

Overview of recent research on disability from the Gamble-Skogmo research program

For more information contact:

Wendy Haight, PhD
Professor and Gamble-Skogmo Chair in Child Welfare and Youth Policy
School of Social Work
1404 Peters Hall
St Paul, MN 55108
612-624-4721

Haight, W., Kayama, M., Kincaid, T. Evans, K., & Kim, N. (2013). The elementary-school functioning of children with maltreatment histories and subtle cognitive or behavioral disabilities: A mixed methods inquiry. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 420-428.

This mixed methods inquiry examined the school functioning of elementary school-aged children with maltreatment histories and mild cognitive or behavioral disabilities (high incident disabilities). Quantitative analyses of linked social service and education administrative databases of 10,394 children in Minnesota with maltreatment histories indicated that 32% were eligible for special education services. Of those children with maltreatment histories and identified disabilities, 73% had mild cognitive or behavioral disabilities. The most frequent primary disabilities categories were specific learning disabilities (33%) and emotional/behavioral disabilities (27%). Children with maltreatment histories and mild cognitive or behavioral disabilities scored significantly below children with maltreatment histories and no identified disabilities on standardized assessments of math and reading, and this gap increased with grade level for math. Qualitative interviews with 22 child welfare professionals and 15 educators suggested why some children with maltreatment histories, especially those with mild cognitive or behavioral disabilities, struggle in school. Risks to school functioning included children's and families' multiple unmet basic and mental health needs which can mask or overshadow children's mild disabilities; poor cross systems collaboration between child welfare, education and mental health systems; and inadequate funding, especially for mental health services. Protective factors included child engagement in school, parent engagement with child welfare services and a professional culture of cross-systems collaboration. Implications are discussed for holistic child, family and system-level interventions.

Kayama, M. & Haight, W. (2012). Cultural sensitivity in the delivery of disability services to children: A case study of Japanese education and socialization. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 266-275.

This ethnographic study examined beliefs about disability and related socialization and educational practices at a Japanese elementary school. Disability is a universal issue affecting child welfare and educational systems around the world. Yet, relatively little sociocultural research has focused on non-Western children with disabilities. This limitation restricts our understanding of the extent to which and how cultures vary in their responses to disability, and

the impact of these variations on children's development. Public schools in Japan recently implemented formal special education services for children with "developmental disabilities," a new category used by educators to refer to "milder" difficulties in children's acquisition of social and academic skills, for example, learning disabilities, ADHD and Asperger's syndrome. This transition created a dilemma for educators: blending new requirements of providing individualized support with traditional Japanese socialization and educational practices of raising and educating children within peer groups. Participant observation, in-depth interviews, and longitudinal case studies of children with developmental disabilities addressed culturally- and developmentally-sensitive practices employed by educators. Educators were sensitive to stigma, involved peers in supporting one another, created home-like classrooms, guided children towards voluntary cooperation, and provided support and guidance to parents. Broad implications for the design of culturally-sensitive disability services are discussed.

Kayama, M. & Haight, W. (in press). The experiences of Japanese elementary-school children living with "developmental disabilities": Navigating peer relationships. *Qualitative Social Work*. Available online: <http://qsw.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/03/06/1473325012439321.full.pdf>

This article focuses on children's experiences of the evolving Japanese special education system. Relatively little disability research has focused on non-Western children, which restricts our understanding of the extent to which and how cultures vary in their responses to disability, and the impact of those differences on the developing child. 'Developmental disabilities' is a term used by Japanese educators to refer to various neurologically-based conditions which cause 'milder' difficulties with school functioning, for example, learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD), and Asperger's Syndrome. Public schools in Japan recently implemented formal special education services for children with developmental disabilities. Our previous ethnographic research at Greenleaf Elementary School described how educators and parents balanced new requirements to provide formal individualized services with traditional Japanese practices of educating and socializing children within peer groups, in part, through practices that encourage supportive peer relationships. Using a longitudinal, multiple case study design, we describe how three children with developmental disabilities experienced these socialization practices, focusing on their active, individual efforts to connect with peers. Prior to their involvement in special education, all three children struggled with peer relationships. Over time, they used opportunities provided by educators to connect with peers and find their *Ibasho*, a place where they felt comfortable and accepted, within their peer groups. Children developed relationships with peers through self-regulating contact with them, and through their specialized interests and play. Understanding the experiences and creative responses of children from diverse cultural and subcultural groups provides a unique perspective from which to view our own disability policies and practices.

Kayama, M. & Haight, W. (in press). Disability and stigma: How Japanese educators help parents accept their children's differences. *Social Work*

In this report, part of a larger ethnographic study, we examine the support Japanese elementary school educators provide to parents of children with relatively mild cognitive and behavioral

disabilities, such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and Asperger's Syndrome. Conditions that impact children's learning and behaviors are widespread, but cultures vary in responses to children with such difficulties and their families. In many cultures, disability remains a sensitive issue due to lingering stigma. Japan's recent implementation of special education services for children with mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities provided a unique context in which to examine otherwise taken for granted beliefs and practices related to disability. Participant observations in a Japanese elementary school and individual interviews with educators and parents suggest that parents' sensitivity to other people's "eyes," or stigma, can be an obstacle to their acceptance of their children's need for special education, permission for their children to receive services and collaboration with educators. Educators supported parents through a steadfast focus on emotional support, communication, relationship building and partnerships. Japanese practices and adults' reflections on stigma provide a broader context for international, school, and other social workers to reflect on their own beliefs and practices with families of children with disabilities.

Kayama, M. & Haight, W. (In press). *Disability, Culture and Development: The case of Japanese children at school*, New York: Oxford University Press.

In this book, we consider a key moment in the history of how disabilities are envisioned in Japan: the transition between two different understandings of what it means when children have difficulties learning in school. After the special education reform in 2007, Japanese children with mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities, including learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and high functioning autism, became eligible to receive special education services. Then, children formerly viewed as "difficult" or "slow" were officially recognized as having "disabilities" and in need of special intervention. Using ethnographic methods, we describe how educators, parents, and children at "Greenleaf Elementary School" experienced this transition and how traditional Japanese educational beliefs and practices shaped the implementation of new educational policies. This glimpse into the everyday experiences of these Japanese children, their parents, and educators reflects culturally widespread challenges faced by children with disabilities such as stigma, but also the distinctly Japanese cultural hue of adults' and children's responses. At Greenleaf Elementary School, adults and children addressed the "dilemma of difference" arising when children are singled out on the basis of deficits to receive necessary educational support that is different from that of their peers, and thus potentially stigmatizing. They creatively and flexibly adapted to changes, weaving new policy-generated perspectives of disabilities into traditional, Japanese cultural beliefs and practices. The Japanese case provides us with a unique vantage point to reflect back on our own policies and practices.