Overview of the research

Research Questions
- How do educators socialize children to minimize stigma and facilitate acceptance for children with mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities?
- What are similarities and differences across cultures?

Children with Mild Cognitive and Behavioral Disabilities
- Their diagnoses include learning disabilities, ADHD, and high-functioning autism.
- They appear “normal and healthy” and in many areas, function well.
- Their behaviors may be interpreted as laziness, disobedience, and disrespect.
- They may be at risk for delay in receipt of services and educational neglect.
- These disabilities are recognized as “high-incidence” disabilities in the U.S.
- The number of children identified as having mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities has increased over the last decade in East Asian countries.

Conceptual Framework
- Peers, educators, and parents play important roles in children’s co-construction of positive/negative attitudes toward disability and in supporting children with disabilities within their classrooms (e.g., Varene & McDermott, 1998).
- “Universalism without uniformity” – Understand cultural variations through issues commonly addressed in every culture, e.g., “disability” (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993).

Methods
- Semi-structured, audio-recorded individual in-depth interviews with educators
- Participants described their experiences working with children with disabilities.
- All data were collected and analyzed in participants’ native language.
- Using analytic induction techniques, the meanings of participants’ experiences were interpreted through repeated readings of transcribed interviews (Schwartz, 2007).
- Cross-cultural variations and similarities were examined through going discussion among researchers (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993).

Participants

Japan: 26 educators from 4 suburban areas in Japan
- 20 females; 3-40 years of experience
South Korea: 43 educators in a metropolitan area
- 41 females; 6-40 years of experience
Taiwan: 14 educators in a metropolitan area
- 14 females; 10-30 years of experience
U.S.: 18 educators in a suburban area
- 15 females; 2-33 years of experience

Socio-cultural, Historical & Policy Context
- Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan share relatively common beliefs about disability influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and animism.
- They also have been influenced by special education policies from Western countries, including the U.S.
- Yet the implementation of special education systems vary in each country.

The Importance of Peers as Reflected in Policies
- Explicit agenda in East Asian countries
  - The “whole person” perspective and personality development of children
  - Relationships of children with disabilities and typically-developing peers are mutually beneficial.
- Implicit agenda in the U.S.
  - No explicit description regarding peers’ roles in the education of children with disabilities

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Results & Discussion

Common issues addressed in four sites

Peers’ reactions influence children’s experience of stigma
- Teachers in four sites commonly addressed children with disabilities who internalized stigma caused by their disabilities or “differences,” e.g., feeling ashamed, worrying about their peers’ reactions, etc.
- Teachers create a “kind” classroom atmosphere
  - In four sites, teachers teach and guide children to create a positive classroom atmosphere.
  - Children’s reactions to peers with disabilities change with their development.
    - Younger children are more accepting.

Cultural variations

Japan
- Less stigma for children with mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities than for those with other types of disabilities
  - Classroom teachers prefer to provide extra support for children with disabilities as “naturally” as possible.
  - Educators may involve typically-developing peers in the support for children with disabilities.

Taiwan
- Mixed reactions to children’s mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities.
  - Some people have prejudice but some do not.
  - Some parents are not able to accept their children’s disabilities. Educators are sensitive enough to help them.
  - Educators tell peers explicitly that the child has a disability and encourage them to help him/her.
  - Taiwan has implemented “humanistic inclusive education,” which allows flexibility in supporting children.
  - Educators have developed their own strategies to handle the disruptive behaviors of children with disabilities, e.g., praising and “shaming” strategies.

South Korea
- Sensitivity to stigma is strong.
  - Educators focus on developing disability awareness programs to promote positive perspectives on children with disabilities.
  - Educators explicitly encourage children to understand the struggles of their peers with disabilities.
  - South Korea has developed a structured special education system (e.g., clear roles for general and special education teachers.)
  - Educators described peers’ sensitivity to teachers’ responses to children with disabilities rather than the “differences” caused by their disabilities.

Implications for educators & practitioners

- Benefits of receiving special education may outweigh stigma for children with mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities.
- Educators recognized that children’s peer group memberships as an important learning context.
- Educators utilize a variety of strategies to facilitate positive interaction between children with disabilities and typically-developing peers to minimize stigma.
- The U.S. has established relatively fixed and structured special education systems with clear procedural guidelines.
- Special education policies have been shifting toward more classroom-based support from individually based interventions provided by specialists.

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In four sites, educators have experienced the recent transition of special education systems involving support for children with mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities.
- Findings suggest both cultural variation and similarities across four sites.
- In four sites, typically-developing peers played important roles in the support for children with mild cognitive and behavioral disabilities. Yet their beliefs, experiences and practices are culturally nuanced.

Help children understand their peers with disabilities and include them
- Teachers commonly facilitate positive interactions, e.g., by educating and encouraging typically-developing children to understand and help their peers with disabilities.
- Teachers use metaphor to help peers understand struggles of children with disabilities.
- Teachers in four sites used a variety of metaphors, e.g., “cup of tolerance,” “thinking pockets,” “cookies with different colors,” and “different size of shoes” so that children can understand and respect individual differences.

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China
- “If there is a child with a disability, other children grow… There are children who look at them as ‘special’ but [we try] to make it in a way that has positive impacts, and raises other children’s kokoro [heart and mind].”

Implications for educators & practitioners

- East Asian cases provide U.S. educators with new perspectives to develop intervention programs for children from culturally diverse communities, including immigrant families.
- U.S. cases provide educators in East Asian countries a general framework to provide systematic and consistent interventions.

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