration in groups,¹ and teachers are encouraged to use them (field note, 7/21/2010). Mrs. N further elaborated that when children were at school, it was classroom teachers’ responsibility to teach them social skills.

Social skills training may be provided in classrooms (staff 10, 12, 13), or children may be pulled out (staff 5, 10, 13), depending on their needs. Regardless of the setting, teachers commonly suggested that social skills training should be provided in a way that children can

¹ This information was obtained from the website of, or publication by, the local board of education. In order to maintain confidentiality of the research site, I have excluded these information sources from the reference list of this study.
learn in their daily “lives” at school (staff 3), for example, giving feedback right away when the child misbehaved (staff 10), using activities such as field trips as a chance to learn how to behave in public (staff 12), having someone who can assist in classrooms so children can behave and listen to instruction without being distracted (staff 13), and using what the child has actually done as a case scenario to think together (staff 5). The following is a description from my field note.

Kakeru studied at the resource room with Mrs. Y. Mrs. Y told him, “You did very well today, so why don’t we do what Ms. A [his classroom teacher] gave us?” and picked up a folder on the table and told him to answer to the questions. Mrs. Y read the account and questions written on a sheet of paper in the folder. The first page described [an incident at] lunchtime, and the second page was about playing with peers during recess. Today, they only talked about the lunchtime. After reading about what happened during lunchtime, three questions followed. The account was as follows: Kakeru threw beans he doesn’t like on the floor when the lunch menu of the day was minestrone. The first question asked what he would do when he found food that he didn’t like during lunch. His answer was, “Throw it!” Mrs. Y made up a question and asked what he liked and didn’t like. After answering these questions, Mrs. Y read the second question, Mrs. Y: Do you throw [food you don’t like] at home?”

Kakeru: No, because my daddy is scary.

Mrs. Y: Only at school?

Kakeru: Yes.

Mrs. Y: What do you think about other children? What do they think?

Kakeru: They don’t care.

The last question was about rules when eating at home. His answer was not to eat with
his hands. He said, “I used hands to eat, but now I am using a fork and a spoon and chopsticks.” (field note, 1/27/2010)

His classroom teacher provided materials from her observations in her classroom, and worked together with Mrs. Y, who was teaching him in a small group, so that he was able to reflect on his behavior. Ms. A also facilitates his learning by reminding him of the rules. When I ate lunch with Kakeru and other children in the special education classroom in the following school year, Ms. A reminded Kakeru, “Do you remember the rule we made last year? We still have [the rule]” (field note: 7/2/2010).

More broadly, the principal discussed during the teachers’ meeting the importance of raising children, mentally and academically, by using activities, such as the S Festival, where students presented what they had learned to other children and their parents (field note, 2/6/2010). This is consistent with what is written in the National Curriculum Standard that children’s learning occurs within and outside of classroom activities, including classroom discussions led by children and special activities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008), such as the festival described above.

Further, teachers described moral education (staff 3, 10, 12, 13), which is also required and determined in the National Curriculum Standard. For example, I observed Mrs. K teaching moral education in her 3rd grade classroom. She read the class a story of a boy who was expecting a visitor while his mother was not at home. He was told by his mother to stay at home and give a packet to the visitor, but while waiting, his friends came to ask him to play. While playing with his friends, the visitor arrived and waited for him to return. Mrs. K facilitated a discussion of how the boy and the visitor felt, and what the boy could have done differently (field note, 6/19/2009). Moral education was used to facilitate children’s learning regarding self-awareness and basic rules and skills for interacting with other people. However, some teachers
were critical of moral education, describing it as too superficial (staff 3, 10). Another teacher felt that children might be able to better understand if they talked about themselves, rather than people in stories (staff 12). Accordingly, they would like to create opportunities for children to learn social skills in their daily lives. For example, Mrs. N explained:

Mrs. N: Children have experiences since they are very little that there are things like people usually do this or that in this kind of situation, although they may not notice [that they are learning]. There are things like, “That’s obvious” or “Not surprising!”

Misa: Is it like when [we] do something wrong and [adults] discipline it, and then next time try to do differently? I feel we keep doing this sort of thing, right?

Mrs. N: Yes, there are children who don’t have things that are “obvious.” So, I keep trying to find the best time for children to teach [these skills] and I know I definitely have to teach them, but actually I don’t have time [to do so].

In addition to classroom instructions, the National Curriculum Standard determines that moral education must occur throughout the curriculum, including special activities and other subjects depending on children’s development and needs (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008). In this sense, moral education and social skills training may not be distinguished clearly. The principal shared a discussion with other principals during a workshop:

Social skills are not determined in the curriculum currently, so, [we] have to use moral education, classroom activities, and Japanese Language. Even if a child who needs to learn more social skills [in small groups or individually] is identified and pulled out to teach social skills, [we] have to pull the child out during Japanese Language. This is what [we] have to think about [and make changes] to provide better support. (e-mail, 5/30/2010)
She provided the reasons why social skills are taught in Japanese Language. It is not typical yet to pull children out from regular classrooms to teach social skills. In many cases, children are pulled out for math or Japanese language instruction. In addition, social skills programs developed by the local board of education are mainly for facilitating communication skills and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, Japanese Language that focuses on children’s ability to speak and express themselves is preferable to other subjects such as social studies.

**Facilitating Children’s Voluntary Cooperation**

As described above, teachers try to create opportunities for children to learn social and interpersonal skills in their daily lives at school. I observed several occasions when teaching social skills during children’s daily activities resulted in children’s voluntary cooperation in learning basic skills. Teachers turned children’s needs, conflicts, and misbehaviors into opportunities for children to learn emotional and social skills. Instead of giving directions and responding immediately to problems, they gave children choices, acted as role models, gave suggestions, and observed how children responded. They waited for children to solve the problems. One example is a reaction of Mrs. S when Dai did not follow her direction to wash his hands before eating lunch in her office. Usually, children eat lunch in their classroom. Several children eat lunch at the school nurse’s office, for example, children in charge of announcing the day’s lunch menu. On the day when Dai refused to follow her direction, another child and his mother were eating lunch with Mrs. S and these children. Mrs. S shared what happened later with me.

Before eating lunch, we washed our hands, but Dai touched a table in my office. I told him, “Children who are sick also come here, so this room may be full of germs. You touched the table, go wash your hands again. [It’s not only for you, but] other children also have to.” He told me that he didn’t like to be corrected, and if his mother did
same thing at home, he would go to his room, shut the door, and put a note on the door saying, “Don’t come in.” Instead of washing his hands, he said, “I won’t eat lunch” and went to the other side of the room while other people were eating. He faced the other side of the room, but it was not like he didn’t mind at all. He sometimes looked at us, but didn’t come to us. While eating, we talked of our experiences of being disciplined. Children, they were 5th and 6th graders, described similar experiences, and we discussed that that meant parents cared for children. Another child’s mother also said she still was disciplined [by her parents]. We did not ignore Dai, so if he asked something, we answered. He looked at us, but didn’t come. After a while, he asked me, “Is it too late to eat lunch?” I told him it was not too late. He said, “I’m gonna go to the bathroom and wash my hands.” After he came back to my office, he finally started eating. (field note, 6/30/2009)

Mrs. S explained to me, “He may not understand what he is told right now, but he will be able to understand later.” This experience actually motivated him to follow the rule of washing hands before eating. Several weeks later when I ate lunch with him, he told me, “Did you touch anywhere? Let’s go wash our hands (field note, 7/15/2009).” Mrs. S also observed his progress as follows (from her comments on my daily log submitted as a teaching assistant):

Even though he shuts down when he is told to “correct” [his behavior], he has learned from it, and the next time [when he is in the similar situation], he can deal with [the situation] smoothly without shutting down. It seems that he has noticed that shutting down [to resist to adults’ directions is not appropriate] and is struggling. If he found or [someone] taught him a better way, and if he actually had experienced [that it worked], he learned from it perfectly, and he was able to handle the situation [next time]. I feel that if we interact with him carefully in the way he can learn social skills, and he will be able
to have a decent life [in the future].

In the next example, Mrs. S used more direct strategy to encourage Yusuke to communicate with Mrs. A., the principal, because she knew that Yusuke needed to be more assertive. For Yusuke, Mrs. A is a person who has the authority, and he has to follow her directions and “behave himself” in front of her. The following excerpt from my field note illustrates how he thinks of Mrs. A. After the lunchtime recess, he did not want to study and tried to make an excuse. This was his typical response in those days to any teaching assistant who told him to study.

[Yusuke took a while to get back to his desk from the play area.] Then, he [again] took time to arrange the white boards around his desk, so that he would be surrounded by the “walls.” [A few days ago, Dai made a hiding place using partitions (See his case study in Chapter 8) and Yusuke found that the walls helped him calm down.] Finally, he started working on his worksheets, but soon noticed that he had left his shoes in the play area. I knew that if he went to pick up his shoes, it would take him longer to get back to studying. I told him, “It’s ok, do it later.” … after a while, I had a phone call telling me that the principal would come to the resource room to see me. Soon after he learned that the principal would come, he immediately went to pick up his shoes, put the white boards back, and came back to work on his worksheet. He announced, “I’m studying.” (field note, 7/7/2009)

One day in the next week, Yusuke found that he had to go to the principal’s office to ask her a question, but it was not an easy decision to make. If he did not go to see her, he had to give up what he wanted, but he was hesitant to go. With Mrs. S’s encouragement, Yusuke was able to talk to Mrs. A.

During the 5 minute break before the 4th period, one of the children in the special
education classroom asked Yusuke if he would eat lunch in their regular classroom today. He said, “Yeah…” in a small voice. After the 4th period, when Yusuke and the other children were about to go to their regular classrooms to eat lunch, he told me, “I told Mrs. A, I will eat lunch in the 5th grade [classroom], but I couldn’t say I wanted to eat at the Challenge Room [the resource room].” I asked him, “Do you wanna go ask her if you can change [the place to eat]?” He said, “I’ll go,” so, I went to the 1st floor with him. In the elevator, his face looked very nervous. I asked him, “Do you wanna see Mrs. S [instead of Mrs. A]?” He said “Yes!” and we went to the school nurse’s office. Yusuke said to her, “I told Mrs. A that I would eat at the 5th grade [classroom] but I changed my mind. I want to eat at the Challenge Room.” Mrs. S said, “Well, can you tell Mrs. A? Do you want to practice with me?” Yusuke said, “I’m ok,” and we left her office. Yusuke passed the principal’s office, but came back and said, “I heard someone’s voice. She has visitors.” I said, “It’s ok, why don’t you knock on the door?” and indicated the staff room door [the principal’s office has another door to the staff room]. While he explained to the assistant principal that he wanted to talk to Mrs. A, Mrs. A noticed Yusuke and came to talk to him. Yusuke repeated what he told Mrs. S. Mrs. A suggested to him that he eat at the Rainbow Room, instead of the Challenge Room, because she had heard that Dai would eat there with Mrs. T [if he did not want to eat at his regular classroom]. (field note, 7/13/2009)

Yusuke accepted this suggestion, and he ate lunch with Dai, Mrs. T, and me at the Rainbow Room. Mrs. A was not usually involved in deciding where Dai and Yusuke would eat lunch, but it was the first day after Dai’s mother officially requested that Dai transfer to the special education classroom, which had a policy that children ate lunch in their regular classrooms. Mrs. S, Mrs. A., and special education classroom teachers all knew that lunchtime was a sensitive
issue for Dai, and he preferred to eat at the resource room or the special education classroom. Therefore, they were concerned about Dai’s lunchtime placement on that day and monitored Yusuke’s as well as Dai’s reactions to it, since they used to be together in the resource room and were allowed to choose where to eat. Through these conversations, Mrs. S and Mrs. A encouraged Yusuke to speak up about his needs.

**Discussion**

When there are children experiencing difficulties in learning social and/or academic skills, one of the benefits of educating these children in regular classrooms is that both children with special needs and their peers have a chance to learn through their interactions. Children with special needs learn how to make and maintain friendships. When they have difficulties in understanding academic content, by working together with their peers, they can learn the joy of understanding and completing tasks. At the same time, their peers learn that there are individual differences, although they may not know these children have “disabilities”.

In their daily interactions, children are encouraged to think from the viewpoint of children with disabilities, for example, through teachers’ “interpretation” of the children’s behaviors that cause conflicts within classrooms, which allows children to learn “empathy” and appropriate ways to help these individuals experiencing difficulties. These experiences can decrease discrimination against people who are “different” from them when they get older. For example, when a classmate saw Dai behaving in a confident and assertive manner in the resource room, he expressed surprise, but enjoyed playing with him. Dai’s classroom teacher was amazed by the children’s ability to adjust their attitudes towards Dai who was in transition from the regular classroom to the special education classroom. What children learn when they are younger is critical, since it is not easy to change once they learn “habitus,” which “provides individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 13).
In other words, once children establish discrimination against people with disabilities, it is difficult for them to re-adjust their attitudes and beliefs about disability.

Behind this practice of teaching children with disabilities in peer groups, there is a traditional Japanese educational practice of teaching children through their daily interactions with peers and educators, as well as the sensitivity to stigma caused by singling children out for intervention programs. Therefore, children’s learning occurs not only through classroom instruction, but also in everyday activities at school including eating lunch, cleaning, and during recess. In addition, Japanese schools traditionally do not have specialists to teach specific skills, such as social and emotional skills. Accordingly, classroom teachers have broader roles in and outside of their classrooms including teaching emotional and social skills.

Azuma (1994) described Japanese classrooms as follows. Even when a teacher gives instruction to a whole classroom, the instruction may be designed so that it facilitates interactions between children, in which children are motivated and learn spontaneously. To make this type of instruction effective, relationships between teachers and children as well as between children become critical. The relationships should be close enough and inter-dependent, so children can receive and understand teachers’ non-verbal massages. This is parallel to what I have observed at S Elementary School.

However, there are children who need intensive support in more restrictive settings, such as at the resource room or at the special education classrooms. In this educational environment, children who do not fit in groups, for example, if they are isolated or unable to find friends with whom to play during recess, may find their classrooms and school a source of stress. This stress can impact children’s functioning thorough a loss of self-esteem and motivation to learn. In a culture where group membership is emphasized, children who do not fit in with groups may have a hard time adjusting, more than children in a culture where individuality is valued. Further,
many classroom teachers are not trained to teach children with disabilities, and may not recognize their special needs. When teachers find that children are experiencing difficulties, their problems may already be serious, for example, refusing to come to school as in the cases of Yusuke and Dai. As the new special education services for children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms is fully implemented and educators’ awareness of knowledge and skills to provide appropriate support raise, they may be able to identify children who begin to develop problems early while they can benefit from less intensive and restrictive support.

Even when children receive support at the resource room or at the special education classroom, regular classroom teachers and their peers make an effort to maintain relationships with these children. Rituals to welcome children back from the resource room also illustrate the close relationships of children with their peers as well as educators. Children understood the classroom teacher’s explanation that welcoming Dai made it easier for him to come back to their classroom. Dai, who get confused at first began enjoying exchanging the greeting words after he understood what they meant. I also observed children greeted like this in other classrooms. The way Japanese teachers framed this support was to create a home-like environment by greeting children like this, not to single children out.

At the same time, welcoming children in classrooms could label them. When I shared this story with U.S. teachers who participated in my pilot study, one of the teachers expressed concerns:

Um hum… I would say the children with the mild disabilities that you have mentioned, the teacher doesn’t make a real big deal [about] them coming in and out, because they don’t want them to look different…. I think they try very hard just to treat all the kids in the same way, so they don’t seem different.

This difference in the U.S. teacher’s interpretation should come from the meanings of the
greeting words in Japanese and English. When these greeting words are actually used in a
dialogue, there are many meanings attached, more than what they literally mean. Japanese
children know that these greeting words are used when someone is leaving or coming back home.
A person who leaves home says, “Itte-kimasu” and the person who stays at home says, “Itte-
rasshai.” When the person comes home and says, “Tadaima,” and the person who is at home
greets the person by saying, “Okaeri-nasai.” This set of greeting words is one example of
Bakhtin’s greeting genre (Morson & Emerson, 1990; Wertsch, 1991) that Japanese people use on
a daily basis. Children have heard these words everyday at home since birth. As children hear
other people use these words to them, they learn to use the words by themselves. This is a
process of establishing “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1990). In this process, children also learn the social
and emotional meanings attached to the greeting words.

There are no English words that have the same meanings. A close translation of okaeri-
nasai may be “welcome back” or “welcome home,” but I do not think parents use these English
greeting words everyday to their children when they come back from school. Welcome back
sounds like the greeting word for someone who has not been seen for a while. In this sense, “I’m
home” or “I’m back” may be similar to tadaima. The feeling of, “I’m a member of this
family/group” may be stronger in these Japanese greeting words than the corresponding English
words. As the U.S. teacher indicated, for those who do not know these dual meanings, greeting
children may be considered discrimination.

After I talked with the U.S. teacher, I heard from a Japanese teacher that Dai’s mother
indicated that greeting children could be discrimination. She was sensitive to Dai being
recognized as “different” due to her past experiences of handling problems caused by her child’s
disability. The difference between Dai’s mother and the U.S. educator who expressed concerns
was that Dai’s mother knew the meanings of these greeting words. What makes her think that it
is discrimination is probably from her past experiences of how people treated her son and what she thought of these experiences, which made her more sensitive to discrimination. In other words, her son’s disability had affected her beliefs about disability and made her sensitive to greeting words taken for granted by the majority of Japanese people.

Still, in general, children’s classrooms are considered to be the places they belong, just like their “homes” where they feel safe, comfortable and accepted, rather than just a place to learn academic skills. Daily interactions involving emotional and social experiences facilitate the establishment of close relationships between children and peers. Cave (2007) suggested that this sort of emotional experience ties children together as a group.

Quinn and Strauss (1997) also discussed that emotional experiences can be internalized and connect the experiences and individuals involved in the experiences more strongly than other experiences. They applied this to children’s learning and indicated that emotional experiences involved in classroom instruction can help children internalize what they are taught. Mrs. S’s use of children’s problem behaviors to facilitate their voluntary learning is one example of the use of children’s emotional experiences. As a consequence of his choice not to follow a direction by Mrs. S., Dai found that he was in a more difficult situation emotionally to handle. Observing other people eating in this situation made him feel uncomfortable. Other researchers who examined Japanese preschools identified similar practices. In these studies, teachers also wait for the appropriate time to intervene, and even create an opportunity for children to learn by letting them behave and engage in problematic situations (Peak, 1991; Tobin et al., 2009). For example, a teacher waited to intervene until a child who had been misbehaving, pulling on other child’s hair, came to an emotional “boiling over” and cried (Tobin et al., 2009). Peak also observed, “When Japanese children cry after inappropriate behavior at preschool, it is rarely due to having been punished or scolded by the teacher. Instead, crying results from having been forced to
experience the consequences of an incident that the child instigated himself (p. 156).” This thoughtful and intentional strategy puts children in a more challenging situation emotionally to manage their feelings, than when they are punished for their mischievous behaviors. In order to find the right time to intervene, teachers have to observe children and interact with them carefully. Tobin et al. (1989) discussed that U.S. educators interpreted this practice as Japanese teachers ignoring children’s physical fights, which required immediate attention in U.S. schools. Lewis (1995) further discussed that Japanese schools were considered as a “community” and one of the elements of this community was, “focusing discipline on what it means to be a kind, responsible member of the school community, not on rewards and punishment (p. 7),” which meant, instead of using tangible rewards and punishment, children learned more from child initiated compliance.

At the same time, Mrs. S has created a zone of proximal development conceptualized by Vygotsky (Wertsch, 2008), which also served to motivate children to learn new skills. For example, by letting Dai experience the consequences of his choice, Mrs. S implicitly and explicitly suggested what was expected at school. Yusuke also was given a chance to practice before talking with the principal. Mrs. S encouraged him to overcome the challenge by lowering the “hurdle,” but did not eliminate it. She intentionally created a “gap” between his current level of performance and expectations for him, in order for Yusuke to be able to experience the “joy” of overcoming challenges and completing difficult tasks, which can motivate children and help them become more confident. Accordingly, children are “guided” to voluntarily learn these skills in their daily activities and interactions at school.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Case Studies: Children’s Understanding of Disabilities as They Transition into Special Education

As Mrs. I (staff 11) indicated in the previous chapter, both children with disabilities and their peers may not know that the children have “disabilities.” Three children, Yusuke, Dai, and Kakeru, went through the transition from their regular classrooms to the special education classroom while I observed them over one year of data collection. When I met them in June, 2009, they were in the resource room, or their regular classrooms. During the 2010-2011 school year, they studied together with other children in the special education classroom. Three of them recognized that they were different from their peers, but younger children, Dai (3rd grade) and Kakeru (2nd grade) did not know about their autism spectrum disorders. However, Yusuke (5th grade) who had a language disability and a learning disability began to question his ability to learn and eventually heard about his learning disability from his mother.

In this chapter, I will describe children’s perspectives on their disabilities or “difficulties,” studying outside of regular classrooms, the transition to the special education classroom, their relationships with peers, and their progress over one year, based on my observations and individual interviews with children, their parents and educators. Dai’s case illustrates how educators have helped him and his mother to go through the transition to special education, by creating an environment in which Dai can fully benefit from the support and guiding his mother to be able to accept Dai’s special needs. Kakeru’s case is an example describing the importance of parental understanding of their child’s disability and needs in providing support that fits the child’s developmental stage. In so doing, parents created a protected environment for him to be ready to learn new skills in collaboration with educators. Yusuke, who is older than other two children, provided his own understanding of difficulties. His
case illustrates his struggles and the process through which he learned to cope with hardships and internalize his “difficulties.”

**Dai (3rd grade – 4th grade)**

Dai is a 3rd grade boy who has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. He was able to catch up with other children academically until 2nd grade. In 3rd grade, the increasing demands of study began overwhelming him. He frequently uses polite language which may not be typical for children of his age. This sometimes sounds like reading aloud a written sentence. In daily conversations with others, his responses sometimes lack empathy and cause interpersonal problems. Although he is willing to interact with his peers, he worries about being alone during recess, and this becomes a pressure for him to be actively involved in peer groups. When Dai works on tasks he is interested in, such as drawing fish, he looks happy and takes the initiative to expand the activities. In contrast, when adults push him to work on new materials, or materials of struggles with, he gives up quickly and withdraws. When Dai was able to receive appropriate support and adults, including classroom teachers and parents, dealt with his behaviors in a consistent manner, he functioned well at school. Throughout his 3rd grade year, he struggled between conflicting desires and expectations: his own desires, his mother’s expectations for the support he received at school, and teachers’ expectations for him to be more independent.

My observation of Dai began in mid June, 2009, 6 weeks before the summer break began. He had just begun studying at the resource room with Mrs. Y that day. He had done well in his 2nd grade classroom, which had less than 20 students in each of two classrooms. At the beginning of 3rd grade, the two classrooms were combined and his class size increased to 37 children. In addition, Dai’s 2nd grade classroom teacher was known as one of the “experts” in special education at S Elementary School, and understood his needs for additional support. The 3rd grade classroom teacher did not have experience teaching a child like Dai, and Dai soon began
showing difficulties, for example, refusing to go to school in the morning.

**Transition to the Resource Room**

On the first day I went to S Elementary School, Mrs. S, a school nurse and a special education coordinator, introduced me to Dai as he walked down the hallway with a resource room teacher, Mrs. Y. Mrs. S asked him where he would go after the recess. He told her that he would study with Mrs. Y at the resource room, so we went to the resource room with Dai’s guide.

Since it was the first day Dai had been pulled out from his regular classroom, Mrs. S. monitored his reactions. At the end of 3rd period, Mrs. Y asked Dai what he would do during 4th period, and based on his request, they decided to stay in the resource room. After this conversation, Mrs. S suggested that Dai go to his classroom, because they would be discussing the field trip coming in a few days. Dai agreed with this idea. On the way to his classroom, he pretended to be a “tour guide” and took a hand towel from his pocket and waived it like a flag, so we followed him. Still, he told us that other children might be surprised if he arrived during the middle of the day, not in the morning.

Later, Mrs. S told Mrs. Y and me that she thought that he was too attached to Mrs. Y. Although Mrs. Y had visited Dai’s classroom the week before and he already knew her, it was the first day Mrs. Y worked with him individually. Since Mrs. Y comes only once a week, and if Dai decides not to come to school when she is not there, it will be a problem. Therefore, Mrs. S suggested to Dai that he should go to his classroom. During that first week, Dai studied in both his classroom and the resource room. On the days Mrs. Y did not come to school, teaching assistants, including me, worked with Dai and Yusuke, who also studied at the resource room (field notes, 6/17/2009, 6/19/2009).

In the following week, Dai started refusing to go to his classroom, choosing to study at the resource room almost all day long. When I talked with his classroom teacher, Mrs. K, at the
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... beginning of the second week, she told me that Dai’s decision was abrupt and she did not know how to handle the transition. According to Mrs. K, his mother preferred to make the transition “naturally” without telling the other children why he was going to the resource room. Mrs. K observed that the other children were confused and questioned why Dai was not in their classroom and studied at the resource room. Mrs. K also explained that before he started 1st grade, the local board of education had suggested that a special education classroom might be the best fit for him, but his mother requested that he would be placed in a regular classroom (See also chapter 4). Dai also did not know about his diagnosis. Therefore, Mrs. K could only explain to other children that Dai was going to the resource room during Math and Japanese Language, because these subjects were difficult for him (field note, 6/21/2009).

Yet, Dai only went back to his classroom, when he had a question for Mrs. K, or to get his lunch, which he brought back to the resource room to eat. Still, he seemed to think about his classroom while he was in the resource room and asked me, “What do you think they [other children in his classroom] are doing?” He usually worked on worksheets prepared by Mrs. K and other teachers. When he had questions about the worksheets and other materials, he sometimes asked me, “Can we go [to the classroom] and ask?” However, if we went to his classroom, he did not want to stay there and came back to the resource room as soon as his need was satisfied. One of the reasons he did not want to go to his classroom was that other children would notice when he went there in the middle of the class period. He had noticed that his attendance at the resource room was different from other children. One day, on the way to his classroom, he told me that when going to his classroom, he would like to go during recess, 5-minute breaks or “ton ton [an onomatopoeic word of the sound knocking a door, meaning that he will knock the door if the class has started].” Gradually, he became anxious about going to his classroom. He looked fine on the way to the classroom, but hid behind me when we could see the classroom door.
At the same time, children started greeting him by saying, “okaeri-nasai (welcome back)” when he went to his classroom and “itte-rasshai (come back soon)” when leaving. He was confused at the beginning and said back to children, “No, it’s not okaeri-nasai (field note, 6/30/2009),” and asked me, “Why okaeri-nasai?” I told him that they wanted him to say, “tadaima (I’m back)” (field note, 7/1/2009). After that, he started saying tadaima when going to the classroom. Mrs. K suggested that the other children use these ritual words in order to make it easier for Dai to come back to his classroom (See Chapter 7 for more detailed discussion). Dai also expressed appreciation of the ritual when we talked about his classroom during the individual interview.

Even though he did not know about his “disability,” he knew he was different from other children. His 2nd grade classroom teacher, Mr. M, described him and his problems with peers:

I think it is stressful for him in many ways. One of the things is that I had not seen children who were autistic but did not have ADHD until I met him. To make it straightforward, he was sensitive to the fact that he was not able to do things [like other children], so I found it was very difficult to work with him. … I anticipated that the most difficult thing for him in 3rd grade was the classroom size would be doubled, although his personality was like, he was good at, well, observing [other people], gathering information, and imitating them. So, with this respect, it may work better for him if he is with friends. … [During the previous year, other children tended to interact with him in ways he felt comfortable with], but sometimes children’s minds were not there [and had conflicts with him]. If we see his [development] for an extended period of time, he can’t avoid it. Somewhat, you know, instead of saying “No” automatically, like the allergy reaction, I’d like him to be able to go along with [these hardships], even though he doesn’t like [to do so] or finds it difficult. Otherwise, he must be stressed out. I
also think I want him to be able to [cope with] through interactions with other children. It doesn’t happen without parents’ understanding. So, I think this year, he must be struggling. I think he should have a feeling like he wants to [study and play] with [other children]. He should have a feeling that he wants to make an effort. I don’t think he doesn’t want [to make an effort] any more, but probably, his feeling, his willingness to do his best, is heading somewhere else. Then, it makes it more difficult for him. I don’t know what it is like right now, but unless we set goals for him relatively lower, so he feels he can do it, and those goals are met on a daily basis, his life at school may become more difficult.

During the time I worked with him as a teaching assistant, I also observed that he gave up easily and tried to switch the tasks when activities, academic or otherwise, including playing with other children, were difficult. Frequently, he quit or got confused when he made the first mistake. He also did not like his mistakes to be openly corrected. If we pushed him to correct them, he would say, “No” and withdraw. Learning from the hand washing incident with Mrs. S (See Chapter 7), I let him do as he wanted, even though I knew the way he insisted would not work as he expected. From such experiences, he learned what worked and did not work.

Indeed, Mrs. S and I intentionally created these situations in order to let him know that there were rules he had to follow at school. Mrs. S told me the story about hand washing along with his behaviors and attitudes during the past few weeks and what she heard from his mother. After he moved to the resource room, the initial goal that teachers set for him was to adjust to the new environment, the resource room, and to establish relationships with people in the resource room and teaching assistants including me. As he met the goal earlier than teachers anticipated, he began to enjoy the “freedom” of being in the resource room. He started refusing tasks and requesting to go to the library and other rooms while other children were studying in their
classrooms. Mrs. S. and the principal discussed that he should learn that the rules he had to follow in his regular classrooms still applied in the resource room, for example, following adults’ directions.

This strategy worked, however it was exhausting for both Dai and me, if we had this sort of situation several times a day. Dai was tired of making an effort to calm down and I was tired of thinking what and how I could give him feedback without him becoming emotional. Within a week, he attempted to run away from the resource room. When he returned, Dai and I talked about what we could do. I asked him to let adults know where he was going before leaving classrooms. He said, “Then, I can’t hide.” We agreed to make a hiding place in the resource room. Soon after that, we walked around the resource room to find a place to create the hiding place. In the corner of the study area, we put a desk and a chair and enclosed them by partitions, which also served as a door to enter the hiding place. We also made rules together on how to use the place, such as, “He can use the hiding place when…” and “He has to notify adults before going to the hiding place.” While discussing the hiding place, he told me, “Lucky, I had a hiding place when I was in 1st grade.” When I showed the hiding place to his mother, who came to pick him up, she told me that it took a while for him to adjust to the 1st grade classroom and he had attempted to run away from the classroom. His first grade classroom teacher created a space for him to calm down. He remembered it and requested a similar place when I asked him what he needed. The following excerpt from my field note illustrates how the hiding place worked when Dai had a problem.

[After the recess, Dai, Yusuke, and another child were picking up toys.] Dai pulled the tricycle over to the cabinet, but he put it where the other children were going to place a vaulting box. I told him, “The tricycle is in the way of the vaulting box, so why don’t you put it there?” but he said, “I won’t.” When I asked him again, he was not smiling any
more, and I decided to let him do as he wanted. As I had anticipated, the vaulting box hit the tricycle. As the tricycle leaned toward him, he withdrew and said, “I will go there,” and pointed to the hiding place. As soon as I said, “Ok,” he walked to the hiding place and stayed alone. After 5 minutes or so, when Yusuke was ready to go to the gym for the 5th period, I told Dai through the partitions to wait for 5 minutes until I came back from the gym. When we were about to leave, Dai said, “I’m ok now,” and came out from the hiding place. I asked him if he wanted to come with us and he said, “Yes”, so, we three went to the gym. (field note, 7/3/2009)

The “hiding place” worked very well. It shows the impact of appropriate support and accommodations on Dai’s functioning at school. Dai also knew how to use the hiding place. More importantly, he knew from his experience that a hiding place would work and he was able to express his need of a place to “hide.” This episode showed that he had the ability to learn from past experiences. Yet, such accommodations and support might not always be available at school, especially in a large classroom where there were many other children. If Dai is not able to receive appropriate support, his classroom may become a stressful place.

As teachers indicated, Dai’s mother was also struggling and did not want other children to know about his problems. She understood that Dai needed more support than was available in his regular classroom, but was not able to admit that Dai could not remain in the classroom. During the individual interview, she shared what she thought.

It was really hard from the beginning [to take care of him]. 1st grade and 2nd grade were the exceptions. It was the only time I thought things went well. Because 1st and 2nd grades were the time everything went well like a dream, right now, I feel like it’s turned back, again. During these 2 years, he had developed [as other children did], and I thought he was going to develop [without any problem], so, I was shocked, it was too much, yes.
The resource room was located next to a special education classroom, so in addition to Yusuke, Dai had a chance to play with three other children during recess as well as Yusuke. In addition, children from regular education classrooms came to play with the equipment in the resource room, such as cushions, gym mattresses, blocks, balls, a tricycle, and other materials. Therefore, the resource room was a place for other children to interact with children with special needs, although these materials seemed to be more attractive for children from regular classrooms, than interacting with children in the resource room and the special education classroom. During his first few days at the resource room, Dai was very quiet and read books alone at recess, but over the next week, he gradually joined the group of children and they played together.

It was clear to staff members, such as administrators, Mrs. K, and other teachers who knew him well, that Dai looked happier in the resource room. Since the resource room for Dai and Yusuke was considered a temporary placement until they were able to come to school regularly, staff members had to decide what to do for these children once they met their initial goals. My field note described how Mrs. S responded when Mrs. Y and I asked about Dai.

What Dai thinks and what his mother thinks are a bit different. There was a choice to place Dai in the special education classroom, but we decided to start from the resource room [for her, not for Dai]. His mother wants him to study at the regular classroom, but Dai has already accepted the resource room and likes it better. After he started studying at the resource room, he looks good, recently, so his mother may think differently right now. It might be a detour for him, but we decided [to place him in the resource room, not the special education classroom] for his mother. (field note, 6/24/2009)

In short, Dai was placed in the resource room as a transition until his mother accepted that he needed support at the special education classroom. If Dai came to the resource room, he
was able to study with teaching assistants. It was better than staying at home. Still, studying with
different teaching assistants each day may not be good when considering his progress in the long
term. Mrs. S. clearly stated,

We have to consider children’s outcome on a long term basis, even after they graduate
from here. We just can’t make a decision day by day to make children happy. …To tell
the truth, other children already know he is different, because he is in the resource room.
I think the transition to the special education classroom may be easier than the transition
to the resource room [for his mother]. (field note, 6/20/2009)

Transition to the Special Education Classroom

Two weeks before the summer break, Dai’s mother talked with the principal and decided
to place him in the special education classroom. The next day, the classroom teachers prepared
his desk in the special education classroom. Mrs. S told me that his mother was shocked when
she found his desk in the special education classroom the next morning when she came with him
to school. Even though it took time to officially transfer him to the special education classroom,
the school provided a chance for him to study there, in addition to the resource room. Mrs. S
clarified to his mother that the desk prepared for him meant “welcome.” He still belonged to the
regular classroom officially and had three places he could go, his regular classroom, the resource
room, and the special education classroom (field note, 7/8/2009).

From that day, Dai technically studied at the special education classroom and was taught
by two special education classroom teachers, but officially on paper, he still belonged to his 3rd
grade regular classroom. It seemed that his mother was not ready to transfer him to the special
education classroom yet. It was the school’s accommodation for her to be emotionally ready.

After he started studying at the special education classroom, Dai himself described what
he thought of regular classrooms (2nd and 3rd grades), the resource room, and the special
education classroom. He described the resource room as “different,” for example, “There are many text books [for Mrs. Y to teach children from various grade levels], toys but not much, and a computer, there are many things [that he has not seen in his regular classroom].” He also talked about studying at the resource room, “It’s easy.” The worksheets and other materials selected by teachers involved content he had already learned in 1st and 2nd grades. Keeping him motivated to learn and providing an environment he was able to enjoy and come to school every day were the priority during this period, rather than learning new academic skills. When I asked which classroom he liked the best. His response was as follows (interview):

Dai: Sure, the best is the Rainbow Room [special education classroom] and the second is the Challenge Room [resource room].

Misa: Ok, then why do you think the Rainbow Room is the best?

Dai: Because, you know, there are lots of toys, there are many things I wanna do. It looks fun [to be with] them.

Misa: In the Rainbow Room?

Dai: Yes, and teachers are kind.

Misa: Ok, then next, how about the 3rd grade classroom?

Dai: Something.

Misa: Something what?

Dai: Because there are 37 children, so I think it’s noisy.

Misa: It’s noisy, well, do you like a quiet place better?

Dai: Yeah.

Misa: Alright. Is there anything you find it different from the 2nd grade classroom?

Dai: Yes, yes.

Misa: What, what??
Dai: Two classrooms become one classroom, and it gets difficult, studying.

Misa: It’s getting difficult. Sure, it’s because you are a 3rd grader [and older than 2nd graders].

Still, he explained that he liked the 3rd grade classroom better than the 2nd grade classroom. He described what he liked about his 3rd grade classroom, for example, he liked that the children told him okaeri-nasai (welcome back) when he went back to the classroom. At the same time, he was not comfortable with being in the classroom, especially during the recess.

Misa: How do you think about friends in your classroom, like itte-rasshai (Come back here) and okaeri-nasai?

Dai: Kind.

Misa: Kind, ok, do you like play with them?

Dai: Yeah.

Misa: Alright, then where do you like playing with them best, here [resource room] or the classroom?

Dai: Here.

Misa: Here. Why do you think so?

Dai: Sometimes I don’t have friends [to play with].

Misa: That must be hard…

Dai: But here, there are toys and other things, so it’s ok. I can play by myself.

Misa: There are other children here too. You can play by yourself and also with other children.

Dai: But, sometimes they don’t come, not many children come here.

Misa: I see, there are times when many children come and when not many children come.

Dai: And, I think it’s too noisy.
In short, interpersonal problems and the increasing demands of study that began overwhelming him seemed to have made it hard for Dai to go back to his regular classroom. In the resource room and the special education classroom, he enjoyed studying at his own pace free from the pressure to maintain interpersonal relationships with other children.

At this point in time, Dai spent most of the day at either the resource room or the special education classroom. He began considering himself as a “child of the Rainbow Room.” When Dai and I went to the library, we stopped by the 3rd grade classroom. Their school bags were on their desks, but no children were there. A second grade boy found us in the hallway and asked him:

2nd grade boy: Dai!, Dai! Where are all the 3rd graders?
Dai: I don’t know, too.
Boy: You don’t know? You are in 3rd grade, right?
Dai: Because I’m in the Rainbow Room.
Boy: Aren’t you in “Fight” [the name of the 3rd grade classroom]? (field note, 7/13/2009)
Dai was, at the same time, confused that he also was a child in the 3rd grade classroom. Before the summer break, the 3rd grade classroom held a party, called “Apricot party.” Children had been preparing in groups what they would make using apricots and how to make them. Although Dai was assigned to one of the groups, he had not participated in discussions to prepare for the party. I, who worked with him on a daily basis, also did not know if he could participate until I went to the home economics room and found Dai working in one of the groups. His mother was also there as one of the volunteer parents helping children cook and clean. As soon as Dai found me, he came to talk to me about what his group was making and then went back to the group. After Dai left, his mother came to talk to me about what Dai asked her the day before (field note, 7/16/2009).
He said he didn’t want to come last week. It sounds like they will have a farewell party for a child who is transferring to another school, but Dai hadn’t heard [from them] to come to the party. He asked me, “Why?” so I said, “Because you haven’t been [in the classroom].” Instead of [the farewell party], I asked him if he wanted to come to the Apricot party. He asked me like, “Do [you think] I can go?” I said, “Sure” and, “Do you want me to call Mrs. K?” and I called her. Then, she told us [not only to come to the party], but he could join the group [and make his apricot snack]. Once he comes here, he looks very happy and enjoys himself, but what I heard is that he doesn’t like to be alone during recess or breaks [Mrs. S explained later to me that even if he looked enjoying, when they asked him individually, his responses frequently were negative, such as concerns and confusions]. (field note, 7/16/2009)

At the end of the party, children ate what they made. However, children in several groups that made apricot sorbet had to wait until the after lunch recess to eat. Dai was in one of these groups. After they ate and cleaned the dishes, children talked about their afternoon classes. It was the first time I saw him telling other children what he thought about the special education classroom.

One of the children asked Mrs. K what they would do in the 5th period. When Mrs. K answered that a Japanese Language quiz was waiting, children said “Really??” Dai, who was listening to this conversation, smiled and said happily to them, “I’ll do craft. I made a calendar [of September, after the summer break], so I’ll go find plants that look like susuki [Japanese pampas grass, usually found during the fall; he was going to put the plants on his calendar]. Doesn’t this sound nice?” (field note, 7/16/2009)

These excerpts illustrate that Dai recognized that he was a child in the special education classroom, but wanted to remain connected with children in his regular classroom.
6 Months Later: Winter, 2010

When I visited the school in January, 2010, Dai was struggling due to conflicts between his mother and Mrs. T, who was one of two special education classroom teachers and responsible for him. His mother had lost trust in Mrs. T, and made complaints to the principal and even directly to the local board of education. I met her at the beginning of January when she came to school with Dai. After we greeted each other, she asked me to report to her if I saw the teacher forcing Dai to do something he did not want to do.

Before the summer break, Dai came to school in the morning by himself, although his mother came to pick him up after school on most days. There were days when he came late with his mother or was absent, but it was once a week or less. However, in January, his absence became regular, 2-3 days a week, and even when he came to school, it was usually before or after the morning recess, and he was always accompanied by his mother.

Mrs. T had higher expectations for Dai, for example, to be able to eat lunch in his regular classroom with peers. Actually, eating lunch in the regular classroom had become the largest stress for him. Even before the summer break, it was an issue and his mother was concerned about whether he had to eat in his regular classroom. When I met him in the winter, he was given choices regarding where he would eat every day, but it overwhelmed him, because he knew Mrs. T wanted him to eat in the regular classroom. This conflict created an atmosphere in which he felt compelled to eat in the regular classroom. According to his mother, every morning this conflict created extra stress and pressure to avoid school.

On one day, the principal visited the special education classroom when his mother was there. The principal, Dai, and his mother discussed that it was ok to eat in the special education classroom or the resource room with Mrs. T and me, if it made it easier for him to come to school. At the beginning of January, I was told by Mrs. T to refrain from eating with Dai. During
the summer, I usually ate lunch with him at the resource room or the special education classroom, and she thought my presence might affect his decision to eat in the regular classroom. However, on the next day after we had talked with the principal, Mrs. T again asked Dai where he would eat. After Dai said he would eat at the regular classroom, Mrs. T told him he could choose wherever he liked. After a silence, Mrs. T told him to decide by the end of the 4th period, before the lunch. He then asked me where I would eat.

Dai: Where will you eat today?

Misa: I haven’t decided yet.

Dai: Here [with me]?

Misa: With you? Ok, then which room [the resource room or the special education room]?

Dai: There [the resource room].

Misa: What’s there?

Dai: Challenge Room [the resource room]. (field note, 1/27/2010)

After Dai answered, “Challenge Room,” I looked at Mrs. T who was nodding, and let him go to the resource room. Despite the principal’s decision that Dai did not have to eat lunch in the regular classroom, Mrs. T again asked him where he would eat lunch. This conflict could disrupt her relationship with Dai. He answered he would eat at the regular classroom as Mrs. T wanted, but when he was asked for the second time, he could not answer. Both Mrs. T and Dai looked exhausted.

After Dai left, Mrs. T described to me what Dai and his mother were like since I had left the school before the summer break. She thought very seriously about Dai and was concerned about his lack of independence. At the same time, she was frustrated with things that did not go as she expected, including his relationships with other children in his regular classroom, preparation for the achievement text coming in a few weeks, and how hard it was to work with
him. For example, she observed that children in his regular classroom were very nice to him. They waited for him to eat lunch and invited him to play during recess. She felt sorry for the other 3rd graders, because if Dai was not able to join them, it looked like these children did something wrong to him, despite their willingness to help him.

She also had difficulties in maintaining a relationship with his mother. Mrs. T was confused by his mothers’ over sensitive reactions. According to Mrs. T., whatever she indicated, his mother would react defensively. Another example Mrs. T told me was that during the second week in January, a meeting was scheduled to make an official decision to place Dai in the special education classroom. Mrs. T worked with his mother to prepare and arrange someone to take care of Dai at home, so that she could attend the meeting. Yet, the meeting was postponed when his mother cancelled on the day the meeting was scheduled. All these thoughts and experiences made the relationships between Dai, Mrs. T, his mother, and other school staff members complicated, and consequently, put Dai in a more difficult environment. It seemed that he did not have a person on whom he could rely either at home or at school. Whatever he was told at school or at home was denied when he went home or came to school.

I was there at the school until the S Festival, which was scheduled at the first weekend in February. All children in S Elementary School participated in presentations in their classrooms. Children in the special education classroom opened a restaurant and presented about vegetables they grew. On the day of the festival, there was a miscommunication between Mrs. T and children regarding cleaning their room after the presentation. It was a misunderstanding of the day’s schedule between the children and Mrs. T, and she had to clean by herself until the children came back from recess. She was upset and not in a good mood until the end of the day. I heard from Mrs. Y that from then on, Dai’s absence increased until the end of the school year in March.
The principal told me that they knew about the problems, but they had to go through two more months, until the end of the school year. Five months later when I visited the school, the principal explained that they had decided that next year another teacher, one who had a special education certification, would take the special education classroom, so they had to get through the school year without further problems.

**4th Grade in the Special Education Classroom**

Dai officially transferred to the special education classroom in 4th grade. According to the special education classroom teacher, his transition at the beginning of the school year in April was difficult. Yet, when I visited the school in June, every time I saw Dai in the hallway or his classroom, he was smiling and working happily as a member of a group of seven children in the special education classroom. While I was there for five weeks, Dai came to school almost everyday. He arrived at school in the morning and attended the morning meeting and activities with other children and went home with a child living near his home. This school year, all children, not only him, can choose where they eat lunch, and he is enjoying eating with other children in the special education classroom. During the 3rd and 4th periods in the morning, children may go to regular classrooms depending on the subjects taught in each classroom. When I visited the special education classroom, Dai stayed there while all other children went to regular classrooms. He enjoyed his time there with two teachers. While teachers were preparing for the rest of the day, he worked on worksheets by himself. He had less time to interact with children in regular classrooms than other children in the special education classroom had, but, he enjoyed visiting classrooms during cleaning time and playing outside with other children during recess. I saw his mother once at the school, but she was not there to observe Dai. She was working at the library as a volunteer. Her face looked much better than when I saw her the last time several months earlier. When Dai has a teacher who creates an environment where he has
less stress, he functions better, and further, it also seems to have positively affected his mother.

**Yusuke (5th grade – 6th grade)**

Yusuke is a 5th grade boy with a language disability (stuttering), and a learning disability. Aside from his stuttering, he was considered a “normal” child, until he exhibited his struggle by refusing to go to school in 4th grade. His ability to comprehend and learn by listening is high, but he has difficulties in reading, writing, and doing math calculations. He is aware that he cannot read and write at the level of other 5th graders, which has negatively impacted his self-esteem, for example, he described himself as “hopeless.” He is very sensitive and can attend to other people’s feelings. This frequently puts him in a difficult situation. He tries to accommodate others as much as possible by setting his desires and emotions aside. He usually does not express his struggle verbally. His parents and educators did not notice his struggle until he stopped coming to school. I observed his progress over one year. As his parents understand his disabilities and additional needs and work collaboratively with educators, he began to enjoy playing with other children and to understand and learn how to cope with his difficulties, for example, by creating his own world of play in which he was a train driver. In the 6th grade, he gained confidence and enjoyed his “life” at school more than the previous year.

**Transition to the Resource Room**

Until Dai joined in June, 2009, Yusuke studied at the resource room by himself with Mrs. Y and teaching assistants. Yusuke had stopped coming to school after the summer break when he was in 4th grade. His mother told me that children in other grades made fun of his speech problems and it usually happened at the entrance, where children changed their shoes to indoor shoes, so he was not able to go into the entrance and frequently turned back home (field note, 7/9/2009). She heard from him that he was not able to understand the instructions at school, and was “scared” and explained, “I don’t like [school].” He even told her he did not want to go on
living.

With his classroom teacher’s and other teachers’ support, Yusuke was first able to come to school after school hours and then to the school nurse’s office during the day. The principal suggested to Yusuke that he could study with children in the special education classroom, so he was able to be with other children. He, however, refused this, and during the rest of his 4th grade year, he studied at the school nurse’s office, a counseling room, or the principal’s office.

From April, 2009, the beginning of 5th grade, the school made the resource room available for Yusuke to stay and study. Other children studying at the resource room came only when Mrs. Y was at school, on Wednesdays, but he also studied at the resource room on other days with teaching assistants. His mother came everyday to school with him, which was Yusuke’s request. His mother said, “In April, when [the school] created this room, he said, ‘I’ll go to school if you come with me.’ Since then, I’m coming here every day, but I couldn’t get over and felt, ‘How long do I have to do this?’ or ‘Why am I here at school?’” At the same time, she appreciated what teachers had done for Yusuke:

It was the teachers, who provided a room for him, and he used this room all by himself, and well, I wonder what other children may think. There should be children who think [he is] a teacher’s favorite. “Why [do the teachers] treat Yusuke better than us?”, or like that. I understand it looks like that, but for me, I really appreciate it, because he was not able to step into the classroom, actually.

Mrs. Y, a resource room teacher, also talked about Yusuke when she met him at the beginning of the school year:

Well, [I was shocked] when I saw him the first time. He kept telling me he was bad, hopeless. It looked like [he had] no confidence… He looks better right now, but at the beginning of the year, he looked low and didn’t come to school. He didn’t come to school
if his mother was not with him. He reported that other 5th graders studied in their classroom, but he was here [the resource room], so he was not [as good as other children]. Children of his age already have established a sort of self esteem [or self respect], so, he wondered why he couldn’t do this or that. He also told me he wanted to be an adult soon. What he meant by he wanted to grow up was a little different, I thought, from other children. I mean, he likes trains, so, he wants to work at the O station [train station near his home]. Anyway, it’s because the school is a place he can’t really enjoy, I think, but it seems that [what the school means for him] has changed a bit [after being in the resource room for 3 months].

He usually came to school with his mother around 9am or sometimes later before or during the morning recess, around 10am. His mother stayed at the resource room with him until lunchtime. She came back after school to pick him up usually with his younger sister after picking her up from preschool. His younger sister sometimes went to his regular classroom with Yusuke, so other children already were familiar with her and knew her name.

When I met Yusuke in June, his attitude towards his 5th grade classroom had changed slightly, according to Mrs. Y and Mrs. S, the special education coordinator. He went to eat lunch in his classroom occasionally, and participated in meetings in his classroom to make plans and prepare for an overnight field trip scheduled in July. Mrs. S told me that Yusuke had been participating in practice for the sports festival with other 5th graders [for several weeks] until mid June, and he looked better after the sports festival (field note, 6/19/2009).

Still, Yusuke was hesitant about going to the classroom by himself and asked one of the teaching assistants to come with him, if they were available. His 5th grade classroom teacher discussed how he benefited from being in the resource room with teaching assistants.

He can’t come in to the classroom. When [we] think of what we can do for him, now,
there is a room for him, Challenge Room [resource room], and always teachers [teaching assistants] are there, that really helps. For example, there are several [teaching assistants] in the Challenge Room, and when he and other children eat lunch, they can ask like, “Can you come with me?” and they come to classrooms with children. Things like that, for these children, if [there is someone coming with them], you know, they can feel easy about [going to their classrooms], but we didn’t have that kind of [support] last year, so, he might have thought that he had to go to the classroom or might be able to give it a try, but couldn’t make it, it’s like that. Then, he wasn’t able to come to the classroom, and that made it more difficult to come to school, I think. But right now, there is a room and teachers [teaching assistants] are there, so, it’s good for children and also I feel they are helping me, too.

During my first visit to the school from June-July, 2009, I primarily worked as a teaching assistant for Yusuke and Dai at the resource room, and there were days I was the only available “teacher” for them once or twice in a week. Eventually, Yusuke began trying out going back to his classroom, for example, during lunch time and other periods, including Music and Social Studies to prepare for the field trip, but he needed someone to go with him. Yet, Dai still wanted to keep a distance from his classroom and remain in the resource room, so there were times Yusuke and Dai had to accommodate each other. Dai once went to Yusuke’s classroom with us and observed and interacted with 5th graders seeding soy beans. The other days, Dai ate lunch with Mrs. S at the school nurse’s office when I went to Yusuke’s classroom to eat lunch. Yusuke also came with Dai and me to see Mrs. K, a 3rd grade classroom teacher, when Dai had questions for her.

The following excerpt from my field note describes what happened during one of these occasions, when three of us visited Dai’s classroom (field note, 6/29/2009). It was a few days
after another teaching assistant pretended to be a person who was blind and let Dai guide him to the staff room.

In the elevator, Dai held one of his legs with his hand and stood on one leg. He hopped and told us,

Dai: Look look!

Misa: What are you doing?

Dai: I’m pretending. I’m a person who can’t use a leg.

Misa: Well… pretending [like this] may not be ok.

Dai: I can see what happens if that person can’t use a leg.

Misa: That’s right, you can see what these people are like, but it’s not good to imitate just for fun.

Yusuke: Imitating isn’t good… someone did to me [imitating the way he speaks]. (field note, 6/25/2009)

At this point in time, Yusuke did not know about his learning disability yet, but he was aware that he had speech problems, which was one of the reasons it was hard for him to come to school. He went to the pull-out special education classroom for children with language disabilities at another elementary school once a week during the morning to work with a special education teacher individually. He also has recognized that children in the special education classroom at S Elementary School all have some sort of disability. For example, after he played with children in the special education classroom, which was located next to the resource room, he shut down a computer one of these children used during recess, saying, “Because S is a child with a disability [I am taking care of what they didn’t], but he knows [about certain things] very well (field note, 6/29/2009).”

When Yusuke was in 4th grade, he refused to study at the special education classroom,
even though it was meant to be temporary. After spending some time together with three children in the special education classroom, his attitude towards the special education classroom changed. His mother described this “transition” as follows (individual interview).

Misa: One of them [in the special education classroom] is also a 5th grader.

Mother: Yeah,

Misa: He sometimes stops by to go to the [regular] classroom [with Yusuke].

Mother: Really?

Misa: In these couple of days. He says, “Let’s go together” and waits [for Yusuke].

Mother: Yes, recently, his presence becomes very big for Yusuke. How to describe… they are helping each other, well, Yusuke is supported, may be.

Misa: Always they are together whenever I see [during recess].

Mother: Yeah, I think … it was very good for him to be able to get along with these children. He becomes able to admit that he has a language disability, stuttering, and it’s same as these children who have autism. He used to hide “stuttering” but he came to admit that only the names of disabilities were different, and they were all the same “disabilities.” I guess, he thought he got picked on because “I have a disability.” While watching children [in the special education classroom] and receiving energy from them, he must have learned from them that even though [they have disabilities], they can come to school and have fun, very naturally through experiencing the same things together.

Therefore, he is able to say that he has a language disability and stutters a lot without hesitation to S [one of the children in the special education classroom]. S asks Yusuke like everyday, why he speaks like this, holding [a sound] like that, or why stumbling over.

Misa: Children ask like that?

Mother: Well, yeah. S and other children can’t hold everything what they hear [from
adults], so, ask Yusuke in person. Yusuke also knows they have disabilities, too, so he tells them about his disability, honestly, like “it’s my way to speak, that’s way I’m going to T Elementary School [for pull out special education classroom for children with language disabilities],” he became able to say like this honestly, so, I really appreciate it, [the school] created this room [next to the special education classroom].

While admitting that he had a language disability, Yusuke was struggling with learning academic skills. He acted as a big brother to Dai and helped him to interact with other children and get involved in play. When it came time to work on worksheets, Yusuke was struggling with questions for 1st or 2nd graders, and sometimes Dai was ahead of him. Dai, who did not care how Yusuke might feel, said to him, “I’ve done the same one.” This made it hard for Yusuke to come to school, even to the resource room. Mrs. S who heard about this from Yusuke’s mother suggested to the teaching assistants that Yusuke and Dai sit apart when they study together at the resource room, so each of them would not be able to interrupt what the other was working on. His mother described his potential “learning disability” and how he was struggling:

Children in the special education classroom have some sort of diagnosis, such as autism. Yusuke also has [disabilities]. [I took him] to the hospital, but [a doctor] didn’t give him a diagnosis [of learning disability]. Yusuke goes to the “class for speech and hearing,” a pull out special education classroom, but that’s it. He has to “live” in his regular education classroom during the rest of the time. He was told at the hospital that he had a bit of learning disability and a bit of ADHD, and also stuttering, but [the doctor said he] couldn’t give him a diagnosis of learning disability, because he had only part of it. [The doctor] also said the number of children like Yusuke was increasing, and they were the children who were in the most difficult place to handle. If we can give him a diagnosis, like “you have a learning disability” and give him a name of disability, things may go
very smooth. He may think, “I am like this, so I’ll learn something [I am good at],” but when [we are] told, [the doctor] can’t give him a diagnosis because it’s just a part of it, and he has to hang in there in the regular classroom, but actually, if he goes to his 5th grade classroom, he can’t follow instruction, can’t write, can hardly understand anything. This can make him anxious, and this was one of the reasons he couldn’t get in the classroom.

Yusuke’s mother also struggled until she understood that he needed additional support at school, so, Mrs. S arranged for her to talk with a school psychologist visiting the school once a month (See also Chapter 5). His father’s lack of understanding also had affected relationships within the family. This made it more difficult for Yusuke to come to school. Because he heard his parents arguing at home, he was anxious that his mother might leave home while he was at school. If he was with his mother at school, his level of anxiety was low. Later, Mrs. S and a school psychologist discussed that his parents’ reconciliation also led to a good result for Yusuke (field note, 7/8/2009).

After being in the resource room with Yusuke for several months, his mother noticed the change in his attitude at school and home. He did not tell his parents what he was struggling until he could no longer go to school. Yet, she observed that he was hyper after he got home even though he was very quiet at school. She observed that Yusuke looked like a very different person at school when he was in 4th grade, and he might have thought that he had to bear [or endure: *gaman*], even if he had problems. She continued, in the resource room, “He walked and ran around [as he wanted, even during the time he was supposed to study], but he was not as hyper as he used to be at home” (field note, 6/29/2009).

While spending time with Dai and other children in the special education classroom, Yusuke’s perception changed gradually. He found a place “where he belongs” at the resource
room, just as Dai found his place at the resource room and the special education classroom. Not only had he found his “place,” but also he created his own “world” of play within the resource room. In the world of play, he was a train driver, which was his dream even during the time when he was not able to come to school. This also became a source of motivation for him to work hard. This play helped him establish relationships with other children. Yusuke’s “train” was a tricycle. Other children played with the tricycle, but he was the first one who pretended to be a train driver and used desks and gym mattresses as “stations.” Since then, other children began to recognize the tricycle as a “train.” They made train stations together, and the “train” carried a passenger on its back and took the passenger to his destination. When Yusuke was alone, he still was a train driver and rode around the room.

This imaginary world functioned as a safe place for him, which protected him from the sources of stress at school that prevented him from entering his regular classroom and contributed to his extended period of absence from school. He actually used a word, “world [of study]” to express his readiness to begin studying after recess. When the after lunch recess was over and other children went back to their classrooms, he was still in the play area of the resource room and continued to pretend.

I told him it might be better if he finished what he didn’t like first, but he said, “I wanna do what I don’t like later. I promise. I will do the worksheet after this.” So, I told him that he could play until 1:55 and then [he] had to study. …“One more minute!” and I counted down. When I said, “30 seconds,” he said, “I’m going to the world of Japanese Language.” It looked like he tried to make up his mind. He said, “I need to prepare” and lay on a gym mattress a while and went to his desk. (field notes, 7/7/2009)

Yusuke enjoyed playing with friends at school, but he still needed to make an effort to adjust to school.
Before the summer break, Yusuke and his mother had a chance to talk with the principal about studying at the special education classroom. Yusuke once refused this when he was in 4th grade, but this time, he was very excited about the transition. The next day, both Yusuke and Dai started studying at the special education classroom, before the paperwork to transfer them to the special education classroom was completed. They had the “trial” period to think about whether the special education classroom was the best fit for them until the end of the school year.

On the first day at the special education classroom, Yusuke ran to school by himself at 8:05am and waited for a staff member to unlock the door of the entrance. His mother who usually came with him came to the special education classroom during the 2nd period. She reported to Mrs. Y, who had been working with him for over 3 months at the resource room, “I told him don’t come to school any more for Mrs. A, [the principal, but come to school for himself].” During the individual interview with his mother a few days later, she said:

Mother: He is a child who starts running without thinking and can’t continue, so I’m still anxious if he may feel overwhelmed, but now, at least in these couple of days, he is enjoying, so, I think it’s good enough.

Misa: He was very excited yesterday.

Mother: Yeah, [he said.] “I’m going,” “I wanna run with them,” and “I wanna do the morning meeting.” [Running at the gym was part of the morning meeting in the special education classroom.] Because he was here [in the resource room] alone, he might have felt lonely sometime, I think.

A week before the summer break, Yusuke told me what he thought about his regular classroom, the resource room, and the special education classroom. He described the regular classroom as the place where it was noisy and he got nervous. In contrast, the Challenge Room [resource room] was for him a quiet place where he studied something that was hard to
understand or he did not understand. The Rainbow Room [special education classroom] was the place he liked the best. According to Yusuke, the Rainbow Room was similar to the Challenge Room, but there were the same teachers always, and he was able to be with other children and enjoy running, exercising, and studying together.

**Special Education Classroom: Winter, 2010**

After he started studying at the special education classroom, Yusuke was able to go to his regular classroom without a teaching assistant. One of the children in the special education classroom was in the same grade level, and when he went to the regular classroom, he waited for Yusuke and they went together. When I visited the school in winter, 6 months later, he did not require a teaching assistant’s support at all when he went to the regular classroom. He usually came to school with friends in the morning, not with his mother. His mother showed up on a daily basis, and he looked forward to it, but he was more independent than when I saw him in summer.

However, when problems occurred in school, it was hard for him to come back the next day. In such cases, he was absent or came to school late with his mother. For example, his special education classroom teacher told me that she let him go home in a good mood as much as possible. If he goes home feeling down, he will not be able to come to school the next day. One day, he was looking forward to band practice for the music recital for children in special education that was scheduled for the following month. He was waiting for a teacher to get a key to the music room during the morning recess, but found out that they had to go somewhere else to practice making an announcement for the S Festival coming in a few days. It was a day they did not have recess after lunch, still, he kept asking teachers if they could practice. Teachers decided to take some time after school for him, and all children went to the music room, even though some of them wanted to go home. One of the teachers said, “If we didn’t do that, he
won’t come to school tomorrow” (field note, 2/3/2010).

He looked better and I saw more smiles compared with what I saw 6 months earlier. Still, he was more sensitive than other children. In addition, he began questioning his ability to learn and it became a source of frustration for him. One day, he did not come to school. Mrs. S explained to me his absence on the next day:

He was absent yesterday because he asked his mother about his “difficulties.” Mrs. S talked with his mother today during the morning. Mrs. S heard from his mother that he asked, “Is there something wrong in my head? You know about it, Mom.” His mother could not answer, and talked with a teacher at T elementary school [where he is going to the pull out special education classroom for his speech problems]. The teacher told his mother that it might be too early to tell him about that, but his mother was concerned, because he kept saying, “I am working very hard, but I can’t do, I don’t get it” and believed, “I’m hopeless.” At the same time, Mrs. S. continued that he can’t accept [what he can’t do], because there are things he can understand easily, but when he looks at what he is not good at, it’s like this [gesture showing uneven ability]. (field note, 1/14/2010)

Mrs. S explained that telling parents about their children’s disabilities works better for their children, but she was concerned about telling children about their own disabilities. After Yusuke’s mother learned that Yusuke’s disability was not because of her parenting style, she refrained from telling him to work hard, and accordingly, he functioned better. It may not mean, however, that telling him about his own disability would have a positive impact on him. Indeed, I heard that telling children about their own disabilities was uncommon when I visited the local board of education (field note, 1/26/2010).

After considering what they could do for Yusuke, Mrs. S and Yusuke’s mother decided to ask me if I could talk with him individually and share my experiences of accepting a wheelchair.
Instead of telling him about his “disability,” they thought that he might be able to learn something from my experiences, even though his disability and my disability were different. Mrs. S told me that he was not good at reading and math, but he had the ability to understand what he heard and make connections to his own experiences.

By the time I talked with Yusuke the following week, he had already heard from his mother about his learning disability. He asked his mother the same question again a few days later and could not come to school. His mother had read books and learned that he would have a more difficult time if no one told him when he wanted to know. She decided to use the day to talk with him. She told Mrs. Y and me how she explained it to him. As his mother described what she had told him to Mrs. Y and me, Yusuke circled around us on the tricycle and listened.

She kept a result of the tests [from a doctor]. She showed it to him and explained that his “ability” to listen and learn was 10 out of 10, but the ability to read, memorize and write what he looked at was 3 out of 10. When other people can memorize in two hours, for him, it may take 6 hours. Therefore, if he tries to keep up with other people, he will be overwhelmed. She said it seemed that he wanted that kind of explanation. He wants to be a train driver. If it takes 2 years for other people, for him, it may take 4 or 6 years. ……

She also told him that she would not be able to go to his junior high school with him as she does now. So, he has to be able to ask someone for what he needs, and if he knows what he can and can’t do, he will be able to ask for help. Teachers are working hard to find how to make things easier for him. They have not found out yet, but he will find together with them. She did not think he would understand if she told him about his learning disability, so she did not tell him the “name” of his disability yet. (field note, 1/20/2010)

After talking with him for an hour, I asked him if there was something he’d like to talk or
found something similar. He said, “What I have and what you have are different, but the same thing is we have something that is a problem (field note and daily log, 1/20/2010).” On the next day, his mother told me that he came back home saying, “It was fun!” and “I wish I could switch my mind like she did.” I had told him how I switched my mind from thinking about what I could not do to looking at what I could. When I left the school in February, he gave me a letter. At the end of the letter, he wrote, “I will remember your wheelchair.”

6th Grade in the Special Education Classroom

When I met Yusuke about 4 months later, he was in 6th grade. 6 graders had special roles as big brothers and sisters for all children in other grade levels. In S Elementary School, all children belong to one of the small groups consisting of children from all grade levels. Occasionally, they work together, such as cleaning rooms once a week and field trips. On such occasions, 6 graders go to the 1st grade classroom to pick up 1st graders in their groups and take care of the younger children. Yusuke also took this “leader” role and I saw him several times at the 1st grade classroom taking care of them as a “big brother.”

From April, the beginning of the new school year, Yusuke officially transferred to the special education classroom. He also had been tested at the local board of education and it was suggested that he could benefit from special education. When I talked with the principal, she made it clear that he was in the special education classroom not because of his attendance issue, but because he needed assistance in learning. However, he is on the borderline and his IQ is higher than other children in special education. If his academic performance is improved as a result of being in the special education classroom, he will not be eligible to receive special education next year, in junior high school, even if he continues to have interpersonal difficulties in regular classrooms (field note, 7/2/2010).

Except when I visited the special education classroom for several days, my observations
were limited. When I saw Yusuke in the hallway and regular and special education classrooms, he worked independently and enjoyed studying, playing, and interacting with other children, especially with children in the special education classroom. He went to his 6th grade classroom by himself, and further, when S, another 6th grader in the special education classroom, decided not to come to the classroom, he was able to let the teacher know that S would not come. When I visited the home economics room while all 6th graders were cooking “breakfast,” he worked collaboratively with children in the same group and laughed and talked with them. Yet, his face looked more relaxed when I saw him in the special education classroom.

Every morning, Yusuke walks to school with friends, not with his mother. From the end of January, his mother started working at the school kitchen of S Elementary School. I saw his mother visiting the special education classroom to see Yusuke frequently in the winter. During this visit, she still visited the classroom sometime, but did not stay as long as she used to. When I spent two days at the special education classroom, I saw her at the classroom on both days, but she left soon after she talked with teachers and saw Yusuke was studying.

While Dai kept coming to talk to me whenever he saw me, Yusuke did not rely on me any more and enjoyed being with other children. He tends to internalize his anxiety, but his classroom teacher knows about this and takes this into consideration when organizing activities and provides support as needed. When he was in 5th grade, Yusuke told me that he could not sleep well and his mother was concerned about his night terrors. He still has this problem. When they had an overnight fieldtrip, the classroom teacher told me she had to talk with his mother about his night terrors before making a final decision regarding the sleeping arrangement on the field trip days.

In this safe environment, he has been able to behave as he wanted over the year. For example, he was a leader of the “Japanese drum club,” which was one of the club activities 3rd
graders and older children could choose to participate in. During the summer festival in mid July, members of the Japanese drum club played the drums in front of the other children, their parents, and visitors from the community. As a leader, he had to make a speech to introduce them. His special education classroom teacher, who knew that he was nervous, went to see him before their performance to talk to him. During the speech and performance, he looked more confident than the previous year.

Kakeru (2nd grade – 3rd grade)

Kakeru is a boy with autism spectrum disorder. He is energetic and enjoys talking and playing with friends in his classroom, but frequently, does not listen to others or pay attention to what other children would think. When I talked to him, he sometimes does not respond and walks away. This looks like ignoring my presence, but he comes to talk to me when he has questions. He has parents who are supportive at both home and school. His parents frequently come to school to assist in activities and work collaboratively with educators. Kakeru is excited when his parents are at school and more motivated to complete tasks than other days.

His behaviors in the classroom can be distractive, such as talking at inappropriate times, but his responses also function as an icebreaker and make the classroom a place where children can actively participate in activities. For example, when his classroom teacher introduced his mother who came to help checking their answers on worksheets, Kakeru announced to the class, “My mom gives you ‘Xs’ if your writing is messy!” He is also proud of his knowledge about “bugs,” and other children acknowledge it. His stories of bugs are impressive, in terms of accuracy, depth, and breadth. His parents have contributed to developing his knowledge. They have fully accepted Kakeru’s disability and understood his needs. This case illustrates how his parents and educators worked collaboratively to create a protected environment at home and school, so that he can make an effort at school.
Receiving Support at the 2nd Grade Classroom

Unlike Dai and Yusuke, Kakeru was in his regular education classroom full time when I visited the school during the summer, 2009. His “disability” was recognized by his parents as well as his classroom teacher, Ms. A, and he received the necessary support from her on a daily basis in his classroom, including support to stay focused, keep on track, and learn social skills.

During the period I was there as a teaching assistant, his parents had a meeting with the principal over the test results sent from the local board of education. His parents were considering pull out support at the special education classroom for him and had him tested prior to the meeting. The principal showed me the results suggesting that he could benefit from studying at the special education classroom. The test results did not clearly stated his potential disability, but the principal told me that she heard verbally from the board of education that he had some characteristics of Asperger’s syndrome described above.

At this point in time, Kakeru might have known that he was different from other children, but he enjoyed studying with them and Ms. A in his regular classroom. As described in the previous chapter, he was known as a specialist of bugs. His reputation extended beyond the 2nd graders. Dai, who was a 3rd grader, also referred to him as a “leader” of bugs who knew much more than him (field note, 7/15/2009). When I saw Kakeru in his classroom or in the hallway, he was usually with friends and talking, running, and laughing. Still, I sometimes saw him staying away from other children.

Kakeru tended to talk during instruction and walk around when Ms. A was not there. He frequently was not ready for the next task. When Ms. A gave directions to the whole class, he frequently needed her prompts and reminders. Always, Ms. A paid attention to him as well as other children and provided assistance to him as needed. For example, when Ms. A told the class to have a text book ready on their desks and open the page to read it aloud, Kakeru was still
working on something else. Before telling children to start reading, Ms. A took his textbook out from his desk, opened the page, and indicated where to read by her finger (field note, 7/10/2009). Ms. A told me that she always assigned Kakeru a desk in the front row so she could give him immediate assistance.

Since Kakeru was in the regular classroom with his peers, I did not have a chance to talk with him individually until I went back to the school in winter, 2010. During the interview with his parents in July, they discussed his “disability,” what they did at home, how he understood his difficulties, and his relationships with peers.

Kakeru’s mother used to be a preschool teacher, and his father worked at an institution for people with mental retardation. They had knowledge about child development and disabilities. Before Kakeru turned two years old, they noticed some unusual behaviors, for example, he did not make eye contact with his parents. Although he passed the regular developmental check-up at age two, his parents kept talking with specialists and finally realized that he had some sort of disability when he was 3 years old.

Unlike Dai’s and Yusuke’s parents who struggled, Kakeru’s parents acknowledged his disability. They had fully accepted Kakeru’s disability before he started 1st grade, and both parents worked to create a safe environment for him at home. According to his mother:

First of all, we started from accepting him, so he can trust our family. … letting him know that there are things he feels bad [outside], but when he has a problem, his family can help him. If he feels safe [at home], that can be a “foundation” for him to find a clue, you know, when he [gets older] and goes to the outside world, he can find, “These people [outside] are not that bad,” or “I like my family.” We are sending a message to him, “We’re here for you.” That’s our starting point, still now.
Yet, raising a child with a disability is challenging. Like other parents, Kakeru’s parents did get frustrated occasionally.

Father: There are many things I want to teach him. I can’t count how many things I want to tell him, a lot of things, but, you know, [we have to] wait, right?

Mother: [waiting for] his development and [appropriate] time to [tell and teach].

F: Exactly.

M: [We are waiting] for it.

F: I think parents of other children say the same thing. They also have to wait until [children are ready], but,

M: [for him], much longer than other [children] and…

F: Much more than others. [We know] that, but…

M: [There are times we feel,] It’s annoying.

F: Yeah, it’s hard, but [we] have to be patient.

M: I feel I want to teach [him] more, a little bit more, so he can take it. But [if I give him too much], he can’t take all of them straightway….While watching over his development, [we tell and teach him] in a way that is best at the time.

Kakeru’s parents have been preparing and waiting for the right time for him to learn about his disability by teaching skills he needs as he develops. According to his mother, Kakeru himself thinks he is a full-member of his classroom and that he is standing at the same place as other children. Since he was in preschool, it was not easy for him to get along with other children, and he had to handle difficult situations. He used these experiences to learn and widen his values. At the same time, Kakeru has realized that what he is suffering may not be same as that of other children. One of the things they can do as parents for him is to encourage him to make an effort,
for example, telling Kakeru that other children also have the same problem. In so doing, he becomes able to handle each problem one by one, which is going to be his strength.

Kakeru’s parents described 1st grade as a time for him to learn that the school was not a bad place and he was able to have fun at school. Yet, Kakeru frequently had problems, even though no problem was serious. For example, he was nervous about doing new things and felt that it was difficult to make friends. When these problems accumulated, he said he did not want to go to school. The 2nd grade teacher had studied special education in college, so Kakeru was able to receive the necessary support without letting her know what he needed in detail. According to his mother, whenever Ms. A found incidents that could make him feel down, she let his parents know, so that they were able to follow up at home. His parents believe that this must be very good for Kakeru. His mother described what Kakeru thought about school;

He says he likes the 2nd grade. It’s fun. There have been many things in terms of relationships with friends during 1st grade, but other children have developed as well. I think [other children think about him] like he does something strange, but he is not that bad. Also, he believes that he knows about bugs better than any other child. I asked him the other day what he thinks when filling out the form [to turn in to school]. He insists that he wants to study hard. When he has something he isn’t good at, he says he wants to study with Ms. A… He already has things he doesn’t like at school, but still, he holds [positive] feelings. I think it’s because he is coming through the right track.

Although his parents were open to talking about Kakeru’s disability to me, they were very careful about telling him about his own disability. His father explained that he had not made Kakeru’s “disability” open to many people, because he has not “started [to understand himself and internalize his problems]” yet. His mother agreed and said, “He has not noticed about himself.” His father further elaborated:
I will tell him from myself [about his disability, rather than having him hear about it from others], and then he notices [his “disability”]. He can “start” when he understands, “I am that kind of person [with a disability]”, but he is not ready yet [to learn about himself], still warming up. So, [what is important] at this moment is how much [we] can prepare for him, such as the environment.

His mother also stated that before telling others about Kakeru’s disability, she would like to talk with him at home first, then let other people know, such as at school. Every year, she considers it may be good if they talk about him at least to parents of children in the same classroom at the beginning of the school year, but at the same time, she thinks it is the best for him to hear about his disability from his own parents at the right time. Therefore, it is ok if other children think he is strange.

Whenever I went to Kakeru’s classroom before recess, he was one of the children who went to find a ball and ask other children to play, and he run together with them to the school ground. If I was late to go to his classroom, I was not able to find him. He was already somewhere playing. When I stopped by his classroom after 2nd graders came back from the field trip to a park near the school, he came out to the hallway and told me that they did not have recess because they went to the park. He looked disappointed, but happily showed other children and me what he caught at the park, a crawfish, and enjoyed talking about it (field note, 7/14/2009).

**Transition to the Resource Room**

When I visited the school in January, 2010, I noticed that Kakeru’s attitude was slightly different. I saw his unhappy faces frequently. He had started studying at the resource room once a week with Mrs. Y from November, 2009. One of my roles as a teaching assistant was assisting Mrs. Y when she came to school once a week to teach children in a small group, usually 1-4
children, and I had a chance to study with Kakeru on a weekly basis.

Kakeru looked happy some days, but the other day, he came in and said, “Too bad… I couldn’t read well.” He explained to us that he was not able to read aloud from a textbook in his classroom as fluently as he had expected. During this week, 2nd graders practiced reading aloud a story in a Japanese Language textbook. This was a collaborative project of two 2nd grade classrooms. Children from each classroom told the story they practiced to children in another classroom. On that day in the resource room, Kakeru was not able to concentrate on tasks Mrs. Y gave him, and asked her for a restroom break or tried to make an excuse, such as, “I have to go get my scissors in my classroom.”

Before the summer break, Kakeru was very good at making an effort to study with other children, even though he was behind them academically. For example, when they worked on worksheets, children who had finished early moved on to the next task written on the blackboard. He was one of the children who kept working on the first task assigned to them. There were times he was not on task, but with Ms. A’s prompts and rewards, he did not give up and continued working on the tasks. Ms. A told me, “He is doing his best, he is great (field note, week 6, 2009).”

However, when Mrs. Y and I worked with him in the resource room during the winter, he frequently said, “I can’t do this,” or “I don’t want to do this, can I play there [the other side of the resource room where children usually play with various toys and tools]?” One of the reasons might be that we were not Ms. A, who had been working with him daily and could motivate Kakeru better than us. Nevertheless, I found that when he felt good, he was eager to work on his tasks in the resource room.

In relation to his placement to the resource room, I heard from one of the 2nd grade teachers that before he began going to the resource room in November, Kakeru told all other 2nd
graders that he would go to the Rainbow Room [special education classroom] beginning April, the start of the next school year. With the request of his parents, classroom teachers arranged the “classroom activity” period so he was able to talk about his problems to 40 other children.

Kakeru’s mother described how this transition happened after I left in July. When Kakeru came back to school after the summer break, he found that the school was no longer a fun place for him. When he was a 1st grader, his priority was to get used to the school. He came to school because it was fun to be with friends, even though there were times he did not feel comfortable. However, in 2nd grade, children were required to “study” more and more. The increasing demands of school work overwhelmed him. Before the summer break, Kakeru was able to keep up “for Ms. A,” because he liked Ms. A and wanted to be praised. His mother said, “He noticed that he had been working with 300% of his energy/ability and wasn’t able to keep working that hard any longer.” At the same time, he also noticed that he might behave inappropriately when he found something fun and got excited. Once he noticed that, he was not able to enjoy recess [with friends] and school became a place that was hard and exhausting (field note, 2/3/2010).

Kakeru’s parents thought that it was the time to talk about his “difficulties” with him, as he had began recognizing that he was different from friends in his classroom. His mother continued, “So, I told him, there is a place at school where you can study in your way,” for example, he would have less homework and tasks and longer recess. Around the same time, Ms. A talked about kokoro during moral education class to children. Kokoro refers to mind, heart, attitude, value system and humanity. Education of kokoro is emphasized in Japan as the important component that facilitates children’s personality development (Okamoto, 2006). Through listening to teachers and his parents, he began to think that it was not bad to do things differently from others, such as studying at a different place. When I talked with his parents during the summer, they said that it was too early to let him know about his disability. Regarding
this, his mother said it came earlier than they anticipated but it was a good chance for him to learn about his “difficulties,” because he recognized and understood himself. His mother also said after he talked about his difficulties and going to the special education classroom to other children, he seemed to be feeling better. Since then, Kakeru began going to the resource room once a week and also working on different tasks from other children in his regular classroom. More importantly, Kakeru looks forward to going to the special education classroom in April (field note, 2/3/2010).

During the time I worked with Kakeru from January to the beginning of February, according to his mother, he was not in a good mood because of the special activities, such as the S Festival coming in a few weeks and the end of the school year exams. Even though he found that it was difficult for him to do the same things as other children, still he had not fully admitted it. He was not yet used to doing things differently from other children in his classroom and felt, “I wanna be with them and do the same thing (field note, 2/3/2010).”

In this sense, Kakeru was in transition to the special education classroom, and struggling to keep his place in his regular classroom. At the same time, his mother told me that she considered studying at the resource room as a “refreshing time” once a week for him. On the day he studied at the resource room, she found he was excited even after he went back home. There were only a few children in the resource room, so he did not have to worry about making mistakes and also he could find people who wanted to listen to his stories [about bugs and other things]. His mother hoped that he would be more confident (field note, 2/3/2010).

As his mother told me, he had lost confidence. My field note described him in the resource room:

[Kakeru was the only one who was scheduled to come during this period. Mrs. Y and I were waiting for him at the resource room.] When we looked out the hallway, we saw
Kakeru coming. He stopped by one of the classrooms, which provided the after school program he was familiar with. When Mrs. Y said, “I hear Kakeru speaking,” he laughed and came in to the resource room from the play area side. There was a curtain in the middle of the resource room that separated the study room and the play area. So, I opened the curtain a little bit and looked into the play area. Kakeru was pretending [playing hide and seek]… Mrs. Y asked him what he had today and opened his bag. [Mrs. Y prepared worksheets for children except Kakeru, because he usually brought worksheets his classroom teacher prepared]. Then, she said, “Let’s continue this, the one you were doing in the morning,” but it seemed that he did not feel like studying, and started talking about other things, such as a trip to the river during the summer break to catch crabs. Again, Mrs. Y asked him, “Let’s do this worksheet,” but he said, “I don’t like school.” After several attempts, he finally started working on questions, but soon talked about other things. … After working on the worksheet for a while, he repeatedly asked, “Can I play [at the play area] if I finish it?” When he finished the worksheet, he said, “5 minutes break?” but Mrs. Y said, “1 minute!” Then, I said, “How about 2 minutes?” and he was allowed to play while Mrs. Y was checking his answers and writing comments. … [I went to the play area with him. He was in a big round container rotating like a spinning top] and said, “There are many people here [in the resource room and the special education classroom] who know about trains well.” I said, “You too know well about bugs, don’t you? It’s great you all have something you are good at.” However, he did not say anything, and the break was over. (field note, 2/3/2010)

It seemed that Kakeru had lost motivation and interest in studying. His understanding of children in the resource room and the special education classroom was that they had something good, for example, “They know about trains.” Therefore, I told him that he too knew a lot about
bugs as much as they knew about trains, because I observed during the summer that he was proud of his knowledge of bugs (See also Chapter 7), but he did not respond.

As his mother indicated, Kakeru also looked like he was struggling to identify places where he belonged, between his classroom, the resource room, and the special education classroom where he would go in April. My field note also described what he was like when I visited a 2nd grade classroom as a guest teacher to talk about my experiences in a wheelchair. Children from two classrooms gathered in one classroom. After asking questions and listening to my stories, they actually had a chance to take turns riding on and pushing a wheelchair.

[After all the children sat on the floor with at a classroom teachers’ direction,] the teacher told children that I was from the United States. Kakeru immediately responded, “I know, I heard from R [a child in another grade level who studied in the resource room].” The teacher continued, “You know already, because sometimes she comes to help you [as a teaching assistant]” but “There are things we don’t know yet, so we will hear about her wheelchair today.” Again, Kakeru said, “I met her at the Rainbow Room [the special education classroom] today” in a loud voice. He raised his hand to ask me questions and participated in the discussion at the beginning, but as other children continued asking questions, he went to the back side of the classroom and lay down on the floor between desks. He was also one of the first children who came to ride on a wheelchair. He said that it looked scary to ride and decided to push first, but enjoyed riding on it after all.

Again, he went back and lay down on the floor while waiting for others. (field note, 1/27/2010)

Kakeru calls the resource room the Rainbow Room which indicates the special education classroom. It might be because he did not know the difference between them. One thing that was clear was that he did not hesitate to tell other children what he saw and did in the resource room.
He enjoyed being with children in his regular classroom and was one of the first children who asked questions and tried out a wheelchair. Still, it was hard for him to sit and wait for other children, so he went to the back and waited in a way that was comfortable. Other children as well as the teacher did not say anything to him. He tried to be one of the members of his regular classroom, but at the same time, enjoyed the freedom of not doing the same things as others. However, doing different things in his classroom could make him feel, “I’m not a child here.”

3rd Grade in the Special Education Classroom

As was planned, Kakeru transferred to the special education classroom in April. He mainly studied at the special education classroom and went to the 3rd grade regular classroom occasionally, such as during Social Studies and Science.

When he was in 2nd grade, he said, “itte-kimasu (I’m coming back soon)” when he left his regular classroom to go to the resource room (staff 11). In the 3rd grade, he said itte-kimasu when he left the special education classroom and said, “tadaima (I’m back)” when he came back from the regular classroom. He recognized the 2nd grade classroom was his place when he was a 2nd grader, but in 3rd grade, he recognized the special education classroom as where he belonged.

When he visited the 3rd grade regular classroom, he still enjoyed talking with other children, especially if it was about bugs, games, and other things he was interested in (field notes, 6/24/2010, 7/22/2010). During the daily activities at school, however, he spent more time with children in the special education classroom. For example, during recess, he usually went out to the playground with children in the special education classroom, rather than other 3rd graders. It seemed that he acted as one of the members of seven children in the special education classroom. Even though he had conflicts with them occasionally, these seven children looked like a group of children always learning together.
Discussion

During interactions with peers and educators, children receiving additional support may find their “identity” as individuals with disabilities. They may not know they have “disabilities,” but they know that they are different, especially if they are the only one in their classrooms receiving such support. “Being different” is a tool of identity for them and this is one example of socially constructed self identity, which is constructed through the mediation of discourse (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). These three children established their identity as “different” as they interacted with their peers, especially after they began studying outside of their classrooms. At the same time, playing and studying together with other children in special education served as a source of support for the three children during this transition.

Vygotsky discussed language and signs as tools to mediate human action (Wertsch, 1991). The discourse on support children receive and even support itself will influence children’s relationships with peers as well as educators. For example, if they receive pull out support outside of their classrooms, they initiate new relationships with teachers providing pull out instruction. In their regular classrooms, they also have to go along with their peers who are curious about these children leaving their classrooms occasionally. Since the support system is new, not many children receive pull out instruction yet. Their peers do not know why these children leave their classrooms. Their curiosity may make the children receiving support realize that they are different from peers. Classroom teachers’ role here is to explain this “new support” so that both children receiving support and their peers are satisfied. If classroom teachers do not have the knowledge of how to handle this situation, they may consult with experienced teachers. Children with disabilities also initiate relationships with other children with disabilities. This may affect their understanding of the “disability” or “difficulties” they have. The new support mediates and initiates interactions around children with disabilities, and accordingly affects the
dynamics of personal relationships across the school.

During the period of data collection over a year, these three children transferred to the special education classroom. Interestingly, they went through this process differently. While Kakeru chose to disclose to other children that he would move to the special education classroom, Yusuke and Dai chose to isolate themselves from their peers. Peers may perceive children’s difficulties differently when these challenges are described openly or kept secret. Dai’s mother’s sensitivity to “being different” made his difference an open secret, which created tension in talking about his difference, as his classroom teacher was concerned about other children’s response to seeing Dai who looked more lively and active in the resource room than when he was in their classroom (See Chapter 7). In contrast, Kakeru’s transition was talked about “naturally” as part of children’s daily experiences. Even during class activities, Kakeru shared what he heard and saw at the resource room in his classroom without any hesitation. Accordingly, each child found their “places” that helped them go through the transition to the special education classrooms. In their “places,” they incorporated their own strengths in order to handle difficulties and cope with responses from others, such as curiosity about their status as “different.”

Kakeru found his place in his classroom. His knowledge about bugs gave him confidence. Acknowledgement of his knowledge by other children also helped him establish equal relationships with peers although he recognized himself as “different.” For Yusuke and Dai, the resource room became a safe place where they felt comfortable. Studying at the resource room made them different from others, but at the same time, the resource room was a source of support for them to handle challenging situations. Even at the resource room Dai chose to be alone frequently. He tried to keep a distance from his classroom and his peers and sought opportunities to interact with others in a way he felt comfortable. The hiding place also helped him take time
to be ready to interact with others. In contrast, Yusuke created his own world of play, which gave him motivation to keep working and interacting with other children, and accordingly encouraged him to overcome challenges.

Yusuke’s pretend play using a tricycle served as a zone of proximal development for him (Göncü & Gaskins, in press; Wertsch, 2008), which helped him anticipate what it would be like to be a train driver. He also learned to be a leader in the “real” world, for example through creating rules for passengers as a train driver. At first, I thought the tricycle was a tool for him to calm down when he was frustrated, but it seemed to be much more than that. When his mother told him about his difficulties in reading and writing, he also heard that it might take longer than other people for him to be a train driver. Still, he kept going back to the tricycle during recess. Generally, a child of his age does not know how to be a train driver yet. What he knows was that he had to go to school to be trained as a driver. At this moment, it looks like the tricycle fills in the gap between his dream and what he knows, and this helps him keep motivated.

Yusuke was older than children Vygotsky originally targeted to explain the functioning of play and the concept of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 2008). His play may involve more complicated meanings than those of younger children. He knows that it may not be easy for him to be a train driver. It may take longer for him than other people because of his learning disability. His dream is not only a source of motivation, but also a source of anxiety, which reminds him of difficulties he has to face. At least, in the imaginary world of play, he can be a train driver and do not have to worry about anything. The tricycle connects the real and imaginary worlds for him.

Their transition to the resource room and the special education classroom made Yusuke, Dai, and Kakeru “different” from other children. Not only children in their classrooms, but also children in other grade levels began noticing their differences. For example, a second grade boy
was curious about why Dai did not know where other 3\textsuperscript{rd} graders were. Dai responded that he was a child of the Rainbow Room [special education classroom]. This is only one example of their interactions, but such an interaction can happen at any time while at school. Before long, most children in the school learned that they were in the special education classrooms, and it became “normal” as they got used to.

Bakhtin and Bourdieu discussed the value of daily experiences. For Bakhtin, everyday experience is a source of responsibility and creativity, and “everything experienced and understood should not remain ineffective in that life” (Bakhtin, as cited in Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 183). Bourdieu also stressed children’s experiences as one element that contributes to the formation of “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1991; Jenkins, 2002). In short, children’s daily experiences shape their beliefs and values and have a long lasting effect on their lives. Therefore, children’s interactions with others should be one of the components that affect children’s learning at school.

These three children had similar problems and difficulties, but they responded to and dealt with challenging situations differently because they had different experiences in the past and their relationships with peers, their parents and teachers varied. This affects their decisions currently and in the future.
CHAPTER NINE

Discussion: Children’s Socialization at School

Throughout the world, children are socialized into the school culture that has certain rules and norms, which they learn through daily experiences at school. During this process, various tools help children internalize these norms and rules (Wertsch, 1991). “Tools,” for example, include educators’ and peers’ responses to what children do and say. Through the discourse on expectations for children, such as appropriate behaviors at school, children learn how to behave in the official world at school, which is different from their homes. For example, Peak (1991) observed Japanese teachers guide children’s transition from home to preschool as they learned new behaviors, such as being obedient, cooperative and self reliant. As children learn these rules and norms, they establish “habitus” and begin to behave unconsciously as they are expected (Bourdieu, 1990; Jenkins, 2002). However, children with various types of disabilities, such as “developmental disabilities” presented in the case studies, find it difficult to learn these rules. They require additional support to learn the same skills other children acquire in their daily experiences at school. This makes these children different from their peers, and through their daily interactions with peers and educators, they may establish their identities as “different”.

Despite the widespread challenges of children with disabilities, there are cultural variations in how children with developmental disabilities are understood and educated. For example, U.S. children with these “milder” disabilities receive special education services at local public schools (e.g., Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009; Smith, 2007). From this viewpoint, Japanese children with developmental disabilities are in a unique educational environment. They were “included” in regular education classrooms, but until 2007, they did not receive formal special education services (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2007a; Ueno & Hanakuma, 2006). In addition to a need for formal support for
children experiencing difficulties in regular classrooms expressed by parents (e.g., National Association of Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities, 2010), a movement across the world to protect children’s rights exerted pressure on Japanese educators and the government to implement special education services for children with developmental disabilities. For example, the Convention on the Rights of the Child described a right to receive appropriate education (United Nations, 1989), and the Salamanca Statement called on the governments to provide inclusive education regardless of disabilities (UNESCO, 1994). Japanese children who are formerly recognized as “slow learners” are now treated as children who need special education.

Services for Japanese children with developmental disabilities were shaped by worldwide trends, but were interpreted through the lens of Japanese traditional educational practices. Japanese public education generally emphasizes the importance of children’s relationships with their peers and educators, and recognizes their relationships as one of the ways of teaching children academic and social skills, which is clearly described in the National Curriculum Standard (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2008). Japanese educators also emphasize the development of interpersonal sensitivity and empathy. Consequently, Japanese teachers who participated in this study emphasized the benefit of educating children in groups, even if they had disabilities. Educators intentionally create environments and opportunities for children to interact with others. In this educational environment, children are expected to learn more from their interactions than usually happens in their daily lives. The goal is for children to learn interpersonal and academic skills “naturally” through their daily interactions with peers. Therefore, to provide support for children who are struggling, Japanese educators tend to involve peer groups, for example, by asking peers to create a classroom like “home” in which children with special needs are accepted and feel safe and comfortable, as Dai’s classroom teacher did. Children with special needs receive
socialization into Japanese culture, as do their typically developing peers who benefit through increased empathy.

Children’s daily interactions with peers and educators also are used in teaching academic skills. For example, at S Elementary School, Math is taught in small groups. In so doing, one classroom is split in half randomly, regardless of children’s level of understanding. The grouping changes periodically, so that children have an equal chance to be taught by two teachers. When I asked why they grouped children randomly, a teacher explained to me that slow learners would be able to learn better if they studied with fast learners rather than they were taught in a group of slow learners. According to this teacher, they become inspired by listening to fast learners and learned the joy of understanding and completing tasks.

This practice is similar to what White (1987) observed at a Japanese elementary school. “Slow learners” are able to learn these skills from their interactions with “fast learners.” By working together with fast learners, they are stimulated to perform better (e.g., White, 1987). Therefore, it does not make sense to educate these “slow learners” separately. This practice also reflects Japanese culture that values personal relationships with others (e.g., Doi, 1996, 2001; Lebra, 1976). Accordingly, the traditional Japanese educational practice may contradict the concept of special education that provides individualized support for children experiencing difficulties. Japanese educators have to balance the benefit of traditional practice of teaching children in groups with new requirements to provide individualized support for children with additional needs.

Still, there are children who are not comfortable with being in groups. In this environment in which the importance of peer relationships is emphasized, if children find that they do not fit in their classrooms, their school and classrooms become a source of stress (e.g., Hosaka, 2005; Lebra, 1976). This stress can impact children’s functioning, for example thorough
a loss of self-esteem and motivation to learn. All three children in this study, especially Dai and Yusuke, struggled to find their “places” in regular classrooms.

The presence of children who did not find their places in their classrooms created a situation similar to that of “social classes” within the U.S. According to Bourdieu, it is difficult for children from working class families to establish “habitus” to be successful at school, because rules and norms at school are designed for children from middle class families (Jenkins, 2002). Similarly, the school curriculum at elementary schools in Japan is designed based on the assumption that children learn from their interpersonal relationships (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2008). This creates a “social world” that informs children of expectations and goals (Bourdieu, 1991), such as establishing and maintaining their relationships with peers. This limits some children from acting as they are. If they have difficulties in managing interpersonal relationships, their classrooms and school may not be places they can enjoy.

There is also variation in parents’ understanding of their children’s potential disabilities. Although there are parents who understand the special needs of their children and are supportive and willing to work with educators collaboratively in providing necessary support for their children, some parents are defensive about their children’s disabilities. They have not been able to admit that their children have disabilities or difficulties and may try to avoid engaging in situations in which other individuals may recognize that their children are “different.” Accordingly, having their children receive support outside of their classrooms may not be a preferable choice for them. Parents’ attitudes affect children’s functioning at school, since children of elementary school age have close relationships with their parents. Therefore, educators patiently establish trusting relationships with parents, especially when their children are experiencing difficulties at school, so that they may work together to help children. Unless
Parents send children to school, educators are not able to provide these children and families with support.

Parents who are sensitive to other people’s “eyes” and educators who emphasize the Japanese traditional educational practice of educating children in groups may have contributed to the practice of providing special education services in regular classrooms without labeling. The basic concept of this practice is to provide support for children with special needs regardless of their origins of these difficulties. For example, children who have family problems at home or whose native language is not Japanese also may receive support. Accordingly, classroom teachers who already have a wide range of roles to perform, including teaching academic skills and providing social and emotional support for children, now have an additional role as providers of special education services in their classrooms. However, not all classroom teachers have the skills and knowledge to provide appropriate support for children who are struggling, and not all children can benefit from such support.

Although they all knew they were different and experienced difficulties in learning and interpersonal relationships with peers, the three children who served as case studies had varied relationships with their parents, educators, and peers in regular classrooms. They responded differently to their difficulties and identity of “being different.” Yusuke, who was older and more socially sensitive, began to accept his difficulties through interactions with other children with disabilities and found his place in the resource room and the special education classroom. He also created his own world of play in order to cope with stress and re-establish relationships with his peers. Dai, who preferred a more quiet and orderly environment, chose to stay in the resource room and the special education classroom to isolate himself from peers. This allowed him to spend as much time as he needed to be ready to interact with other children. Unlike Yusuke and Dai, Kakeru enjoyed interacting with peers in his classroom. He was not as self-conscious of his
social difficulties as was Yusuke. He was proud of his knowledge about “bugs,” and his peers acknowledged his expertise. This motivated Kakeru to be actively involved in his peer group and enjoy playing with them.

There are a number of possible factors that have contributed to these differences. Parents’ sensitivity to stigma attached to their children’s disabilities may affect services their children receive, as it is the parents who can decide whether or not children will receive the support for which they qualify. As Yusuke’s parents began to understand his disabilities and work with teachers for him, he began to accept his “difficulties.” Dai struggled due to his mother’s and classroom teacher’s conflicting expectations for him. Dai had already found that he liked the special education classroom better than his regular classroom. It took nearly a year until his mother accepted that the regular classroom was not the best place for him. Kakeru’s parents who had accepted his disability even before he started preschool provided him with a safe environment at home, so that he was able to make an effort at school and keep up with his peers. His parents had prepared for talking with him about his “difficulties” and transferring him to special education for years. Accordingly, his transition to the special education classroom was smoother than those of Yusuke and Dai.

Children’s relationships with their classroom teachers, and the teachers’ knowledge and skills for providing additional support also may affect children’s experiences in their regular classrooms. Dai and Kakeru had similar disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, but their problems were treated differently. Kakeru was able to receive the necessary support from his classroom teacher who was knowledgeable about special education, when he began experiencing difficulties in his regular classroom. His classroom teacher worked collaboratively with Kakeru and his parents, and arranged his transition so that Kakeru and his peers were able to understand his difficulties.
Children’s relationships with peers, including responses from their peers regarding their “differences,” also affect their experiences at school. Dai’s difficulties were not recognized until he externalized his problems by refusing to go to school. His sudden transition to the resource room roused other children’s curiosity, which made it difficult for Dai to adjust to his new environment and re-establish his relationships with peers. Yusuke, who had been studying with teaching assistants, finally had new classroom teachers who worked with him every day, after he moved to the special education classroom. The presence of classroom teachers who cared for him and on whom he could rely might have contributed to his progress over the year. His transition to the resource room and the special education classrooms also provided him with the opportunity to make “friends” and remember that school was a place he could enjoy.

As a result of educator’s patience, sensitivity, and skills; parent-teacher collaboration; and peer relationships, these three children eventually found their “places” where they felt accepted and comfortable. While Yusuke and Dai found their places in the special education classroom and the resource room, Kakeru found his place in his regular classroom. These “places” helped them handle difficulties at school and accordingly motivated them to study and interact with other children.

Implications for Schools in Japan

Japanese educators discussed challenges in working with children with developmental disabilities and suggested resources that would help them to provide special education services and additional support. They suggested several ways to handle these issues and the resources they needed; specifically, smaller classroom sizes, professional knowledge and skills, procedures to provide additional support, an educational budget, and full time special education coordinators.

Smaller Classroom Size

Balancing the individual needs of children with the functioning of groups seems to be key
for the success of new special education practices in Japan. Since classroom teachers now have
to provide “special education” in their classrooms, both children and classroom teachers can
benefit from smaller classroom size. Classroom size must be large enough for children to benefit
from learning in groups, and small enough for classroom teachers to attend to the individual
needs of children. At S Elementary School, one grade level had classrooms of 20 children. In
these classrooms, children with additional needs were able to receive necessary support and
“stabilized.” However, when these classrooms were combined and children were in large groups,
several children who had been “stabilized” began exhibiting problems. This small classroom
arrangement is not always possible, due to the law that determines the teacher to student ratio at
public schools. Currently, in regular classrooms, one classroom teacher is assigned for every 40
children in the same grade level (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2008b).

At the governmental level, benefits and risks associated with small classroom size have
been discussed (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology 2010d). In
order for teachers to be able to attend to children’s individual needs, small classroom size is
desirable. At the same time, there is a desire to maintain the traditional Japanese holistic
approach which seeks to create an educational environment in which children learn academic
and social skills by establishing trusting relationships with their peers and classroom teachers.
Accordingly, it is suggested that in small classrooms of 20 or less children, activities and
instruction involving children from multiple classrooms should be actively utilized, so that
children have more time to interact with others (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science,
and Technology, 2010d). S Elementary School has adopted this practice. Children in two small
classrooms frequently studied as a large group and they knew each other. S Elementary School
also utilizes groups consisting of children from all grade levels, who interact and work together.
By utilizing group activities outside of their classrooms, children may be able to benefit more
from small classrooms than large classrooms, when they are experiencing difficulties in learning.

More Skilled and Knowledgeable Staff Members

Under the law that determines teacher certifications, teachers who teach in classrooms at special education schools are required to hold a special education certification of their specialization, such as hearing and visual impairments, mental retardation, and physical disabilities, in addition to a regular teaching certification. However, the same law allows schools to postpone implementing this requirement for an unspecified period of time (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2008c). As a result, currently in Japan, educators without a special education certification can teach children in special education classrooms and schools. Even at special education schools, during the 2009-2010 school year, less than 70% of teachers at special education schools held the special education certifications for the disabilities children they worked with had (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2010e).

Further, in Japan, the law does not specify certification for teaching in special education classrooms at regular public schools. It is typical that children in special education classrooms are taught by teachers who only have a regular teaching certification. Consequently, in 2010, the Central Council for Education discussed the necessity of expanding the “certification for special education schools” to “certification for special education” involving educational services at regular public schools (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2010f).

Ideally, teachers should learn skills and knowledge for teaching children with disabilities at college before actually teaching at school. Considering the shortage of teachers who hold a special education certification at special education schools, currently, it is not realistic to assign special education teachers with the certification to all regular public schools to work with children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms. Therefore, in addition to expanding teacher education at the college level, educating teachers currently working at schools...
is critical, for example, through regular workshops on special education.

**More Systematic Procedures for Providing Services**

Even if teachers identify the needs of children for more intensive support, if there is no teacher available for the children and no room available to provide pull out instruction, children do not receive regular services. A framework or a guideline that describes a procedure to provide additional support for children as soon as their needs are identified is necessary.

In addition, specific procedures and clear guidelines for the use of resources rooms are also necessary. S Elementary School may not be a typical school utilizing a resource room. Because the laws do not clearly determine how to utilize resource rooms, implementation and functioning of resource rooms depend on local boards of education and schools. Children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms may not need intensive support all day long at special education classrooms. For these children, there are pull out special education classrooms where they can study and receive special education as needed. Currently, however, not all schools have such classrooms, and the access to pull out instruction is limited. If schools have resource rooms, these children can receive pull out instruction within their schools. Further, resource rooms are not considered “special education,” and parents’ psychological “barrier” to their children receiving additional support may be lower at resource rooms than at special education classrooms.

**Flexibility and Educational Budget**

Flexibility of support was one of the characteristics I noticed while at S Elementary School. Educators tried everything they could think of to provide the necessary support for children who were struggling within available resources. For example, Yusuke and Dai studied at the special education classroom for more than one semester before the paperwork to officially transfer them to special education was completed. This contrasts with the paperwork U.S.
educators involved in special education deal with. One reason U.S. schools have to complete the paperwork is to receive federal financial support for providing special education services under the IDEA. From this viewpoint, Japanese special education system is different in terms of how the law determines special education services. The School Education Laws states that schools can create special education classrooms and provide pull out instruction, but does not say that schools “have to.” This allows flexibility to implement special education. The principal at S Elementary School indicated that this also means that schools are not receiving enough money to implement the new educational support. In order to provide the support, more money is necessary.

If schools receive financial support, it should be used to maintain the flexibility of the current support system, for example, by hiring teachers who can provide additional support and reducing classroom size. Even though staff members are interested in special education in other countries and ask me about schools in the U.S., this does not mean that they are willing to implement the same procedures. The principal shared her interpretation of the flexibility that the limited financial support that is available to implement the new special education also enhances their feelings that they have to work together, for example by teaching children as a team and utilizing resources in the community. Therefore, she is concerned that if the additional roles are given to a certain professional, other teachers may become hesitant to perform them. In short, this system works through collaboration with others. This response may reflect the Japanese practice of personal relationships based on empathy and emotional connections, which motivated educators to provide the necessary support for children with additional needs in collaboration.

**Full Time Special Education Coordinators**

Under the current special education system in Japan, special education coordinators are designated from educators at each school. Therefore, they have their regular responsibilities in
addition to the coordinator roles. Mrs. S, who is a school nurse and has a more flexible schedule than classroom teachers, stated that she frequently found it difficult to complete her regular tasks. If a classroom teacher served as a special education coordinator, it would be more difficult to balance his or her responsibilities as a classroom teacher and a coordinator. There is a definite need for a full time special education coordinator in each school. Local boards of education are beginning to consider hiring full time coordinators. For example, in 2008, eight local governments agreed and sent a request to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology so that they were able to place full time special education coordinators in all special education schools and as many regular elementary and junior high schools as possible (Kanagawa Prefecture, 2008).

Special education coordinators’ roles include many characteristics of those of school social workers. For example, at S Elementary School, Mrs. S, a special education coordinator, worked as a liaison with parents to initiate communications regarding their children’s additional needs. Mrs. S also coordinated the support children received at regular classrooms and the resource room. If schools are able to hire full time special education coordinators, school social workers could serve as the coordinators.

Currently, some school social workers in Japan work at particular schools regularly, but many of them are sent from local boards of education as needed. Not many school social workers can stay at one school long enough to establish relationships with children and their parents until they are assigned to work with them. Further, school social work in Japan primarily focuses on children with problems caused by extended period of absence, bullying, and child abuse and neglect. Yet, school social workers in several prefectures reported that they worked with children with disabilities at regular public schools during the 2008-2009 school year (Kadota, 2009).
Broad Implications

Japanese special education practices may be characterized as attention to the social embeddedness of disabilities. Educators and parents tend to understand children’s disabilities in their relationships with other children, such as “differences,” rather than focusing on their clinical diagnoses based on the medical model. Accordingly, educators emphasize the importance of empathy, peer relationships, and children’s voluntary cooperation, and create an environment in which children can fully benefit from the additional support by utilizing resources each child has, including their peers and parents.

In a context in which individuality is valued and children are labeled and classified into disability categories to receive special education services, including the U.S., understanding of the biological bases of disabilities may become more important than in Japan. The Japanese cases, which underscore the social meaning and embeddedness of such disabilities, suggest several implications in assessing children’s needs and formulating intervention strategies that may have broad implications beyond these Japanese cases, for example, in U.S. schools.

Empathy

Empathy is observed at S Elementary School in the daily interactions between adults and children and peers. For example, the flexibility of support discussed above partly stemmed from empathy. Dai’s placement in the resource room as a transition to the special education classroom was for his mother, rather than for Dai. The principal and Mrs. S knew that his mother was sensitive and nervous that Dai would be recognized as “different” by his peers and the parents of other children. They gave her time to be ready to have Dai study at the special education classroom and also allowed her to observe him at school. At the resource room, she had opportunities to interact with other parents of children with disabilities and to observe Dai enjoying playing together with children from the special education classroom that was located
next to the resource room. Yusuke’s mother also benefitted from meeting with the school psychologist, but she might have rejected the support if she was pushed to do so. She expressed denial of her need to speak with a professional such as a psychologist. Mrs. S and the psychologist created an environment where she was able to initiate the relationship “naturally” as much as possible. Eventually, educators “guided” these mothers by creating an environment in which they had access to resources that helped them accept their children’s needs. Classroom teachers also create an atmosphere in which children help one another when they have problems. They may serve as interpreters for children who have problems in their classroom, so that other children are able to understand the meaning of behaviors that cause problems and solve problems by themselves.

The practice of empathy is also used in U.S. schools, for example, to facilitate trusting teacher-parent relationships and to create supportive and accepting environment for children experiencing difficulties in their classrooms. Yet, a comparison study in the U.S. and Japan suggested that Japanese teachers were more sensitive to children’s behavioral cues, such as a lack of social skills, than U.S. teachers (Haynes et al., 2000). Further, several studies have suggested the need for more emotional support for U.S. parents. In addition to participatory experiences in decision making process with professionals, parents were willing to receive more emotional support from educators in order to cope with the stress of taking care of children with disabilities (Summers et al., 2007). Even though parents were satisfied with the partnerships with educators based on collaborative decision making, parents’ satisfaction was not related to their parenting confidence and competence (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007).

Empathy makes it possible for educators to think about children and their needs from the viewpoint of parents/children and to identify their problems, including unexpected family stress, on an ongoing basis. Parents may also find it easier to express concerns before they become
severe, when parents and professionals have trusting relationships based on emotional connections. Therefore, it becomes possible for educators to work collaboratively with parents and provide support that fits the needs of children and families in a timely manner.

Specialists, including school social workers and administrators, can help classroom teachers to establish trusting relationships with parents, as they have more flexible schedules. Classroom teachers have limited time to contact parents, because they teach all day in their classrooms. As Mrs. S makes an effort to establish relationships with parents, educators who have established trusting relationships with parents can mediate relationships between the parents and classroom teachers, so that they can respond to children’s needs immediately.

Supportive and Accepting Environment in Classrooms

Although U.S. special education is characterized by individualized services, classroom teachers’ responsibilities to provide intervention programs in regular classrooms have recently increased. Children’s progress as a result of classroom based interventions are reviewed when determining whether the children need more intensive support under special education, especially if learning disabilities are suspected since the recent amendment of the IDEA in 2004. For example, in Illinois, an approach called Response to Intervention (RtI) has been introduced as regular classroom based support for children who are struggling with learning (e.g., ISBE, 2009). Under this approach, the support children receive as well as their progress are monitored in order to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. In addition to interventions targeted to all children in regular classrooms, children who need additional help may receive support individually or in small groups from their classroom teachers. Consequently, regular classroom teachers are required to gain skills to provide such intervention programs in their classrooms.

Japanese practices focusing on the importance of peer relationships may inform U.S. classroom teachers of strategies to provide intervention programs in their classrooms. Similar to
Japanese children with developmental disabilities in this study, Meadan and Hall (2004) suggest that peer relationships of U.S. children with disabilities in their classrooms affect their attitudes in classrooms, such as the level of self-control and perceptions of services they receive. For example, U.S. children receiving special education services for their learning disabilities who were accepted by their peers did not feel that they were different from other children, but children who had low social status rated by their peers felt that they were different from others.

Another study on social support for children with learning disabilities also indicated discrepancy in perceptions by teachers and children regarding the social support children receive. Children perceived support from peers more preferable than teachers recognized. For example, when they are given choices, either teacher, child, or peer initiated strategies to deal with children’s isolation from peers, there was no teacher who picked a peer-initiated strategy as the first choice to provide support, but 20% of children found support from peers preferable. Although nearly 90% of regular classroom teachers and over half of children identified teachers as a primary support source (Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2000, 2001), social support that involves peers may have a potential benefit to children with disabilities.

**Special Education in Regular Classrooms**

Existing literature in the U.S. discussed strategies to address children’s diverse needs in inclusive classrooms. Children receiving special education services are extremely diverse, from students with severe cognitive impairments to students with mild developmental disabilities. Interventions and accommodations in inclusive classrooms should address this diversity. Therefore, classroom teachers need to be flexible and utilize a variety of teaching strategies, for example, direct instruction, individualized teaching, and cooperative learning, and switch between strategies as needed (Schultz & Evans, 2006). Cooperative learning typically uses small groups of children whose levels of ability are diverse, so that students work together to maximize
their own and each other’s learning of social and academic skills (e.g., Sharan, 1994; Jacob, 1999). Kuntz, McLaughlin, & Howard (2001) found that children with disabilities, including learning disabilities, can benefit from small group individualized teaching and cooperative learning.

A new approach called universal design for learning is also found to be effective for teaching children with diverse needs. In this approach, class materials are provided in multiple formats, such as printed page, computers, and audio recordings. The content of materials is also adjustable to the level of understanding of individual students, in order to motivate students with diverse backgrounds to learn (e.g., Blamires, 1999; Smith, 2007).

These approaches are similar to what I have observed at S Elementary School. Some of the strategies used at S Elementary School should be applicable to regular classrooms in the U.S., for example, small group instructions regardless of the level of children’s understanding, small group activities that facilitate children’s abilities to solve problems as observed in math instructions on “weight” in the third grade classroom, modifications of instructions so that children are able to receive accommodations “naturally,” for example, by using visual cues in addition to verbal instructions, preparing additional materials for “fast learners” while waiting for other children to complete assigned tasks, and utilizing on-going projects that facilitate children’s autonomy and motivation to work collaboratively and learn from one another. These approaches can motivate children and facilitate their learning in both social and academic skills.

**Children’s Voluntary Cooperation and Learning**

Japanese practices also underscore the value of children’s voluntary corporation and learning. A zone of proximal development served as a source of motivation for children to learn in this study. Children may create their own, for example, Yusuke’s “world of play.” Educators also create opportunities for children to learn by using children’s real problems in their daily
lives at schools and by guiding them to handle the problems. Classroom teachers can utilize this practice either by helping children to take the initiative or by guiding them to acquire basic skills they are expected to learn.

In order for children to take the initiative, educators need to be flexible and allow children’s autonomy to some extent. Yusuke and Dai were able to find their places in the resource room, which helped them to cope with difficulties at school, because of the school’s flexibility in handling their “fear” of regular classrooms. U.S. classroom teachers can incorporate this into activities and instructions, for example, by letting children decide their own goals before the activities and taking time to reflect on their performance after completing the tasks, which is commonly observed in Japanese schools (e.g., Lewis, 1995). For example, in the third grade classroom when they learned the concept of weight, children wrote what they thought every time a new term was introduced. Another example I observed at S Elementary School was the school wide project, “Book walk.” Children counted how many books they read in two weeks. On the first day, children filled out their goals, including the number of books they would like to read. Children received a certificate if they read books more than what they wrote at the beginning. There were children who read 5 books and received a certificate, but children who read 20 books did not receive if their goals were higher than 20. During this period, children were excited when teachers told them they could go to the library if they completed the assigned tasks. They finished their tasks as early as possible and went to the library. Some children in the special education classroom received the certificate.

Classroom teachers also have to take the initiative to teach basic social skills, so that children meet expectations at school. As teachers at S Elementary School did, such occasions are usually when children exhibit behavioral problems. Instead of giving immediate discipline, teachers allowed them to experience of the “consequences” of their behaviors. Due to the
difference in the understanding of problem behaviors and child discipline at school, this approach may not be accepted by U.S. educators, especially when physical fights are involved (e.g., Lewis, 1995; Tobin et al., 1989; Tobin et al., 2009). Still, within the range of behavior that can be accepted in U.S. classrooms, teachers may be able to utilize this approach. For example, a preschool teacher in the U.S. used this approach when she had a child who had interpersonal problems (Paley, 2004). Learning about this practice from a school director from Taiwan, she eliminated a “time out chair” from her classroom. A boy who frequently engaged in arguments with other children in the block area was given an opportunity to explain his behaviors. She found that the boy was going to “help” other children to build, but the way he helped was not appropriate. She invited the boy and his peers to role play, so he was able to observe his behaviors objectively and learn appropriate ways to help.

In this practice, teachers need to think about the meaning of children’s behaviors and guide them to re-learn the skills. It may take more time to deal with the problems than giving children immediate directions or using tangible rewards and punishments. This approach may work the best when there is a consistency in dealing with children’s behaviors among educators. School social workers and other staff members who have direct interactions with the children can work together with classroom teachers. Ideally, once children learn the skills, they retain and apply them when they face similar situations.

**Strengths and Limitations of This Study**

I was an insider and an outsider at the same time at S Elementary School. I was treated as a staff member, more than as a researcher from the U.S. These dual roles allowed me to follow up with the same children over a year, across two school years. At the same time, I have learned school social work and special education in the U.S. and tend to look at Japanese schools through the lens of U.S. special education and school social work. This bi-cultural experience was useful
in identifying unique characteristics in Japanese practice.

Throughout the study, my standpoint was to learn from participant adults as well as children. Therefore, developing relationships with participants was critical. For this purpose, my wheelchair was a useful tool in initiating relationships with participants, especially, with children. Children were interested in and curious about my wheelchair and came to ask me questions when I visited their classrooms. Even though children and I had different types of “disability,” my wheelchair also showed that we had something in common, which helped children engage in activities and conversations with me (Clark, 2003). A classroom teacher of one of the children I worked with noted that the child was able to ask me for help without feeling negatively, because he knew he could help me as well. This equal relationship was also important as a researcher to hear what they really thought.

My dual roles as a teaching assistant and a researcher also helped me establish equal relationships with children as well as adult participants. Our conversations in “natural” settings, as part of their daily experiences at school, helped to create a safe environment where they were able to share their stories and experiences.

At the same time, this dual role brought me several difficulties. First, although I was able to observe children and their interactions with peers and educators in “natural” settings, my role as a teaching assistant influenced their interactions and behaviors, for example, I had to give children directions and talk to parents as a “teacher” occasionally. I kept such interactions in my field notes to review. Still, without this opportunity to be a “teacher”, I would not be able to establish relationships with staff members, children, and their parents.

Second, there were a few teachers who seemed to be competitive with me or did not know how to utilize teaching assistants in their classrooms, even though most teachers welcomed me when I went to their classrooms. For example, during the first wave of data collection, I spent
time with two children almost continuously while they were at school. I developed relationships with them. When I went back to the school for the second wave of data collection several months later, one of these children was struggling with establishing a relationship with his classroom teacher. The teacher asked the special education coordinator not to involve me in the support for this child, even though the child and his mother were willing to. In such occasions, I consulted with the special education coordinator who supervised teaching assistants.

I knew that I should not take too much responsibility and I was not an individual with whom teachers should feel competitive, because I was at the school for a limited time, less than two months for each visit. The coordinator understood this situation, and told me that teachers should be able to “use” me and take advantage to solve the problems, rather than being competitive. I found, however, that I was in a very difficult position to handle, between the child, his mother, and school staff members who had very different expectations. If I was a “practitioner,” I might be involved in such a case more actively. As a researcher, on the other hand, I should not be involved in these cases, and instead observe their interactions and how they would solve problems. Again, as long as I was at the school as a teaching assistant, I had to take responsibility to some degree, and worked as the special education coordinator suggested. Balancing roles as a researcher and a “teacher” became a challenge as I got used to the school and people there.

Third, I had to refrain from interacting with children more than I was expected as a teaching assistant, unless children came to talk to me or asked questions. If teachers did not find a need for assistance in their classrooms, I did not have a chance to observe. I also did not interview children in regular classrooms, because the principal and I noticed that it was difficult to do so without singling them out. This resulted in limited involvement of children experiencing difficulties in regular classrooms. Still, the principal and the special education coordinator helped
me create opportunities to interact with children and observe as much as possible without interfering with their daily activities, for example by assigning me to the particular classrooms as a teaching assistant or asking classroom teachers for permission to observe. Still, I did not ask classroom teachers directly if I could observe as a “researcher.” It was always through the principal or the coordinator.

**Implications for Future Research**

Formal special education services for Japanese children with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms just began in 2007 and schools are still in transition to fully implementing the support and exploring ways to accommodate children’s needs. Longitudinal study is necessary to examine how the new services evolve over time. I will continue to collect data in the Japanese school that served as the primary site when I return to Japan during summer and winter breaks as well as through e-mail and phone communications. I will continue to follow longitudinally children who served as the primary participants and describe the support they receive and their progress.

Findings from one elementary school may not be applicable to other schools in Japan. In order to examine to what extent findings from one Japanese school are transferrable to other schools in Japan, it is necessary to hear from educators in other school districts. Findings from this study can be used to develop a survey to obtain feedback from teachers and administrators. The survey should contain a summary of this study focusing on how new services are implemented and ask respondents to reflect on their own practices in relation to the primary research site.

One of the major findings from this study is that children’s relationships with peers, educators, and their parents affect their experiences at school, including social and academic performances, especially when they have disabilities. This study primarily focused on three
children who were in the transition to special education classrooms. In addition, examining children with developmental disabilities studying at regular classrooms regularly and their interactions with peers and classroom teachers may inform how educators can utilize support from peers to address the needs of children with disabilities and to establish trusting teacher–child relationships.

As children with disabilities in this study established their identity of “being different,” children with other health impairments may have similar experiences. Children’s chronic illness can be “invisible” and cause curiosity among other children, for example if they are absent from school frequently. In Japan, children who are not able to go to school due to medical treatment over 6 months are eligible to receive special education services. For those who do not need that intensive care, it is a classroom teachers’ responsibility to provide necessary support (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1996). Therefore, availability of educational support can be ambiguous if classroom teachers and children’s parents do not have resources. In this sense, these children are in the similar situations to those with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms. By exploring experiences of children receiving special education services due to their health impairments and their transition to regular public schools, this study can be expanded to address the needs of children with “invisible” problems and the way to facilitate their interactions with peers in regular classrooms.

Children experiencing “invisible” problems also have to face and accept their “difficulties” at some point in their lives. Yusuke began questioning his ability to learn and heard about his difficulties, but did not know his diagnosis yet. Similarly, the other two children knew they were different from other children. Yet, they did not know the nature of their disabilities. When children are younger, it is difficult for them to understand even if they hear the explanations about their disabilities. Adults who are close to the children, such as their parents
and educators, may affect children’s functioning at school and how they think of themselves. Yusuke was frustrated before he heard about his ability to read and write. Kakeru also struggled in regular classrooms before his parents gave him a choice to study at the special education classrooms. It is the adults’ responsibility to figure out the appropriate time and how to explain to children about their disabilities and help them become more confident. There is a need for more studies suggesting how adults can better handle children’s disabilities as they develop, for example by examining children’s understanding of their difficulties and how adults inform children regarding their disabilities. This can also affect children’s choice for their future directions. Therefore, it is important to involve older children in such studies, because their performance at school can determine the availability of choices they have for their future career.

Finally, if this study is replicated at an elementary school in the U.S., it will raise new issues to examine, which can contribute to formulating strategies to strengthen school social work and special education practices in both countries. In this study, outsider perspectives from the viewpoint of U.S. schools provided an opportunity to discuss and learn culturally specific practices in more detail and depth. My observations and input from U.S. teachers made me focus on Japanese practices that are taken for granted, for example, the emphasis on interpersonal relationships as a way of teaching children. Similarly, findings from this study at an elementary school in Japan can serve as “outsider” perspectives to examine school social work and special education in the U.S.
REFERENCES


Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2002c). Ko-ritsu gimu kyo-iku sho gakko no gakkyu heisei oyobi kyo-shokuin teisu no hyojyun ni kansuru ho-ritsu shikorei no ichibu kansei ni okeru kyo-iku jyo tokubetsu no hairyo wo hitsuyo to suru jido mataha seito ni taisuru tokubetsu no shido tou ni taisuru kyo-shokuin teisu no tokurei kasan ni tsuite [Notice regarding amendment of the regulation of the Law determining standards for classroom sizes and the number of staff members at public schools providing compulsory education in order to assign additional staff members to provide educational support to pupils and students with additional educational needs]. Retrieved October 3, 2010, from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/nc/t20020401002/t20020401002.html


APPENDIX A

Pilot Study in the U.S.

Team members’ perceptions of the functioning of multidisciplinary teams in an elementary school

Japan’s new formal special education policy involves components borrowed from other countries including the IEP type of individualized support found in the U.S. To learn more about this root of Japanese special education, I conducted a pilot study at an elementary school in Illinois. As a school social work intern and volunteer, I learned that in the U.S. educators who have various professional backgrounds work together with children with disabilities in multidisciplinary teams. These teams include school social workers, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and special education teachers. In addition to these professionals, the teams include the children’s parents, their classroom teachers, and administrators. These team members work together to make decisions for children concerning whether or not they need additional support, and to develop intervention programs that meet the needs of each child. These multidisciplinary teams were fascinating to me, as I observed and worked as a social work intern to assess and evaluate children’s needs and provide support for children at school. I did not remember educators other than classroom teachers working directly with children, when I went to an elementary school in Japan.

It was not, and still is not, typical for Japanese schools to have specialists other than teachers working regularly in their school buildings. As I communicated with Japanese educators informally, I also learned that children’s needs for special education services were assessed outside of their schools, such as at a meeting with specialists selected by a local board of education, and there was no “multidisciplinary team” in each school. I thought that it was very interesting that each U.S. school has specialists who work together with children in special
education, and this became a topic of my pilot study.

**Background Information in the U.S.**

Multidisciplinary team meetings are the places where team members from different professional backgrounds and children’s parents work together in order to help children experiencing educational difficulties. The aim is for all members to work toward the same goal, for example, providing necessary support for children (e.g., Allen-Meares, 2007; Constable, Massat, McDonald, & Flynn, 2006; Villa & Thousand, 2005). Team meetings are arranged as needed, when educators or parents find that children are struggling at school academically and/or behaviorally (e.g., ISBE, 2009).

Support for children with special needs is provided at two levels, problem solving teams organized at each school (e.g., Phillippo & Stone, 2006; Slonski-Fowler & Truscott, 2004; Truscott, Cohen, Sams, Sanborn, & Frank, 2005) and IEP teams determined by the federal law, IDEA (e.g., Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009). Before children are referred to special education, they may receive support from problem solving teams. As of 2000, about three quarters of the states required or recommended that schools provide children with pre-referral interventions before referring them for special education evaluation (Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas & Cook, 2003; Truscott et al., 2005). After receiving support for a certain period of time, children who require more intensive support from specialists are referred to special education (e.g., Lane, Mahdavi, & Borthwick-Duffy, 2003; Lane, Pierson, Robertson, & Little, 2004).

Teams have guidelines to determine children’s eligibility to receive additional services and support through problem solving and IEP processes. Team members are required by federal law/state regulations or the school district to document the child’s needs and progress in order to provide services. In the case of IEP, the IDEA requires schools to complete paperwork to receive financial support from the government (e.g., Department of Education, 2010; ISBE, 2009).
Research Question and Methods

This pilot study focused on multidisciplinary team members’ perceptions of the functioning of teams based on observations of team meetings and individual interviews with team members. One elementary school in Illinois was selected as a research site. A purposive method was used to choose the site, more specifically, I looked for a public elementary school that had at least one school social worker, had one or more special education teachers, and was interested in participating in this study. Through the Bureau of Educational Research, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I was introduced to the principal who was interested in my research project focusing on problem solving and IEP meetings. Participant educators were recruited voluntarily through invitation letters, e-mails, and during personal conversations before or after the problem solving and IEP meetings. As a result, the majority of participants of individual interviews were regular members of these meetings, such as administrators, specialists including school social worker, psychologist, and special education teacher. Only one classroom teacher participated in the interview. A total of 7 educators were interviewed individually. I also observed interactions between team members at 14 problem solving and IEP meetings as well as before and after the meetings over a 3 month period during the 2007-2008 school year. These meetings were scheduled as needed, and a schedule of meetings was provided by the principal on a weekly basis during the period of data collection. I observed all meetings concerning children who have academic and/or social difficulties.

Results

At this elementary school, additional support is provided from specialists at three levels. When children are initially identified as having difficulties, student assistance teams work with them. At this point in time, support is provided primarily from classroom teachers. If children need further assistance, they move on to the next step and the support is provided by Flex teams.
At the time the interviews were conducted, special education teachers were able to provide interventions at this level. As of 2009, at this elementary school, due to the 2004 amendment of IDEA that became effective in 2007, special education teachers’ role was limited to consultation with classroom teachers at this level. If children need more intensive support, they are referred to special education. When it is determined that they can benefit from working with specialists and are eligible to receive special education, IEPs are created. IEPs consist of goals for children, as well as intervention programs provided by each of the specialists. At each level, a case manager is responsible for filling out paperwork, including the needs of children and intervention plans.

One of the major findings is that school staff members report more time outside of the meetings communicating with each other than in meetings. Team members described communications with other school staff as part of their daily practice as well as important resources in working with children. The following is a summary of findings focusing on these informal communications between team members outside of the meetings.

**Team Members’ Perceptions of Teams**

During individual interviews, most team members reported that when they work with colleagues from various professional backgrounds, they learn from each other by sharing ideas and knowledge. Accordingly, team members are able to come up with new and better ideas than working individually with children. In order to make decisions, team members have to reach mutual agreement. Thus, relationships between team members tend to be collaborative.

Most school staff members expressed a general willingness to participate in meetings because they need help and suggestions from other school staff members in order to provide additional support for children. Some staff members, however, are not willing to participate in the meetings when they occur before or after school.

To balance the need for collaboration with time constraints, team members try to keep the
meetings short. Typically, the meetings last less than half an hour. In order to come up with ideas to support children within this limited time, team members report using various strategies, such as coming to the meetings with potential goals and plans for children. Accordingly, team members frequently communicate with each other before and after the meetings.

**Communication between Team Members**

Participants reported that these “informal communications” outside of the meetings have various purposes, such as negotiation, consultation, information exchange, information update to complete paperwork, in-class assistance, education of staff members, and coordination in order to have consistency between members. The major functioning of these informal communications is to get ready for meetings, to achieve consensus prior to the meetings, and to implement recommended interventions.

Team members reported that they spend more time working together outside of the meetings than in meetings. As a result of informal communications outside of the meetings, team members understand each other prior to the meetings. Thus, decision making processes tend to be smooth, and team members are usually agreeable. Some team members think that meetings are the formalization of what they already know, in order to complete required procedures. They prefer to know the meeting agenda, such as the issues to discuss and potential ideas to deal with, through informal communications prior to the meetings. For example, pre-meetings are scheduled when it is predicted that there may be a conflict between members. Other members stress the importance of meetings and prefer to use meetings to get together and share ideas.

During the individual interviews, some team members, especially facilitators, such as case coordinators or case managers, reported pressure to complete the required paperwork. Thus, it is easy for teams to use children’s data based on test scores, “numbers,” such as IQ score, standardized academic tests scores, and results of behavior scales, in order to keep track of
children’s progress. However, not all team members think that numbers are the best tools to evaluate children’s abilities. There are staff members who value teachers’ and parents’ observations of children in their daily activities at home and in classroom more than numbers.

**Challenges to Relationships between Team Members**

It is reported that teachers, including special education teachers, have closer relationships with each other than with other school staff because they work together with the same children daily. Some members reported difficulties in working together due to different philosophies and beliefs about classroom management and/or implications of new concepts, such as Response to Intervention introduced after the 2004 amendment of IDEA. For example, several staff members indicated that there would be resistance when implementing new strategies. There are staff members who are willing to “evolve” and to make the school better. Yet, it is also reported that there are staff members who like traditions. Strategies identified by team members to deal with this issue include informal communications with the member individually in order to educate him or her about the new concept and educational workshops for staff members.

Teachers also work collaboratively with other school staff members who provide additional support. Teachers reported that they perceive other support staff as resources when they have concerns. Conversely, other support staff reported that teachers know children better. They communicate with each other as needed. Some team members reported difficulties in working collaboratively with members who do not have regular interactions and/or trust with them. Strategies to meet this challenge identified by team members are to keep working with those members to build relationships and to have someone who has a close relationship with the member as a mediator in order to have an open discussion.

Accessibility to other staff members also caused challenges in communicating with one another. Although team members are willing to communicate with other members, sometimes it
is hard to find them. For example, teachers tend to have limited time outside of classrooms. Team members reported strategies for finding other team members, such as having conversations during lunchtime, before or after school, or their planning times. Team members also use e-mails and phone calls to communicate with other members. Some members, however, prefer face-to-face communications to e-mails.

Further, too much paperwork and a large caseload made some team members feel overwhelmed and stressed. Communications outside of the meetings also can be sources of support for team members, such as a source of energy and creativity. Team members need support in order to work efficiently.

Finally, most participants reported that parents of the children are important members of the teams. Some members reported difficulties in keeping in touch with parents. For example, staff members are working together daily, so they have closer relationships with each other than with parents. As a result of informal communications between staff members, they know more about the meeting agenda than parents do when they come to the meetings. Team members reported strategies to involve parents actively as team members by using phone calls, e-mails, and home visits if needed. During the meetings, some team members gave additional explanations to parents in a “parent friendly” language and also gave a summary of the discussion at the end.

Observations of the meetings also suggest that parents share a variety of stories from their observations of children at home during the meetings when they are asked to tell the team members about their children. During the meetings that focused on completing paperwork, however, questions for parents were specific to fill out forms, and parents tended to remain quiet. They frequently needed further explanations of the questions from other team members, such as a school social worker sitting close to parents. Several team members regularly participating in
meetings clearly stated that they did not have time to hear “stories” of children from parents and teachers, who only participated in meetings for particular children. Members who participate in meetings regularly may prefer summaries of these stories long enough to make a decision.

**Summary**

Participants described several challenges to effective team meetings, but they also articulated a wide variety of strategies for meeting these challenges. Various members seem to have developed their own strategies to deal with challenges. Not all strategies team members used are equally effective. Sometimes, team members try to do their best with limited resources. For example, in order to deal with time constraints, team members try to communicate with other members briefly and efficiently outside of meetings. Team members met together, but the meetings were used to make a final decision. This can leave other team members such as parents outside of the problem solving process. Parents are willing to and able to share their observations of children to teams, their voices, however, may not be heard if the meeting is focused on completing paperwork, which also is a source of pressure and stress for team members.

I showed the summary of this pilot study to several Japanese teachers. They indicated that the importance of communicating with other staff members and parents is the same in schools in Japan. Even though educators in the U.S. and Japan work in educational systems that have different roles, expectations, and philosophy of education, they do share common needs at the individual level, such as the need for communication to reach mutual agreement with other staff members as well as parents.

Further, three out of seven U.S. educators who participated in this pilot study were interviewed again during the 2009-2010 school year and asked to provide their reflections on vignettes illustrating interactions between Japanese children and educators. These vignettes were developed based on observations at an elementary school in Japan that served as a primary
research site of this dissertation (See Appendix B). Their responses to the Japanese practices will be discussed later in results chapters as an outsider perspective that allows me to interpret my observations and conversations with Japanese participants from multiple viewpoints.
APPENDIX B

Vignettes Illustrating Support for Children with Disabilities in Japan

Prioritizing of peer group relationships

1. Sensitivity to stigma
   Many parents refuse to have their children receive support individually, even though their children have diagnoses of LD or other disabilities. To be known as “different” is problematic for children’s peer group membership. In such cases, it becomes the classroom teachers’ responsibility to provide necessary support for these children in regular education classroom.

2. Special education services without labeling
   “We want to create a system we can teach children with special needs in regular education rooms without labeling.” For example, one classroom teacher said, “If the additional support makes it easier for a child with a disability to follow instructions, other children can also benefit from it.”

3. Social and emotional support from teachers and peers
   Classroom teachers make an effort to create classrooms where children with disabilities are able to come in by involving their peers. Whenever T, a 3rd grade boy, goes to his classroom, he is greeted by children’s “Welcome back!” Mrs. K, a classroom teacher, explained to children that she wanted to make their classroom like their “home,” where children say Okaeri-nasai (Welcome back), and he says Tadaima (I’m back).

Prioritizing of interpersonal relationships between parents, teachers, and children

1. Flexibility
   The school created a resource room for children who have attendance problems. They have a fear of being in their classrooms because of interpersonal problems with peers and difficulties in understanding instructions. While in this resource room, children work on activities and worksheets with volunteers, such as retired teachers and college students.

2. Variety of strategies to secure children’s voluntary cooperation
   When T refused to wash his hands before eating lunch, Mrs. S said, “See, everyone washes their hands here,” and washed her hands in front of him. However, T said, “I won’t eat lunch,” and went to the other side of the room while other people were eating. Later, he came back to her and asked, “Is it too late to eat lunch?” She told him it was not too late. He went out to the bathroom, came back, and ate his lunch. A few weeks later, when I ate lunch with him, he said, “Let’s go to wash our hands, we have to wash before eating!”
# APPENDIX C

## History and Policies Related to Special Education in Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Laws, policies and programs related to <strong>special education</strong> in Japan</th>
<th>Laws, policies and programs related to disability</th>
<th>Worldwide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>First school for children who are “blind” and “deaf”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>The second amendment of the Legislation of Elementary Schools</td>
<td>Schools for children with visual and hearing impairments are determined the first time in a law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>The third amendment of the Legislation of Elementary Schools</td>
<td>Classrooms for individuals with mental retardation in regular schools, first time in a law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Blind and deaf schools law</td>
<td>“blind” schools and “deaf” schools are separated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>First school for children with physical disabilities was accredited as a school providing elementary education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>First special education school for children with mental retardation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Educational reform requested by the Allied Powers</td>
<td>The end of World War II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Fundamental Law of Education</td>
<td>Philosophy and purposes of education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Education Law</td>
<td>Compulsory education for children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and other disabilities. Obligation to establish special education schools for children with other disabilities were postponed until 1979.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>[Ministry of Education] Regulation</td>
<td>Special education schools for children with other disabilities made compulsory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td></td>
<td>Equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities as well as rehabilitation and prevention</td>
<td>UN International Year of Disabled Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-1982</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UN International Decade of Disabled Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982/1987</td>
<td></td>
<td>Normalization Equal participation of people with disabilities</td>
<td>Long term plans for persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Body/Committee</td>
<td>Action/Request</td>
<td>Purpose/Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Extra Council of Education</td>
<td>Requests to the Ministry of Education a need for utilizing special education classrooms to provide pull out instruction for children in regular classrooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Educational Curriculum Council</td>
<td>Support for children with disabilities to achieve “the fullest possible social integration and individual development” including education</td>
<td>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>[Ministry/Advisory committee] a research on special education classrooms providing pull out instruction</td>
<td>Response to suggestions made by the Extra Council of Education in 1987</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>[Ministry/Advisory committee] a research on special education classrooms providing pull out instruction</td>
<td>A need for pull out instruction for children, who did not need to stay at special education classrooms all day long, but needed additional support when studying at regular classrooms</td>
<td>Parent support group for children with learning disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>[Ministry/Advisory committee] a research on special education classrooms providing pull out instruction</td>
<td>A need of support for children with learning disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>[Advisory committee, submitted to the Ministry of Education] a report of discussions regarding findings of the research on pull out instruction</td>
<td>Pull out instruction for children with disabilities/difficulties in regular classrooms at special education classrooms [Children with learning disabilities became to be able to receive pull out instruction outside of their classrooms, but the regulation specifically did not list “learning disabilities” until 2006]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>[Ministry of Education] Amendment of the enforcement regulation of the School Education Law</td>
<td>Pull out instruction for children with disabilities/difficulties in regular classrooms at special education classrooms [Children with learning disabilities became to be able to receive pull out instruction outside of their classrooms, but the regulation specifically did not list “learning disabilities” until 2006]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>raise awareness of people with disabilities and improve the quality of government policies on disability</td>
<td>UN ESCAP Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (extended to 2012 in 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td></td>
<td>Equal participation and independence in the society</td>
<td>New long term plan for persons with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td></td>
<td>promote people with disabilities to be able to participate in social, economical, cultural activities as independent individuals</td>
<td>Amendment of Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>inclusive education regardless of disabilities</td>
<td>UNESCO Salamanca Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>[Advisory committee, submitted to the Ministry of Education] Interim report of the research on children with learning disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Strategies to provide support for children with learning disabilities, including pull out instruction, team teaching, and additional support from classroom teachers. |
| 2001 | [Advisory committee, submitted to the Ministry of Education] the final research report of “Future direction of special education in the 21st century: Specialized support that meets needs of each child” | - Special education required understanding each child’s needs from the viewpoint of a child with a disability and providing support based on the child’s needs.  
- The needs of support were expanded to children with ADHD and high functioning autism in addition to children with learning disabilities. |
| 2001 | [Ministry/Advisory committee] a research project exploring the possibility for special education services started |  |
| 2002 | A call for the inclusion of all children in primary education by 2015 | UN ESCAP Biwako millennium framework |
| 2002 | A need to provide support for children with disabilities, including learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism | Basic Programme for Persons with Disabilities |
| 2002 | “guideline for the reform to provide educational support to children with learning disabilities and ADHD has to be developed by the end of the fiscal year 2004” | Five-Year Plan for Implementation of Priority Measures |
| 2002 | [Ministry/Advisory committee] national research on children who needed special educational support in regular classrooms | 6.3% of children were identified by their classroom teachers that they exhibit either academic or behavioral difficulties |
- Proposed a special education reform associating with the increasing number of children who need additional support whose educational needs are diverse  
1) Individualized education programs  
2) Special education coordinators  
3) Resource rooms where children were pulled out to receive specialized instructions  
4) Committee in which staff members discuss how to provide support to children |
| 2004 | [Ministry of Education] tentative guideline for the educational reform | - Specific instructions to assess and evaluate children’s needs and abilities and to determine learning disabilities, ADHD, and high functioning autism.  
- Guidelines how new positions, roles, and procedures suggested in the final report should be implemented at school. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Definition of “developmental disabilities”</td>
<td>Disabilities caused by deficits in central nervous system · Symptoms of these disabilities present since early childhood · e.g., LD, ADHD, high functioning autism, language disabilities, disabilities involving motor coordination skills, disabilities that affect “psychological development as well as behavioral and emotional disorders, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Support for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Act (enacted in 2005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>[Central council on education, submitted to the Ministry of Education] Report: A system promoting special needs education</td>
<td>overview of the special education reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>[Ministry of Education] Amendment of the enforcement regulation of the School Education Law</td>
<td>Pull out instruction · Learning disabilities and ADHD were added · Autism was separated from emotional disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education</td>
<td>a description regarding special education was added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Inclusive education system for children with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Amendment of the School Education Law</td>
<td>New positions and procedures related to support for children in regular classrooms are: · In-school committee on special education · Understanding children’s needs · Designation of a special education coordinator · Individualized educational support programs · Individualized education programs · Teacher education regarding professional knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>First year of the full implementation of the new special education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>[Ministry of Education] Notice</td>
<td>Special education classrooms for children with emotional disorders were renamed to “special education classrooms for children with autism and emotional disorders”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX D

### History of Special Education in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Major educational reform in special education</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td><em>Brown v. Board of Education</em> [prohibiting segregation and discrimination on the basis of race in public schools]</td>
<td>Delivery of public education services for children with disabilities was inconsistent and unequal (Hall, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s - 1960s</td>
<td>Grassroots lobbying</td>
<td>Became the foundation for future rulings that children with disabilities could not be excluded from the public education system (Mithaiwala, 2004; Smith, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td><em>Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</em></td>
<td>The right of children with disabilities to a public education (e.g., Wright, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td><em>Mills v. Board of Education, District of Columbia</em></td>
<td>Obligation to provide special education to children with mental retardation (Allen-Meares, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td><em>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act</em></td>
<td>The right of children with disabilities to special education regardless of severity of disability (Allen-Meares, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Public Law 94-142, Education of All Handicapped Children Act (currently known as IDEA)</td>
<td>Made it possible for children with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education. (Hall, 2002; Mithaiwala, 2004; Lerner &amp; Lerner, 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td><em>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)</em></td>
<td>Autism was added as a disability category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Amendments to IDEA</td>
<td>ADHD was added to the Other Health Impairments category</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems

10th Revision, version for 2007 (WHO, 2007)

Chapter V: Mental and behavioural disorders (F00-F99)

Disorders of psychological development (F80-F89)

F80 Specific developmental disorders of speech and language
F80.0 Specific speech articulation disorder
F80.1 Expressive language disorder
F80.2 Receptive language disorder
F80.3 Acquired aphasia with epilepsy [Landau-Kleffner]
F80.8 Other developmental disorders of speech and language
F80.9 Developmental disorder of speech and language, unspecified
F81 Specific developmental disorders of scholastic skills
F81.0 Specific reading disorder
F81.1 Specific spelling disorder
F81.2 Specific disorder of arithmetical skills
F81.3 Mixed disorder of scholastic skills
F81.8 Other developmental disorders of scholastic skills
F81.9 Developmental disorder of scholastic skills, unspecified
F82 Specific developmental disorder of motor function
F83 Mixed specific developmental disorders
F84 Pervasive developmental disorders
F84.0 Childhood autism
F84.1 Atypical autism
F84.2 Rett's syndrome
F84.3 Other childhood disintegrative disorder
F84.4 Overactive disorder associated with mental retardation and stereotyped movements
F84.5 Asperger's syndrome
F84.8 Other pervasive developmental disorders
F84.9 Pervasive developmental disorder, unspecified
F88 Other disorders of psychological development
F89 Unspecified disorder of psychological development

Behavioural and emotional disorders with onset usually occurring in childhood and adolescence (F90-F98)

F90 Hyperkinetic disorders
F90.0 Disturbance of activity and attention
F90.1 Hyperkinetic conduct disorder
F90.8 Other hyperkinetic disorders
F90.9 Hyperkinetic disorder, unspecified
F91 Conduct disorders
F91.0 Conduct disorder confined to the family context
F91.1 Unsocialized conduct disorder
F91.2 Socialized conduct disorder
F91.3 Oppositional defiant disorder
F91.8 Other conduct disorders
F91.9 Conduct disorder, unspecified
F92 Mixed disorders of conduct and emotions
F92.0 Depressive conduct disorder
F92.8 Other mixed disorders of conduct and emotions
F92.9 Mixed disorder of conduct and emotions, unspecified
F93 Emotional disorders with onset specific to childhood
F93.0 Separation anxiety disorder of childhood
F93.1 Phobic anxiety disorder of childhood
F93.2 Social anxiety disorder of childhood
F93.3 Sibling rivalry disorder
F93.8 Other childhood emotional disorders
F93.9 Childhood emotional disorder, unspecified
F94 Disorders of social functioning with onset specific to childhood and adolescence
F94.0 Elective mutism
F94.1 Reactive attachment disorder of childhood
F94.2 Disinhibited attachment disorder of childhood
F94.8 Other childhood disorders of social functioning
F94.9 Childhood disorder of social functioning, unspecified
F95 Tic disorders
F95.0 Transient tic disorder
F95.1 Chronic motor or vocal tic disorder
F95.2 Combined vocal and multiple motor tic disorder [de la Tourette]
F95.8 Other tic disorders
F95.9 Tic disorder, unspecified
F98 Other behavioural and emotional disorders with onset usually occurring in childhood and adolescence
F98.0 Nonorganic enuresis
F98.1 Nonorganic encopresis
F98.2 Feeding disorder of infancy and childhood
F98.3 Pica of infancy and childhood
F98.4 Stereotyped movement disorders
F98.5 Stuttering [stammering]
F98.6 Cluttering
F98.8 Other specified behavioural and emotional disorders with onset usually occurring in childhood and adolescence
F98.9 Unspecified behavioural and emotional disorders with onset usually occurring in childhood and adolescence
APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol for Educators

These questions were translated into Japanese and modified in a conversational style so that Japanese participants were comfortable with responding.

Opening statement

This interview is about your experiences of working with children with disabilities and how you think about services for these children. I have several topics to discuss, but basically I would like to ask you to share what you think about special education and children with disabilities, especially, children with LD, ADHD, and high functioning autism.

I learned about special education and school social work in the U.S., but I found that I did not know anything about children with disabilities in Japan, although I received a public education there. One of the purposes of this study is to learn from you how you work with children with disabilities. I think educators have important roles to provide support for children who have difficulties in their classrooms. Can you tell me about children you are working with who have LD, ADHD, or autism?

I have an experience as a school social work intern, but I also have a longer experience as a client to receive services for my disability. I did not have good relationships with physicians until I met a neurologist who found out that I had a problem in my spinal cord. Until then, some of them referred me to a psychiatrist or a psychologist, and the others gave me a long list of examinations and tests to find out what was wrong with me. My “case” was not typical, and when they find could nothing useful to “treat” me, I was left in a rehabilitation room without any goals or expectations regarding how long I was supposed to be in the program.

As an educator, how would you handle children’s disabilities at school? How do you work with parents?

When I switched my “goal” from being able to walk again to living in a wheelchair independently, I met social workers and other people who helped me. Social workers gave me information, such as how to find a place to live accessible to wheelchairs. We went together to “practice” taking a train and going to grocery stores. I learned how to use a wheelchair from a physical therapist. She even taught me how to use an escalator in a wheelchair. Within a year, I became able to do most of the things by myself. When I switched my goal, my why of thinking about disability also changed. I thought that I had a disability, but I could be independent if I had a wheelchair.

For you, as an educator, what do children’s disabilities mean? What do you think are the challenges for these children you are working with?
[Additional questions will be asked after participants share their experiences, if their narratives do not contain the following information.]

1) **Type of involvement**
   - What made you become a teacher for children with disabilities?
   - Can you tell me about some of the children you are working with who have these types of disabilities, such as their relationships with you and peers?
   - How do you think about working with children with disabilities and their parents?
   
   **[Probe questions: Any examples from your experiences? How long have you been working with children with disabilities? What types of disabilities do your students have?]**

2) **Meanings of disability and special education**
   - There may be many different definitions of disability, but what does disability mean for you in your daily life of working with children with disabilities?
   - How do you feel about working with children with LD, ADHD, and autism?
   - Considering children with these disabilities, what do you think are the differences from children with other types of disabilities?
   
   **[Probe questions: Please tell me about your definition of disability? What type of disability are you familiar with? What does special education mean for you?]**

3) **Experiences in special education**
   - Can you describe from your experience about special education services for children with these types of disabilities?
   - How do you describe your relationships with parents?
   - Can you tell me how you are working with children with behavioral/learning difficulties in your classroom?
   - Can you describe the support you think is beneficial for these children from your past experiences?
   
   **[Probe questions: Any example? What do you think about peers and their parents in terms of support for your children? From whom your children are receiving support primarily?]**

4) **Beliefs about disability and their impact on children**
   - Can you tell me about any of your experiences, where you found that you had similar or different ideas about disabilities from other people in the community?
   - How do you think these ideas affect the lives of children with disabilities you are working with?
   - How do you think and feel about talking about your job as an educator working with children with disabilities to someone at school, home, or outside of school such as your friends?
   - Who are the persons you are comfortable with talking about your job at school or outside of the school?
   - How would you think about stereotypical ideas about disability in the society, such as stigma?
   
   **[Probe questions: Any example? How would you feel if you were the person with a disability?]**
5) Challenges
▪ What kind of challenges did you have when providing special education services?
▪ How did you handle them?
[Probe questions: What was the biggest challenge you ever had in relation to special education?
  What is missing? What would you like to have more?]

6) Current special education services
▪ What are some of the strengths of the current special education services?
▪ What are weaknesses?
▪ Could you describe the most exciting experience you ever had?
▪ What was the worst experience?
[Probe questions: Can you describe from your experiences? Why?]

7) Satisfaction with services for children with disabilities
▪ Are you satisfied with your current job? Why?
▪ What do you think about parents’ expectations for you?

8) Suggestions for improvement
▪ Can you tell me if you have ideas that make services for children more effective?
[Probe questions: What are some of the things you think that improve the services for children?
Do you have any example from your experiences? What did you try to make the program more effective? Did it work?]

Ending statement
I would like to close this interview by asking if you have other thoughts you would like to share or if you have any questions.
APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol for Parents

These questions were translated into Japanese and modified in a conversational style so that Japanese participants were comfortable with responding.

Opening statement

This interview is about your experiences of raising a child with a disability and how you think about services for your child. I have several topics to discuss, but basically I would like to ask you to share what you think about special education and children with disabilities, especially, children with LD, ADHD, and high functioning autism.

Before starting the interview, I will share my experience first. I am not a parent, so I do not know exactly how parents feel or think when they find that their children have disabilities. I am the child who has a disability. I had my wheelchair when I was a graduate student in Japan. I had a very difficult time, but I also saw my parents having a difficult time to accept my disability. I was wondering if you had anything you can share with me as a parent.

I might not be a good child for my mother. I was tired of not being able to walk and staying at home. One day when my mother called me, I said, “you never know how I feel, because I am the one who can’t walk, and you can walk.” She said, “I may not know exactly, but I tried. I went up stairs without using my legs, like you, and it was so hard. I didn’t know you were doing this everyday.” I thought, “She is really my mother”.

By the time when I decided to use a wheelchair, she believed that it would help me, but I thought it was not easy for parents to get through. When you found that your child needed additional support at home or school, how did you feel or think?

My father had a more difficult time. Right after my own wheelchair arrived, we went somewhere together. He came to the hospital to pick me up. It was the first time he saw my new wheelchair, and he did not know how to fold it and put in the car. He did something wrong, and I said, “Don’t do this, it’s still new!” I just wanted him to handle it more carefully. He said, “If you say so, I will never touch it!” We did not talk about my “disability” like I talked with my mother. It was the first time I learned that my father was also trying to adjust. I knew he wanted me to be a medical doctor. I cannot make it happen for him any more, but I am the “same” Misa. I think it is a question also for my parents. As a parent, what does “disability” mean for you?

He said, “I will never touch it,” but he really did not mean it. Actually, he was the one who made ramps in front of the entrance of the apartment when I left the hospital several months later. My parents had very different responses to my wheelchair. I know they really care for and think about me. Could you tell me what you think about your child’s disability?
In addition to parents, other people at the hospital or a rehabilitation center helped me a lot to learn to live in a wheelchair. I think special education or additional support at school also helps your child to deal with her/his difficulties. Are there any experiences you would like to share with me?

[Additional questions will be asked after participants share their experiences, if their narratives do not contain the following information.]

1) Type of involvement
- Can you tell me about your child, for example, how she/he is like at home or school?
- How old is she/he?
- Can you describe your child’s disability or difficulties?
[Probe questions: How are you taking care of your child? How are you working with educators? Any examples from your experiences?]

2) Meanings of disability and special education
- There may be many different definitions of disability, but what does disability mean for you in your daily life of working with children with disabilities?
- How do you feel about having a child with a disability?
- How do you think and feel about receiving special education services?
- Considering children with these disabilities, what do you think are the differences from children with other types of disabilities?
[Probe questions: Please tell me about your definition of disability? What type of disability are you familiar with? What does special education mean for you?]

3) Experiences in special education
- Can you describe from your experience about special education services for your child?
- How do you describe your relationships with educators?
- Can you tell me what kind of support your child is receiving at school?
- How are you dealing with problems related to your child’s disability at home?
- Can you describe the support you think is beneficial for your child from your past experiences?
[Probe questions: Any example? What do you think about peers and their parents in terms of support for your children? From whom is your child receiving support primarily?]

4) Beliefs about disability and their impact on children
- Can you tell me about any of your experiences, where you found that you had similar or different ideas about disabilities from other people in the community?
- How do you think these ideas affect the life of your child?
- How do you feel and think about talking about your child’s disability or difficulty to someone at school, home, or outside of the school?
- Who are the persons you are comfortable with talking about your child’s disability/difficulty?
- How would you think about stereotypical ideas about disability in the society, such as negative views?
[Probe questions: Any example? How would you feel if you were the person with a disability?]
5) Challenges
   ▪ What kind of challenges did you have when receiving special education services for your child?
   ▪ How did you handle them?
   [Probe questions: What was the biggest challenge you ever had in relation to taking care of your children? What is missing? What would you like to have more?]

6) Current special education services
   ▪ What are some of the strengths of the current special education services?
   ▪ What are weaknesses?
   ▪ Could you describe the most exciting experience you ever had?
   ▪ What was the worst experience?
   [Probe questions: Can you describe from your experiences? Why? ]

7) Satisfaction with services for children with disabilities
   ▪ Are you satisfied with the current services for your child? Why?
   ▪ What do you think about educators’ expectations for you?

8) Suggestions for improvement
   ▪ Can you tell me if you have ideas that make services for children more effective?
   [Probe questions: What are some of the things you think that improve the services for children? Do you have any example from your experiences? What did you try to make the program more effective? Did it work?]

Ending statement
I would like to close this interview by asking if you have other thoughts you would like to share or if you have any questions.
APPENDIX H

Interview Protocol for Children

These questions/stories were translated into Japanese and modified in a conversational style so that Japanese children were comfortable with responding.

Opening statement

I have a couple of questions for you today about your day at school. If you don’t know or don’t want to answer, you can just say “no”. If you have questions, you can ask me anytime.

I will talk about my wheelchair first, before asking you questions. I have many things I cannot do without my wheelchair, but I can do most of the things by myself, if I have my wheelchair. I can drive, cook, and go to school. How did you think about my wheelchair when you first saw it?

Before I had my wheelchair, I stayed at home all day long except when I went to a hospital. When I needed something, I had to ask my mother or someone to do it for me. Sometimes, I had to wait a while, or sometimes, I was frustrated by thinking how many times I had to ask every day. Do you have this kind of experience? What was like that?

My therapist one day asked me if I wanted to try a wheelchair. I thought that a wheelchair was for people who had more difficult problems. I could not walk at that time. That was a big problem. But I did not think that was that bad. If you were in the similar situation, what would you say?

I started learning how to use a wheelchair. At first, it was difficult to go straight, but I was able to move around by myself and fetch things I needed without asking anyone. I like that, because I don’t have to ask someone. My wheelchair is like a tool to help me, like people wearing glasses to see and read. Do you think you have any “tools,” like my wheelchair, that help you at school or home? What are they?

[Additional questions will be asked after participants share their experiences, if their narratives do not contain the following information.]

1) What’s your day at school (or home) usually like?
   What do you like the best at school?
   What is the worst?
   Tell me about your friends at school.
   How do you think about them? Are they supportive?

2) Do you go to meet and work with someone other than your classroom teachers, such as special education teacher, speech therapist, or school social worker? If so, what does it look like?
   What do you do with them?
3) Why do you think you go to see these people? Have you ever talked about this with someone such as your teachers, parents, or your brothers/sisters?

4) How do you feel about that?
   Do you like it? Why?
   How do you think about that?
   Does it help you? How?

5) Do you have any advices for other children who have similar problems as yours?
   How about your friends at school?
   Your parents?
   Teachers?

**Ending statement**
Thank you very much for sharing. Do you have any questions? It’s ok if you have questions about me, my wheelchair, or schools in the U.S./Japan. I will try to answer as much as possible.