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Ms. Curtin

Independent Research 1

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Primary Research Results  
Interview Transcriptions

Interview with Prof. Haight of the University of Minnesota, author

**SC:** Before we begin this interview, do I have your consent to record this conversation?

**WH:** You do.

**SC:** Thank you. And I should warn you now, but in a few minutes, the bell will ring and there will be some announcements. So I will pause in the middle of the conversation until the announcements are over.

**WH:** Okay.

**SC:** So, my first question is, to what extent has cultural stigma made it difficult for students to receive special education in Japanese public schools?

**WH:** Well, there are several layers to my answer here. From policy and an educational policy perspective, Japanese students with particularly kinds of disabilities, we might describe as milder types of disabilities. That would be like children who were...are on the autism spectrum, but high functioning. Students who have dyslexia, students who have ADHD, um these students were not entitled to receive support services, specialized support services. And so I think it was 2007 or 2008. So really decades after the U.S. had passed the IDEA. So, why was that the case? Um, one of the reasons why, one of the important reasons why was that Japanese educators and professionals and policy makers were very concerned about the risk of stigmatization posed by specialized services that labeled a child, or put, you know, and take a child and give them special education services different from peers. So when Japanese public schools and elementary schools, education occurs with peers, in peer groups. So academic work is done in peer groups and also, planning for advanced special events, field trips, chores around the school, all occurred in peer groups all occurred in peer groups because the Japanese really valued working together with people of different interests and abilities, to you know, further a goal. So when...So that means that a priority is placed on being part of that group. And anything that marks a child from very different from that group, risks stigmatization. So for that reason, Japanese professionals

were very hesitant to provide specialized services, because of the risks of stigmatization. For children who in many contexts are typically developing. Child dyslexia, for example, they have trouble deciphering written texts. So in context of when they don't need to read, they're typically developing and brights. And so, if you label them, as having dyslexia, as having a disability, and get them special services, you risk stigmatizing a child that in most contexts is typically developing, so the Japanese did have policies, education policies provide specialized services to children with very severe disabilities, like children who were blind or deaf for example. But the subtler disabilities, they're concerned about stigmatization, and therefore they want these specialized services like we have in the US. So that didn't, then about ten years ago, or a little before that, these services, these policies were developed, so that the services could be put in place in public schools; however, that stigmatization continued to impact services because parents did not want their children labeled as disabled. And they did not want to restrict them. So they refuse to allow their children to participate, to receive specialized services. So there's another place, another way that stigma impacts services. Now Japan has learned from the US about how to create policies and practices for special education. I think we in the US need to learn from Japan about practices to reduce stigma. Teachers and policymakers in Japan have wonderful ways of reducing stigma. And we're kind of insensitive to that. So studies of families with children who are involved in special education often describe the special education they receive as impersonal, insensitive, and problematic-stigmatizing. So just as Japan can learn from us, we have a lot learn from Japan

**SC:** And um, based on your response, how is cultural stigma different in the US from Japan? Like, is it more "hushed up" or is it addressed more in schools?

**WH:** Well, Japan has been described as a stigma-sensitive culture. So because there's an emphasis on the group, and on furthering the goals of the group, than to be different from the group has more intense consequences than in the US to not stigmatizing children. And some of the examples, I could give you a couple of the examples to illustrate some of the...that in Japan, there are ritual words that are said to family members, when they meet home, in the morning, and when they return in the afternoon or evening. And these have resonance....

*School announcements*

**SC:** Okay, I'm sorry. Keep going.

**WH:** So these ritualized words have emotional meaning and they have to do with belonging. So the teachers in the elementary school where we got our research, they started using these ritualized words when children left the classroom to receive specialized services. So when you think about that, by asking those rituals at school, the teachers were communicating in a very subtle way, but in a profound way to children in the class as well as children who were leaving, that that child is a member of our family. And just as family members can leave the group and be

welcomed back, so can the child leave our classroom and be welcomed back. In Japan, it is very unusual for children to leave the classroom to leave the peer group. So that's the way that they had cultural resources to bridge this practice with traditional Japanese education. So it was a way that they use it as a bridge to reduce stigmatization. That's one example.

**SC:** Okay, thank you. Also, how do the parents' attitudes about their child's disability contribute to the child's academic success?

**WH:** In Japan, as I mentioned,...

*School announcements*

**WH:**...uh, parent might refuse for their child to have specialized services, and without specialized services, the child not only struggles say with reading or math, but can also get secondary uh to what they see well, so that they may become frustrated and have behavioral problems or be discouraged and get depressed. By not supporting children in compensating for disabilities, not only impacts their academic success directly, but it can also have a negative effect psychologically or socially. But on the other hand, um... in South Korea, where there is, and there has been educational policies, almost as long as the US for kids with disabilities. There hasn't been support for the education of teachers

*School announcements*

**WH:** ...refuse the services there, they are reducing dubious services there that might not be effective

*Announcements end*

**WH:** So in that case, the (calculations?) that the parents are making

*School announcements*

**WH:** Do you risk stigmatization? Well, if the services are going to be really effective and held your child, you might. If you question whether or not the services are even effective because the...

*School announcements*

have not been trained, uh,, then you may decide not to have those services.

**SC:** Just as the children are impacted by their parents' attitudes, how are the parents impacted by their student's involvement in special education programs by others?

**WH:** Okay, well, again, stigmatization can come into play. There is a concept called courtesy stigma. And this is a term

*School announcements*

**WH:** that is...by sociologists,...work on stigma. I'm not sure, I've never figure out why they call it courtesy stigma., but the basic idea is that if you have...association with someone with a stigma, then your status also is lowered. And so, parents and families, parents in Japan, can avoid letting anyone know that their child is participating in special education out of fear that they and their families will lose face and become stigmatized as well. So stigma has a direct effect on whether or not children get the services and it also has an indirect effect on the child's siblings and parents.

**SC:** After the majority of special needs students in Japanese public schools graduate, are they encouraged to reach success in their futures through college and through different career paths?

**WH:** Um...It's a tricky one, because I think it's maybe maybe hard to generalize, that often the support is not as good, that the structure to the school might not be as strong when you get higher levels of high school and college. So during the years of mandatory schooling, there was support, not necessarily at higher levels.

**SC:** Um..how are special needs students in the US encouraged to...

*School announcements*

**WH:** I'm sorry I didn't hear the rest of that question.

**SC:** I'm sorry. It's these...um...how are special needs students in the US compared to Japan, encouraged to reach success in their futures?

**WH:** Well I think our laws are stronger. Um, people who have disabilities are entitled are appropriate support. So at the University of Minnesota, there is a special center that people with disabilities can receive support. And as a professor, I am obliged by law to accommodate people with disabilities. So a student who has a reading disorder, for example, that would be documented, and I would consult with the Ability Center to provide appropriate accommodation, for example, extra time in test taking, or extra in writing papers, and also, there may be universities, I'm thinking of University of Southern Illinois in particular, is professionally well-known for their support of students with disabilities. They have like uh students can

actually take a test at the center, where they would be monitored for more time or someone would read the test to them. We do a pretty good job, but sometimes

*School announcements*

**WH:**...a good policy is not what it should be.

**SC:** Uh-huh, and both locally and internationally, is awareness enough to dispel stigma against mental illnesses?

*School announcements*

**WH:** Oh mental illnesses? Oh, well that might be, that is necessary. It definitely is necessary, but it is not sufficient. So you have to have awareness. And then you also have to have policies and laws to back it up. It can't be just like somebody's decision to discriminate or not. That there are protections we have and laws and policies--those are very important that back that up and mandate that make very clear that discrimination is not okay. And of course you have to have adequate support for people who are struggling so that they can reach their potential and contribute to society.

*School announcements*

**SC:** Um, what are some other potential solutions for dispelling stigma, especially because um.. Although laws are enacted, it's very difficult to change the minds of an entire nation?

**WH:** Right. Well I think there are a lot of variability. There are disability advocacy groups so people with disabilities. For example, advocate for their rights. And there are people who do not have disabilities who are allies of individuals with them to raise awareness and humanize their situations. So if you think about, everyone in our lives, have a disability. Some are born with them, some get them through accidents, and we all get disability when we grow old; we lose our hearing, our eyesight develop illnesses. So it is human condition, so it kind of removed all of us to have more empathy and understanding because we ourselves or our families will experience disabilities. It's pretty much a guarantee. So, awareness, advocacy works, working with people who have disabilities, those are all necessary steps...Then again, we cannot overgeneralize. There are people that do not discriminate against disabilities, so we can look at people who are doing a good job supporting and accommodating and working with people with disabilities as role models.

**SC:** Um..Is there anything else you would like to add on this topic?

**WH:** No, I think you had a very good set of questions. We covered it.

**SC:** I have one final question, which is, do you know any other professionals or experts who may be interested in sitting for an interview?

**WH:** Oh.. If you go to the University of Minnesota website, there may be people from disability services. I expect that you could find someone who would writing services would be a good person to talk to. So I would suggest talk.

**SC:** Thank you very much. If you think of anyone else, who may be useful on this topic, if you could email their contact information to me, that would be extremely appreciated.

**WH:** Okay.

**SC:** Again, Thank you very much.

Interview with Ms. Tracey Richards, Special Education ITL at Howard High School

**SC:** So to start off, what is the best part of your job?

**TR:** The best part of my job is when I see students really benefitting in a positive way from the support that we're providing, when what we're doing works, and I see the success that they achieved, that they may not have achieved before. And then it's really nice to see.

**SC:** What are some challenges that you face in your day to day work?

**TR:** Well, the first challenge is that there's too much work to do and not enough time \*chuckles\*... But I think that sometimes there are some teachers who don't have as much of an understanding of the learning differences that students have. And so they're not as clear about how the supports that we're saying the students need can really help the students.

It seems like they feel like we're doing-we're giving them extra, when really what we're trying to do is raise them up to a place where they can access just like everybody else. So we're trying to give them the tools they need to be able to learn. And sometimes teachers I don't think-don't get that some students need extra tools.

**SC:** Yeah, that reminds me of some of the research I've been doing with, like the IEPs, and how, especially with autism, there's such a broad spectrum that, like some students, they need more help than others, while some students. Their symptoms may appear more severe.

In others, it's not very noticeable from the outside...

**TR:** Right

**SC:** So how have Howard students with autism been able to achieve greater academic success or self confidence?

**TR:** So, I feel like that the students who are really achieving academic success are gaining more confidence. When they are willing to accept the help, when they are using the tools that we try to give them and they are achieving success then, it provides momentum that then builds on itself. So I think it's really about understanding what the student needs and making sure that you're providing the right tools, because like you said, there's a **big spectrum**.

And what works for one student may not work for another. So it's really just figuring out the right mix of what works for them.

**SC:** You mentioned the word "tools" a couple times, what are some examples of tools that different students use to achieve greater-

**TR:** Okay, so for example, some students have difficulty looking up at the screen, listening and writing. So for a student like that, the moment that you give them the class notes, or a copy of the Powerpoint ahead of time that they can have on their desk, so they're not having to shift their gaze. And while they're listening and get my highlighter, and they can highlight the important things instead of having to write what they're listening to. Because it's really a struggle to do all three of those things at the same time for those students. And it's because of the disability, it's not because they're not listening, or not because they're not paying attention. It's just because it's too difficult to listen, look, and write all at the same time. So that's one of the tools we'll be having this ahead of time and a highlighter, so they can just mark off what's important.

So that's one tool. Another tool might be a student who struggles with the printed word, but if they're listening to it while they're looking at the visual text, then they can understand and their comprehension improves.

**SC:** Uh-huh, so how have you or the students experienced stigma from the school and if so, in what forms does this stigma present itself?

**TR:** So, well first of all, there are students who are earning a diploma and students who are not earning a diploma. And I think that there's very different...they're looked at very differently. I think that there's more acceptance of the students with accepted disabilities who are not earning a diploma.

And I think that some of the students who struggle with learning in the regular classroom, but are working towards the diploma have more, face more of a stigma in that they're not intelligent enough or their behavior's bad. And a lot of times the behavior stems from the frustration that they're experiencing because they're struggling with the content, or that they're trying and trying and trying and not succeeding. And so they can get frustrated.

And then behavior starts to come out. Because I think anybody who's, you know, in a situation where they're not doing well, and they're frustrated, you might see them for their phone out, or you might see them pull their phone out, or you might see them put their head down, and you know, some of the behaviors you're not supposed to exhibit in class. And so I think that they often get labeled as students with behaviors problems, when really if you fix the learning difficulties, then the behaviors go away. So I think that's really, the biggest thing is more about the lack of discipline, as opposed to the lack of the skills that they need to learn. And I don't feel like, Howard is a very inclusive school, at least in my experience, and I don't see what happens in every classroom with every kid. But I think that there's a lot of acceptance of students with disabilities here. So I don't think that there's as much as you might find in other places.

**SC:** That's good. What factors are discussed between the teacher and the parents when devising an Individualized Education Plans?

**TR:** So what you look at is where they're currently performing in relation to the curriculum, where they're being successful, where they're not being successful. What are some of the things that they struggle the most with? And at the high school level, the student is part of the team as well. So the input from the student about what they're experiencing in the classroom is extremely important. When is it hard for you to learn? You know, what is it about their particular class that you struggle with? What helps you to learn, so having that input from the student is really important as to, you know, student might say, " Well, when I'm sitting in the front of the



classroom, I get really distracted by what's going on behind me. So a seat in the back of the room is better for me. So that information is from the student, as well as the parent from what they're seeing at home is really important.

And it's also I think, the parents share information about the interactions they've had with the teachers in the classroom as well.

You know, and they're hearing from the teachers, we also ask the teachers for input on a form, so that they can put their thoughts and writing in terms of where they're seeing kids struggle. So that information from the teachers in terms of where we look at at the reading, writing, and math, are they having trouble with certain skills? Are they having trouble with application? Are they having trouble inferencing? So just getting that information from the teachers about where the student in relation to the curriculum. And then, we also look at whether there is a learning disability or autism or you know, what is the disability and what is the characteristics of that disability? And then, how can we accommodate for those difficulties?

**SC:** How has Howard High School provided advocacy for mental awareness?

**TR:** I'm sorry, can you repeat that?

**SC:** How has Howard High School provided advocacy for mental awareness?

**TR:** What do you mean by mental awareness?

**SC:** So, for instance, advocacy for students with autism or individuals with a mental illness.

**TR:** Ok.

**SC:** Yeah

**TR:** So I know that we participate in the inclusive schools week or inclusive schools month, ways to get information out there to other students in the school population.

We have Best Buddies which enables non-disabled peers to interact with students with disabilities in Allied Sports. So we have students with disabilities partnering up with students without them to participate more fully in some of the regular school activities. We put a lot of disabled in general classes with their non-disabled peers, so that they're not, that the experience

benefits both students with disabilities and without disabilities so that they can work together. Um... you know, because if you go out into the community and you are not used to seeing people with disabilities in school, then it's a whole new view out there. So I just think having the experience of full inclusion...

we also have "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaigns. Things like that. In terms of mental illness, it doesn't focus so much on advocacy in that manner, I think it has more to do with counseling. And the school psychologists are working with Mental Health Awareness Week, and things like that.

**SC:** What are some ways that the school can provide further awareness and attention to make autistic students feel more represented.

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To share their experiences with their peers, to get to a place where they're comfortable doing that. Explaining to their friends that when they see them acting a certain way, this is why they are acting that way. This is what they need to be successful in the classroom. And I think continuing to include students with autism in all school activities. That full inclusion piece is really instrumental in raising mental awareness.

**SC:** That's all the questions that I have. Is there anything you would like to add on the topic?

**TR:** I don't think there is right now, no.

**SC:** Are there any other professionals in your field who might be willing to speak with me?

**TR:** Um.. I'm sure that there are. I can actually send an email out asking if anybody would be willing to meet with you and talk about their experiences. Do you want me to do that?

**SC:** Yes please. That would be so helpful.

**TR:** Ok, I can do that.

**SC:** Thank you.

**TR:** I'll do that tonight.

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