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AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF INVISIBILITY:
EDUCATION & SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN JAPAN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
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5054

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the education, socialization and social discourse on youths with special needs in Japan. There is a common misconception abroad (and to some extent within Japan) that public, compulsory education in Japan consists of a single track, with no accommodations being made for students with learning differences or developmental delays. Actually Japanese public education provides two avenues for children with special needs and/or disabilities. There are segregated “protective schools” [養護学校: *yōgo gakkō*] for students with significant disabilities, and some mainstream public schools contain a multi-grade classroom [複式学級: *fukushiki gakkyū*] for students with learning differences.

This dissertation focuses on the little studied *fukushiki* system. It is based on my fieldwork at a public elementary school in Saitama prefecture, where I worked as researcher and assistant teacher. For nearly two academic years I followed a small group of elementary students, who were classified as having “emotional troubles” [*jōcho shōgai*] and/or “cognitive impairments” [*chiteki shōgai*]. This study draws upon my classroom observations and interactions with these *fukushiki* students, as well as extensive interviews with caregivers and educators. In order to broaden the scope of the inquiry, I also incorporated an analysis of a popular television drama about the trials of an autistic, first grade boy, who attends a *fukushiki* classroom.

While “special needs” can be defined in many ways, within compulsory education there is always an implicit contrast with normative expectations for

the development of “healthy,” able-bodied student-citizens. Thus discourse about special needs students is also a moral narrative about personhood and citizenship. The youths at the center of this study had impairments that were not written on their bodies. Their dis-abilities only became visible through social interaction with peers, siblings, teachers and caregivers. I explore how educators, caregivers, and the students themselves interpreted and negotiated the *fukushiki* and *shōgaiji* [disabled youth] categories, which were made “real” at school.

I found that the special needs students came to embrace the *fukushiki* identity, which functioned outside of the traditional, age-grade based school relations. Educators looked for opportunities to encourage social bonding within the *fukushiki* class and to teach normalcy through use of social performance. Caregivers had ambiguous, diverse views of the *fukushiki* system (and the related disability passbook system), which were seen tactically in terms of opportunities for, and constraints on, inclusion within the larger society. The half-hidden, *fukushiki* classes lent support to the illusion of uniform ability within the student population and inadvertently contributed to the discourse on homogeneity within wider society.

Words: 421

Keywords: Japan, special needs, disability, education, personhood, citizenship

ON THE ROMANIZATION OF JAPANESE

When romanizing Japanese terms, I follow the revised Hepburn system. While this system is not the newest, I feel that it is the clearest and most aesthetically pleasing of the alternative romanization systems. All long vowels are indicated with a macron, while glottal stops [ʔ] are rendered by using double consonants. Thus school [学校] becomes as “*gakkō*,” and disabled youth [障害児] becomes “*shōgaiji*.” Particles are written as follows: は = *wa*, へ = *e*, and を = *o*. In a minor deviation from the revised Hepburn system, I always render the Syllabic ん simply as *n*, rather than as ‘n.

I follow standard usage for Japanese terms that frequently appear in English. Thus “Tokyo” is used, rather than the more correct, but unfamiliar, Tōkyō.

When both the surname and the given name of Japanese individuals are used, the family name appears first, as is the common practice in Japan.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This is a study of visibility and invisibility, of passing and not quite passing, of laughter and awkward silences, of children and adults—teachers, students, parents, and of disabilities that are not *written* on the body. From June of 2001 through the early spring of 2003, I was an observer and an assistant teacher in a special needs classroom at a mainstream public elementary school on the outskirts of Tokyo. This dissertation is based on my ethnography of this classroom, as well as on in-depth interviews with primary caregivers, and the analysis of a popular television series that dramatized the life of a special needs child in elementary school.

My research strategy was to draw connections between these three distinct data sets (classroom ethnography, caregiver interviews, and a national media narrative) so that experience-near data and observations could be put in dialogue with larger discourses about personhood and citizenship in Japan. I began this project by simply asking what it might mean, on a practical, everyday level, to be categorized as a “special needs” child in Japan. How was the category defined within the well-developed public welfare system and made real in the daily lives of particular children and their teachers at a public elementary school? Who was “special” and who was not?

The central question driving my research is how are the lives of children with “special needs” crafted in Japanese public elementary schools? How are “special needs” children differentiated from their peers and how does the public

sector (through schools and social welfare policies) attempt to guide and intervene in their lives? How do these children and their caregivers respond to and interpret the opportunities and constraints that are created by the “special needs” framing?

While only about 1% of the youths attending compulsory education in Japan are classified as special needs students and tracked into separate classes, I will show that their experiences, and those of their caregivers, provide insights into a moral discourse on personhood, maturity and citizenship in Japan.¹ By focusing on the lives of these children, we can learn something, not only about the educational ethos of a Japanese primary school, but also about the structuring discourses on personhood, emotional maturity, the moral obligations of citizens. I argue that the experiences of these students, situated at the periphery of the school (and of society), provide a commentary on the centering narratives and discourses from which they are partially excluded.

This opening chapter is divided into five sections. I begin by briefly describing an incident that occurred at Midorikawa Elementary about mid-way through my fieldwork. Section two outlines my research questions and situates this dissertation within three related subfields: (a) anthropological research on personhood, (b) disability studies, and (c) ethnographic studies of Japanese schooling. Section three provides basic demographic information on special needs education in Japan. Section four provides an overview of my research methodologies. I conclude with a brief synopsis of the subsequent chapters.

Whispers...

Three small letters, written quickly in *hiragana* (the curvy phonetic script that first graders soon learn to master), scribbled in white chalk at the extreme edge of the blackboard. Three simple *kana* [letters] that most young children in Japan would recognize, and yet here acquiring a rune-ish quality, surreptitiously inscribed and hidden away at the border of the blackboard in the seldom-used classroom. I pause, letting the silent echo of the *kana* script reverberate for a moment in my mind's eye, but the meaning of this rune escapes me. A riddle that almost went unnoticed or had one of the other teachers or children already stumbled across the cryptic message? The compact letters whispering: がいじ [gaiji]...

Whispering—yes. That seemed possible, but what was the secret and for whose ears was this hushed riddle intended?

I make a mental note of the inscription (random letters, an inside joke?, graffiti?), and turn to leave the silent classroom, but as I reach for the light switch my eyes fall momentarily on the block letter banner hanging prominently above the door. A terse, didactic and yet hopeful directive attached to each phoneme in the school's name to form an acrostic poem.

Midorikawa Shōgakkō ~

MI ~ *minna de asobō*

DO ~ *doryoku shite, akiramezu ni*

RI ~ *risō o takaku*

KA ~ *kangaeyō, jibun de*

WA ~ *wa ni natte ikō*

Midorikawa Elementary ~

Everyone, let's play together

Pushing forward, never giving up

With high hopes & dreams

Thinking for oneself

Joining in a harmonious circle

But did Midorikawa's "harmonious circle" encompass the eight students in the *fukushiki gakkyū* [special needs class]?² Did this standing invitation to "join in" and "play together" extend to these children as well? And what sorts of "high hopes and dreams" could they hold onto? It had been nearly a year since I had begun my fieldwork at Midorikawa Elementary, meeting regularly with the special needs students and their teachers at this public elementary school on the outskirts of Tokyo, yet the answers to these questions still seemed as elusive as ever.

It was the first week in June, and Midorikawa's annual *Undōkai* [Sports Festival] had been held the previous Saturday. Just this morning the *fukushiki* students had completed their self-portraits of the event. Their eight watercolor paintings were now up on display in the corridor. Before rejoining the special needs class I paused for a moment to take in these paintings. The pictures had been arranged by grade level with Daisuke, a first grader, at the left and Yoshi, a sixth grader and the *fukushiki* class-leader, at the far right near one of the wooden sliding doors to the special needs classroom.

It was impossible for me to determine which of the many bent, swirly stick figures (were they running?) was suppose to be Daisuke, but two of the second grader's illustrations were considerably easier to interpret. There was Momo smiling in the center of the frame, with two long, green ribbons holding her ponytails tightly in place and her arms held up in the air (was she dancing?) Kento was dashing headfirst toward the finishing line of what must have been the fifty-meter race, two second-grade classmates a few steps ahead of him and another just behind, as the event had actually unfolded. Kai's painting was an

assortment of colorful, overlapping circles; his fingers not yet having acquired the nimbleness needed for iconographic drawing. Aya, a fifth grader, had drawn herself in the center of a three story human pyramid, one of the gymnastic events that both the boys and the girls participated in on Sports Day. Hiroki, Aya's fifth grade peer, was passing a red baton to a classmate in the relay race. His eyes seemingly focused, not on the baton or his teammate, but on the potential viewer of his picture. Fumi, an autistic sixth grader, created the most intricately crafted illustration, an detailed multicolored, pen and paint portrait of herself in a pink *yukata* (informal lightweight cotton kimono) performing a folk dance against a green background. Her figure dominates the canvas, classmates appearing only as indiscriminate, ant-like images. Yoshi, Fumi's age-grade peer, depicted himself as one of two support "horses" in the three person *Kibasen* jostling tournament. *Kibasen* is the pinnacle event in Midorikawa's Sports Festival, in no small part because of the danger inherent in this "mock" battle.³ After three weeks of busy preparations, the annual festival had been quite a success. This year even Kai, who fled the piercing ring of the starting gun at last year's festival, had managed to complete the second grader's race.

The *fukushiki* students had just returned to their first floor classroom after paying a visit to the school library, which was located across the campus on the third floor of a newer building. The class was preparing for an outing to a natural history museum in Adachi ward. Before embarking on this fieldtrip the students were studying about the intricate lives of Kantō plain insects. Hiroki, a friendly but somewhat socially awkward, fifth grade boy was particularly enthused

about the upcoming fieldtrip. When it came to insects, Hiroki was the undisputed class expert.

The *fukushiki* students had a few minutes remaining in their ten-minute break before the next class would begin. I slide the door to the *fukushiki* classroom open and glanced at the day's schedule, which was always posted on the blackboard. The fourth period class was Japanese so we would be dividing into two sub-groups of four students each: first and second graders in one group and fourth, fifth and sixth graders in another.

Before the next class period began I wanted to squeeze in a quick word with Iida-sensei, the resourceful assistant teacher.⁴ She would be able to decipher the meaning of that cryptic inscription on the blackboard in the empty classroom next door. I half wondered if "*ga-i-ji*" might be a pun on the *gaijin*, literally "outside person" or "foreign national," the term that is ubiquitously applied to non-Asian foreigners in Japan?⁵ Perhaps one of the mainstream students, having noticed that I was spending most of my time in the special needs classroom, was directing a concise editorial comment towards me: "Hey you foreigner!" Or could it be that one of the older *fukushiki* students was having a little go at me? But I had never encountered this version of that term before. "*Gaiji*." It must be an idiosyncratic usage or a nonsense term.

I threw my glance across the *fukushiki* classroom, eight desks with well-worn wooden tops arranged in two rows facing the blackboard. Three grey metal teacher's desks pushed up against the far wall where large paned glass windows affording a good view of the schoolyard. This room, located in one of the older buildings on campus, was originally designed to accommodate as many as fifty

students, so with a mere eight children enrolled in the special needs class, there was a good deal of open space available at the back of the classroom.⁶ Six of the *fukushiki* students were gathered there now, everyone except for Fumi, who was seated near her desk apparently searching for something in her backpack, and Daisuke, the first grade boy who was probably outside in the garden as usual. The two accredited, male instructors, *Ichikawa-sensei* and *Fujita-sensei*, were both seated at their desks looking over some papers. The assistant teacher (*Iida-sensei*), a woman in her early thirties, was nowhere in sight, so my question would have to wait for a bit.

Kai, a second grade boy, had appropriated the lone sunbeam that was falling in the corner of the room near a sliding door at the back of the classroom that opened onto the schoolyard. He sat on the floor in his square of sunlight, humming to himself and playing a game with his fingers. A few feet away his age-grade peer Kento seemed to be trying to catch the eyes of two upper class boys, Yoshi and Hiroki, who were playfully tossing a faded, blue, rectangular sponge back and forth across the classroom. Aya stood off to the side of the room, close to the corridor. She was twisting her hair-clip with one hand as she explained something in a hushed tone to second grade Momo, who hung on her fifth grade classmate's every word.

Seeing me at the door, Hiroki suggested in a loud voice that we go outside for a three-way game of catch. "With that old sponge?" I was thinking, but there was no time. The ten-minute break was over, and fourth period was about to begin. The first and second graders would go to the classroom next door and

practice *hiragana* with Ichikawa-sensei and myself, while older students would remain in this room to practice *kanji* [characters] with Fujita and Iida-sensei.

After lunch I did get a chance to ask Iida-sensei about the meaning of the “*gaiji*” inscription. She too had noticed the graffiti. My guess that *gaiji* might be a derivative of *gaijin* [foreigner], proved entirely off the mark. The comment was not directed towards me at all but toward the *fukushiki* students. Apparently one of the mainstream kids had slipped into the classroom, which was frequently unoccupied, and scribbled the message up on the board. “*Gaiji*” is a slang epithet derived from *shōgai-ji* [障害児: disabled child].

Some weeks later Ichikawa-sensei told me that this snide opprobrium implies not only disability or impairment, but also incompetence and a degree of infantilization. The character for *ji* [児] is also used in words like *jidō* [児童: small child] and *yōji* [幼児: infant]. This pejorative is also sometimes used as a broadside attack against the non-disabled when one wishes to imply “complete ineptitude” [*zenzen dame na yatsu*], somewhat synonymous with the invective use of “retard” in English.

So the circle at Midorikawa Elementary was not always entirely harmonious or inclusive. I had sensed this before, but the *gaiji* incident still gave me pause. It was the first time that I could pinpoint an unambiguous crack in the smooth facade [*tatema*] of amicable relations between the mainstream and special needs students. It was revealing that this discord was manifest not as an open conflict between the two individual children, but rather, as an anonymous accusation whispered from the shadows and directed against a generalized, stigmatized other.

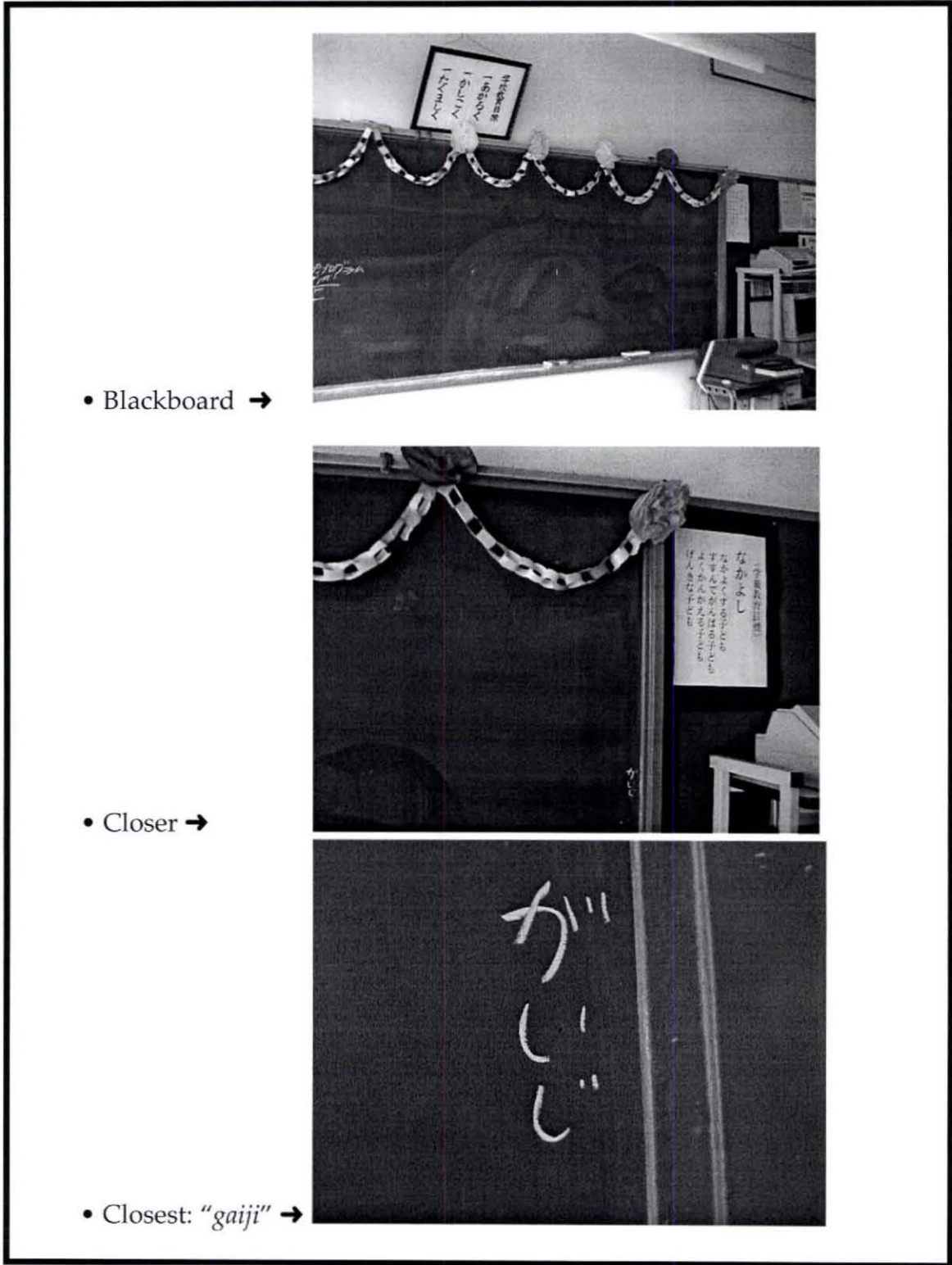


Figure 1.1: Blackboard Graffiti in Seldom Used *Fukushiki* Classroom
 (Photograph by author)

The *fukushiki* instructors never did identify the author of that message and the incident was soon forgotten, fading away into our busy school days, leaving behind nothing more than a hint of a whisper and a little chalk dust on the classroom floor.

The *Fukushiki Gakkyū* & “Special Needs” Label

Anthropologists are inevitably faced with the dilemma of how to transport concepts and translate key terms from one cultural setting into another without doing overt violence to the context-specific meanings and associations. I struggled to find an appropriate English term or phrase that could be used to succinctly describe the elementary school students participating in the *fukushiki gakkyū* [multi-type / multi-grade class] at Midorikawa Elementary. I could have doggedly stuck with the literal translation of “multi-type” or the somewhat more interpretive rendering of “multi-grade” students, but both of these phrases are less than artfully crafted and quite ambiguous in English.

Ultimately I decided to borrow the English phrase “special needs” to describe the students in the *fukushiki gakkyū*; however, the special needs label does not carry the same set of assumptions in Japan as it does in the United States. Within U.S. public education there are elaborate procedures that govern the “special needs” designation, which in theory allows a student access to an extensive array of specialized educational services. In Japan the procedures for identifying and tracking special needs students are quite different from the United States, and “special needs” status is not necessarily equated with access to specialized educational services.

In both nations the “special needs” or “special supports” [*tokubetsu shien*] category is a very broad tag that can be applied to individuals with physical, cognitive, and/or psychological disabilities as well as learning impairments [*gakushū shōgai*] and/or developmental delays [*hattatsu okure*]. However, the students in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary had only non-physical disabilities or impairments that were not clearly written on their bodies. Some had cognitive impairments [*chiteki shōgai*]; others had autism [*jiheishō*] or autistic-spectrum disorders [*jihei keikō*], learning disabilities, emotional troubles [*jōcho shōgai*], attention deficit disorders and/or speech impediments. I should also note that one first grader (Yuri), who joined the class just as I was finishing my fieldwork, had Down syndrome, which was in fact visible at a casual glance.

I met many teachers and administrators in Japan who are well informed about, and perhaps partially influence by, U.S. educational discourse and trends regarding special needs students and “normalization”; however, the Japanese Ministry of Education⁷ has not attempted to mimic or duplicate the U.S. multi-tracking approach towards special needs or “gifted” students. Rather the discourse on students with “special needs” has been slightly re-cast or re-made to fit the needs of the Japanese compulsory education system and the expectations of the larger society.

Framing Theories

Personhood in Anthropology & Theories of Self in Japan

The students who attended the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary had a range of “special needs,” some of which could be traced back to clear

etiological sources, while others could not. In fact, there was no one set of biological or educational criteria that was used to determine who should participate in the *fukushiki* class. Thus the social process through which these particular children were differentiated from their peers and the educational interventions that were then pursued in the *fukushiki* classroom offer insights into models of social comportment and theories of personhood in contemporary Japan.

The ways in which personhood is conceptualized, talked about and enacted differently in differing cultural settings and historical periods is a theme that has interested anthropologists and sociologists for much of the past century. In a series of lectures in the late 1930s Marcel Mauss argued that philosophers made a critical mistake when they assumed that there were broad universal categories of human experience that remained constant over time and across cultural milieus (Mauss 1985). Rather he contended that our conceptualization of “mind” and “self” were socially constructed and anchored in language. Mauss was among the first to suggest that the study of personhood should thus be viewed as a subject of social history.

More than a decade earlier, the American philosopher-sociologist George Herbert Mead reached a similar conclusion via a somewhat different line of reasoning. Mead proposed an emergent, relational, discursive view of self. He argued that infants are not born with any notion of a reflexive, individuated self, but rather that the concepts of “me,” “I” and “you” gradually develop as the young child comes in contact with other selves in language. Mead viewed the emergence of self as part of a linguistic and thus symbolic process, in which a

child learns to see him/herself from the point of view of a generalized third person.⁸ The individual's experience of a distinct "me" is something that is achieved through dialogue with others (Mead 1962, 139-40; Miller 1973, 47-48).

A few decades later Irving Hallowell made a very helpful addition to this debate by proposing an analytic distinction between the "empirical world" and the "life-world." Hallowell pointed out that while *Homo sapiens* physically exist in the empirical world, we filter our perceptions of this empirical world through an array of linguistic and culturally constructed symbols. In fact, we cannot experience the empirical world as a flat objective reality; instead we are endlessly interpreting the perceptual field through symbolic structures. Even our experience and conceptualization of self is negotiated through symbols, which vary greatly according to the historical period, the linguistic-cultural frame and our position within the particular socio-economic nexus. "Just as different peoples entertain various beliefs about the nature of the universe, they likewise differ in their ideas about the nature of self (Hallowell 1955, 76).

In the postwar period, anthropological debates about the fluidity or constructedness of personhood have often focused on Japan. Ruth Benedict almost inadvertently set this debate in motion with a brief four pages on "shame-avoidance" in her 1946 publication of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Benedict argued that Japanese socialization patterns promoted an avoidance of shame, rather than an internal sense of guilt, which she assumed was the self-regulating monitor on behavior in Christian societies (1989, 286). Lebra countered that shame-avoidance in Japan may actually serve to intensify, rather than preclude, a sense of guilt (1983, 192). These debates spark further conjecture about how

cultural systems might not only provide rules and cultural scripts that governed external social relations, but also deeply impact the internal psycho-dynamic life of the individual.

Writing several decades after Benedict, Takeo Doi drew on Freudian theory, to propose a culturally specific psychodynamic model of Japanese emotional stances and interpersonal relationships. Doi argued that Freudian theory emerged from a particular cultural, historical discourse and that therefore the theoretical structure needed to be adjusted somewhat for non-Western cultural settings (1981, 24). Doi felt that the socio-cultural and linguistic environment shaped even basic emotional stances and desires. In Japan, Doi argued, the relationship that arises between mothers and their infants is structured by *amae* (indulgent-dependence), and the desire to recreate relations based on *amae* strongly impacts on many other relationships later in life. Kumagai notes that *amae* is but one phase of two-sided social drama involving caregivers who first *amayakasu* (provide warmth and indulgences) to their children who then learn to seek out *amae* (Kumagai and Kumagai 1985, 313). To function smoothly as an adult in Japanese society, the child needs to internalize, and eventually be able to reproduce, both phases of the *amaeru/amayakasu* relationship.

As I will explore in my analysis of the televised fictional narrative (chapter two), the expectation that a mother/child relationship should unfold within the *amayakasu/amae* frame may be partially frustrated in the case of an autistic or special needs child. Throughout the dissertation I pay close attention to ways in which the students in the *fukushiki* class deviated from, but also learned to

conform to and enact, cultural scripts rooted in reciprocity and structured by the ideology of *amae*.

Anthropological debates about the nature of personhood in Asia (usually Japan) and in the West (read the United States) have often contrasted a socio-centric, public, relational sense of self in Asia against an individuated, egocentric discourse on personhood in the West (Smith 1983, 47; Befu 1986, 109; Bachnik 1992, 3; Rosenberger 1992). Kondo even suggested that the context dependent social relations in Japan produced a sense of interpenetrating, multiple selves (1990, 22).

In his nuanced study of aging in rural Japan and the cultural scripting of senility [*boke*], Traphagan argues that the health of individual body/mind is intersubjectively linked to the health of the community as a whole. When aging individuals fall into the *boke* state they become disengaged from the social obligations and meaningful discourse, turning inward into them-selves. This path poses a serious threat to the Japanese sociocentric sense of reciprocal selfhood (2000, 172). Thus elderly persons in Japan are seen as having a moral obligation to try to stay active in an attempt to ward off the gradual loss of personhood that is implicit in the *boke* state (ibid, 160).

Similarly the discourses that surround and define special needs children also can be read as moral narratives on personhood and on the nation. Children serve as the link that binds one generation to the next through the filter of the family, the community and the nation. Childhood itself is a site of national investment as manifest in the extensive public school system. In Japan some argue that worry over problems at school and changes in the national "stock"

point to social disintegration that is thought to underlie both (Arai 2006, 229; Kawakami 1999). Japanese elementary schools are usually seen as centers of moral authority and many scholars argue that they are “the primary enculturation agent[s] for teaching proper public behavior (Hill 1996, 105).” Thus when a child’s development does not proceed as anticipated, it is seen not only as a problem not only for the caregivers, but also for the schools and the wider society (Tsuneyoshi 2001, 99).

Disability Studies & Anthropology

Over the past several decades there has been an increasing interest in cross-cultural, socially embedded, research on “disability.” While the literature is still quite small, it is clear that an emergent field of “disability studies” is arising to challenge a classificatory, reductive biomedical orientation toward the study of physical and intellectual differences (Ingstad and Whyte, 1995 & 2007; Davis 1997; Stiker 1999). Disability studies situates disability firmly within the social world and explores how impairment relates to identity, personhood and citizenship.

If we accept the arguments of Mead, Mauss and many others that personhood is something that is achieved through a socio-linguistic process of enculturation then this suggests that individuals can be “persons” to a greater or lesser extent. Ingstad and Whyte rhetorically ask, “Are persons with impairments impaired persons (1995, 24)?” Nancy Scheper-Hughes explored this topic by studying impoverished Brazilian women with very few resources to raise their newborn and impaired infants. She argues that in some situations

there are “fragile symbolic boundaries between human and nonhuman, natural and supernatural, normal and abominable (1992, 375).

Several social scientists, who are disabled, have taken a very different tack, applying an embodied, phenomenological approach to the study of disability. Murphy writes that “Disability is not simply a physical affair for us; it is our ontology, a condition of our being in the world (1987, 90).” Borrowing and adapting Victor Turner’s theories, Murphy characterizes disability as a form of *liminality*, “a kind of social limbo in which...[the disabled person] is left standing outside the formal social system (ibid, 135).” Robillard writes eloquently on his narrowing autonomy and the social isolation he experienced as his body gradually became disabled. He explores the asymmetric power dynamics that unfold between the disabled, their caregivers and society at large. Robillard argues that those with severe physical disabilities are often ignored, desexualized and treated as child-like, or even as intellectually incompetent, persons.

Throughout this dissertation I borrow a number of analytic frames from disability studies to explore the lives of the special needs students at Midorikawa Elementary, but were these children really *disabled*? The *fukushiki* students had “only” non-physical impairments. Their differences were not inscribed on their bodies. The status of the students as “disabled youths” [*shōgaiji*] was an open question that was usually deferred. Some of their families accepted this terminology, while others strongly preferred to avoid this framing.

In her recently published study, Nakamura investigated the identities of several generations of deaf individuals in Japan. While virtually all of her deaf informants accepted social welfare benefits based on their status as “disabled,”

many were quite ambivalent about that label itself. In fact they did not view their “impairment” with a sense of loss (Nakamura 2006, xviii). Thus we need to make analytic distinctions between medical diagnoses, government sanctioned categories, external labels imposed by others and the perceptions of the individuals from within their life-worlds.

Within anthropology disability is often conceptualized as another modality of difference along with gender, class, and race. This extracts “disability” from medical taxonomies that seek to locate abnormalities within individual bodies and shifts the focus of inquiry onto the interface between the disabled and the larger society. Disability rights advocates have also had a positioned interest in recasting the discussion of disabilities as a social, historical and political question. Activists have argued that it is society that disables people, not their bodies (Clare 2001, 360).

Stiker argues that disability did not exist as a unified social category until the beginning of the 18th century when institutions in Europe began to first house impaired persons separately from the rest of the population. This argument is indebted to Michel Foucault’s influential theories about modernity, power and subjectification, particularly his early work on prisons (1977). Foucault argued that as nation states and institutions rationalize their use of power, they become increasingly intrusive in the lives of individuals. More importantly the framing narratives that are generated by powerful institutions gradually become incorporated into the individual’s own self-perception.

States create and support powerful institutions (armies, schools, prisons, hospitals, etc.) that aim to produce useful, disciplined citizens. Discourse and

technologies from one institution bleed into the next as the state becomes increasingly ambitious about creating a rationalized, well-disciplined population. Foucault sought to demonstrate how dominant institutions generate discourse and whole networks of knowledge that support and give rise to distinctions, which ultimately uphold the power structures that generated them. These framing narratives then have a very powerful effect on individual identities.

In Foucault's theory schools play a critical role in the state's power because they serve to homogenize the identity formation of the population and to simultaneously differentiate between citizens through a process of perpetual examination. Dividing practices implemented in the schools become a key justification for the current system of power distinctions.

One of the issues that I explore in my interviews with the mothers of the *fukushiki* students (in chapter five) is how these caregivers viewed and interacted with the state's educational and social welfare bureaucracies. How did the families of special needs students interpret the options that were available to their children and negotiate through the educational system?

Stigma & Children with Special Needs

Identities and affiliations that are first forged and harden in Japanese elementary school classrooms often have long-term repercussions for a child's future trajectory. Thus when a Japanese child is labeled as "special" [*tokushu*; *tokubetsu*] and diverted from the "mainstream" [*tsūjō*; *futsū*] classes, there is a lot at stake. The decision to opt in or out of the special needs education may be

particularly difficult for Japanese caregivers as inclusion in a special needs track usually means permanently opting out of mainstream classes. Exclusion from the mainstream system carries some burden of stigmatization, although, as we saw in the opening vignette, stigma is often articulated through indirect channels.

My initial interest in researching special needs education in Japan was partially influenced by Erving Goffman's seminal work on face-to-face interactions, social role-playing and stigmatization, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. When commenting about school attendance Goffman argued that,

[P]ublic school entrance is often reported as the occasion of stigma learning, the experience sometimes coming very precipitously on the first day of school, with taunts, teasing, ostracism, and fights. Interestingly, the more the child is "handicapped" the more likely he is to be sent to a special school for persons of his kind, and the more abruptly he will have to face the view which the public at large takes of him... It should be added that where the infinitely stigmatized manages to get through his early school years with some illusions left, the onset of dating or job-getting will often introduce the moment of truth (1986, 33).

In this text, Goffman suggested that identities based on race relations, age, economic class, mental health, and physical impairment all shared a pivotal link through the concept of stigmatization.⁹ While Goffman acknowledged that there were important differences between these modalities of identity, he chose to emphasize the commonalities and to point toward the social process in which certain classes of individuals are distinguished from the "mainstream" non-stigmatized majority so that, in effect, the latter group can experience a heightened sense of centrality and belonging.

Goffman described his performative theory of social stigmatization as a “language of relationships, not attributes (1986, 3).” Goffman’s theories on social process and stigmatization served as a stimulus for much research within disability studies and also influenced my thinking about some of the dynamics in play between mainstream students and their peers in the special needs track.

While this dissertation is not limited to the study of stigmatization, issues of visibility and invisibility, of labeling and positioning, of marginalization, passing and of stigma, or what I call the “politics of a peripheral personhood,” is as an important focus of my research. These issues became increasingly apparent to me during the final stages of my fieldwork when I was conducting extended interviews with primary caregivers.

Studies of Socialization & Education in Japan

While educators may not set out to teach about rules of being a “good citizen,” primary schools still do convey a great deal about social expectations for the nation’s youth. O’Conner argues that at “the individual level, schools help teach obedience to impersonal authority, punctuality, and categorical conformity (O’Conner 1992, 91).” Ben-Ari, who has done ethnographic research on Japanese daycare centers, contends that the routine administration of meals and naptimes are “saturated with issues of power, physiological needs and demands, and cultural definitions of proper demeanor and behavior (Ben-Ari 1997, 4).” He argues that even very young children, who attend daycare programs, must learn to internalize the norms of the group and assume an appropriate attitude, emotional stance and body posture during various activities.

According to Ben-Ari, teachers at Japanese preschools often use subtle tactics to promote a sense of mutual interdependence among the children. He writes that “In order to develop the proper awareness of ‘who am I?’—what may be termed a ‘sense of self’—a Japanese child *must* be part of a group: she or he *must* participate in group activities [*shūdan seikatsu*]” (ibid, 39, emphasis in original). Ben-Ari infers that cooperative grouping emerges as a central schema in Japanese schools, and in later life, because this cultural script is emphasized so consistently in preschools and absorbed so very early in life.

Japanese preschools and elementary schools do make ubiquitous use of small, self-regulating groups [*han*] to promote social bonds and accomplish joint goals. Teachers will often even defer discipline to the internal dynamics of these peer groups (Benjamin 1997, 58; Lewis 1995, 75).

Much of the research on early childhood education in Japan emphasizes the positive ethos, which not only promotes academic goals, but also attempts to incorporate the children’s desire for active participation within an emotionally connected group of peers. For instance, Catherine Lewis argues that, “Japanese education succeeds because, early on, it meets *children’s* needs—for friendship, for belonging, for opportunities to shape school life (1995, 1).” She found that Japanese teachers often framed their talk about education in terms of the “whole child whose intellectual development cannot be extricated from their social, emotional, and ethical development (ibid, 6).” While Lewis does not disagree with Ben-Ari’s assessment of the peer groups’ importance, she paints these peer groups in a more positive light. “Students didn’t just work *in* groups; they worked *as* groups (emphasis in original; ibid, 84).”

Peak also praised “the remarkable psychological intuition of Japanese preschool teachers” (1991, 163), who fostered a cheerful atmosphere and a sense of cooperation and teamwork in the classroom. She argued that deferring internal discipline to the peer group allows preschool teachers to develop closer, less confrontational relationships with their students. Japanese teachers tend to “avoid isolating or chastising children as much as possible” so as to avoid a cycle of punishment and rebellion (ibid, 156). When discipline is deferred onto the peer group, teachers are then free to look for ways to foster emotional bonds [*kizuna*] between themselves and their students.

Hendry and Tobin both document how Japanese preschools provide opportunities for playfulness and emotional bonding between classmates and teachers, yet the school day also has formal ceremonies that require a serious posture for a brief period. Young children need to learn to read this social landscape and make a distinction [*kejime*] between the two types of social interaction. Tobin has used the distinction between *ura* [back/informal] and *omote* [front/formal] to characterize this shifting movement between various social postures during the school day. “Japanese children speak two distinct languages at school: the language of *ura* with friends and with teachers during the informal segments that make up the great majority of the school day and the language of *omote* during the formal ceremonial moments that punctuate the day and the year (1992, 37).”

Many Euro-American studies of Japanese preschools and primary schools have emphasized the wide spread use of cooperative learning tasks and self-regulating groups [*han seido*], as well as the prevalence of non-academic

activities, the strong emphasis on “whole child” instruction,¹⁰ and the staunchly egalitarian nature of the public system which shuns ability based tracking of students (Benjamin 1997, 233).¹¹ This articulation of egalitarianism assumes that children are of roughly equal ability or that sufficient effort can compensate for any differences in ability.

Studies of Japanese secondary education often draw a sharp contrast between the holistic, experiential, child-centered classroom ethos that is typical of early education and the more didactic, text-centered, information-driven atmosphere that comes to dominate in junior high school and high school. At this later stage teachers and students become preoccupied with preparing for competitive entrance exams (Fukuzawa 1996, 295; Tsuneyoshi, 2001, 32).

Special Education in Japan

The Lacuna on Children with Special Needs

The studies mentioned above focus on children in grade levels K-12, who were attending a variety of Japanese educational institutions, and yet all of the students were participating in mainstream classes. In fact, most of the conclusions reached by scholars of Japanese education only make reference to the experiences of mainstream children, teachers and parents.¹² Large classes are seen as necessitating the skillful use of collaborative peer groups (or vice versa), yet large classes and the importance of collaboration both assume a certain common stock. That is, there is a strong normative assumption built into Japan’s public education system. All children *should*, or rather *must*, be able to work well with peers and at least make an appearance of staying up with the group.¹³

But what happens to the students who fall outside of these normative expectations? Even if we were to uncritically embrace the state promoted discourses that emphasize the homogeneity of the Japanese population, there still must be some youths who fall outside the norm, or in the case of this study, fall into the grey borderlands between normalcy and irrelevancy. What of these children and their caregivers? My research seeks to address this lacuna in the research on the socialization of Japanese youth. As far as I can determine, this dissertation is the first study in English to explore the education of special needs children in Japan. I focus not only on an ethnography of a special needs classroom, but also incorporate the perceptions of caregivers and an analysis of the surrounding social discourses on children with special needs.

No Tracking in Japanese Public Schools?

Hill, Sato, Tsuneyoshi and many others have argued that, through the ninth grade, Japanese public education is a unified system that avoids tracking students into special programs for the gifted, the learning disabled or for any other group. Parents, primary school teachers and administrators openly reject, or have very strong reservations about the use of, ability based tracking (Hill 1996, 96-97; Sato 2004, 74). Lewis reports that teachers and parents in Japan often viewed ability based classes as essentially anti-democratic. “Don’t American parents complain that ability grouping violates children’s rights to equal educational opportunity (Lewis 1996, 79-80)?”

This rejection of tracking is linked in part to Japan’s historical experience. There is still a strongly negative historical memory of Japan’s prewar, two-tiered

educational system, which virtually ensured that only the children of “good families” (or families that were independently wealthy) would be able to gain access to upper level posts within the various government ministries.¹⁴ This prewar experience with a two-tiered educational structure has made the Japanese public sensitive to, and skeptical of, educational initiatives that aim to track certain groups of students into separate, specialized programs.

In Japan educational rights have usually been constructed as the right of all students to have access to the same basic education. This egalitarian goal has been largely achieved through a number of key measures: (1) a funding system which ensures that educational tax dollars follow the students, rather than being tied to residence within a particular district, (2) a national curriculum with specific targets for each grade level, (3) a strong public school system at the elementary and junior high levels¹⁵, (4) a set of approved textbook that is managed by the Ministry of Education. These factors work in tandem to create compulsory educational system that can be characterized as highly egalitarian (roughly equal public resources, similar content and standards across the compulsory educational system) yet also strongly meritorious, particularly at the upper end of the system.¹⁶

In U.S. public schools educational rights have often been articulated as the individual student’s right to receive specialized instruction that is “appropriate to” his or her particular needs. These rights were given teeth in 1975 with the passage of the “Education for All Handicapped Children Act,” which was later renamed “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).¹⁷ This legislation led to a vast expansion of specialized tracks within U.S. public schools. These

programs range from advanced classes (and even separate schools) for “gifted” students to highly specialized classes and tutoring programs for students with an array of impairments. At the same time within the U.S. system there is little discussion about the right of all students to have access to the same educational content or access to similar resources across districts.

The *Digest of Education Statistics* reports that in 2005, nearly 14% of the public school population in the U.S. was classified as “special” and tracked into some type of remedial, therapeutic or gifted program (IES 2006, 83). Thus from the perspective of a U.S. researcher, it might seem as if Japanese public schools only offer a single-track with no accommodations being made for special needs students. This is the impression one often gets from reading most Western studies of Japanese education; however, public schools in Japan do make some provisions for students with special needs and disabilities.

Special Educational Schools

Japan has a system of specialized educational schools that dates back over a century. As early as 1878 the Kyoto School for the Deaf was founded, and the Tokyo School for the Deaf was established just a few years later (Nakamura 2006, 41); however, these two institutions were pioneering and unusual for the era. In fact, until the second half of the twentieth century there were only a few schools for deaf and blind persons in Japan.¹⁸ Children with other types of disabilities had very limited educational options in the prewar period.

In 1947 the Occupation government approved the Fundamental Law of Education, which called for compulsory education to be made available to “all

Japanese (ibid, 25).” The law gradually gave impetus to the establishment of a network of publicly financed special needs schools for the deaf, the blind and those with physical or mental disabilities. By the early 1980s, all of Japan’s forty-seven prefectures or sub-national jurisdictions had at least one of each of the three types of special educational schools. In 2006 there were 175 schools for the deaf and blind and 831 “protective schools” [養護学校: *yōgo gakkō*] for those with physical or cognitive impairments operating in Japan (*Monbu-kagakushō* 2006, preface 13).¹⁹ Students enrolled in Japanese special educational schools slightly exceeded 100,000 in 2006, which represents about 0.75% of the total student population in K-12 (see Appendix A: Tables 1-3).

Access to special needs education in Japan has differed according to the specific type of impairment. Children with mental disabilities were the last group to gain the right to a public education. In fact it was not until 1979 that the public education of cognitively impaired children was mandated by specific legislation (Heyer 2006, 7; Mogi 1994, 6). Yet in spite of their relatively recent access to public schools, students with mental and /or physical disabilities now significantly outnumber the blind and deaf student population in Japan (see Appendix A: Table 1).

In comparison with the ever-expanding special needs population in United States, the number of Japanese students classified as having “special needs” remains quite small, yet is not insignificant. While over 95% of the Japanese elementary and junior high school students are attending mainstream classes²⁰, there are nonetheless significant numbers of students attending specialized

educational tracks. These tracks have received little mention in Western studies on Japanese education and socialization.²¹

In addition to Japan's "protective schools," many public elementary and junior high schools make provisions for one "special support classroom" [特別支援学級: *tokubetsu shien gakkylū*] within the mainstream school. Chapters three and four of this dissertation examine one such classroom at a mainstream public elementary school near Tokyo.

Shifting Labels for Special Needs Classes

"Special support education" [特別支援教育: *tokubetsu shien kyōiku*] is newly coined, politically correct terminology. This phrase was adopted as the umbrella term for special needs classes within mainstream public schools in the spring of 2007. Prior to that date the Ministry of Education used the designation *tokushu kyōiku gakkylū* [特殊教育学級: special educational class] to refer to special needs classes nestled within mainstream schools. In practice within the schools this phrase was often shortened to *tokugaku* [特学: special ed]. However, this label had strongly negative connotations because *tokushu* [special] can also imply "odd" or "peculiar" in the sense of being "not normal." In practice I found that parents and educators at Midorikawa generally avoided the phrase *tokushu kyōiku*, although a few of my informants did occasionally make use of the abbreviated version, *tokugaku*.

The Ministry of Education's decision to adopt new terminology for special education was probably influenced to some degree by the transnational circulation of educational terms and bureaucratic categories. I met several people

within the Ministry of Education who were very well versed in the pedagogical debates and trends in educational scholarship in the western countries. I would venture that the desire for a new, politically correct phraseology, which strives in part to neutralize previous discourse, indicates that the special education field is marked by a degree of stigma, prejudice, regret or even danger.

My classroom observations took place several years prior to introduction of a new terminology by the Ministry of Education, but I doubt this new label is being used much by parents, students and teachers. At Midorikawa Elementary the stakeholders all avoided the previous label, *tokushu kyōiku gakkylū*, preferring the generic phrase *fukushiki gakkylū* [multiple type class] instead. While this phrase is quite widely used to indicate special needs classrooms, the designation contains some ambiguity.

The trouble is that the same four characters [複式学級] are also used to refer to mixed grade, mainstream classrooms that operate at some very small public schools located in remote areas or in the sparsely populated countryside. Thus in rural Japan the *fukushiki gakkylū* is usually roughly analogous to a multi-age class in a one-room schoolhouse; however, in an urban context the *fukushiki gakkylū* designation indicates a special needs classroom.

To further complicate matters, in official publications the Ministry of Education uses “Article-75 Classes” [*75-jō gakkylū*] to designate special needs classes at mainstream schools. This is legalistic shorthand, referring back to the original 1947 Fundamental Law of Education. Article 75 in this legislation authorized the creation of special tracks for students with disabilities. In December of 2006, the Fundamental Law of Education was significantly altered

so it is likely that in future publications the Ministry of Education will abandon the obscure *75-jō gakkū* terminology, which is never heard in the schools.

At the level of the school there is considerable variation in the naming of the special needs class. There are any number of alternative designations and euphemistic nicknames that are attached to *tokugaku* classes. These include *yōgo gakkū* (Protective Class), *ikusei gakkū* (Training/Development Class), *shōgaiji gakkū* (Disabled Children's Class), *sōgō gakkū* (Comprehensive Class), *nakayoshi gakkū* (Buddies Class), *asunaro gakkū* (Cypress Class), *himawari gakkū* (Sunflower Class), etc. This proliferation of labels for the special needs track points to tension, unease, ambivalence and possibly contestation over the labeling and status of students with special needs.

To facilitate internal consistency within this dissertation I use the single term *fukushiki* [*fukushiki gakkū*: multi-grade class] to refer to the special needs classes operating as separate classrooms within mainstream public schools in Japan. I have settled on this generic label, as this was the designation that was most frequently used by the students and teachers themselves at Midorikawa Elementary.

A Macro-level View of the *Fukushiki* System

The *fukushiki* track offers a middle ground between the mainstream classes, which typically accommodate 25 to 40 students per class, and the segregated “protective” schools, where very low teacher/student ratios allow for individualized instruction.²² Elementary school instructors and even parents in Japan will often argue that larger classes help children learn to negotiate

relationships with peers and that a larger group facilitates a sense of “classhood” [*gakkyūzukuri*] (Hendry 1986, 166; Lewis 1995, 85-86). However, in the case of those with significant disabilities, the need for individualized instruction usually supplants the desirability of peer socialization.

In the *fukushiki* system class size is restricted to a maximum of eight students per instructor. At Midorikawa Elementary for the duration of my fieldwork there were always eight students in the *fukushiki* class, which had two fulltime instructors and one assistant teacher. The number of students was small in comparison with the mainstream classes, yet much larger than in classes at the protective schools. In the *fukushiki* track peer socialization (particularly between elder and junior classmates) and the fostering of a sense of classhood were both given considerable emphasis.

Since the late-1970s special track classes have become increasingly available in urban areas, although these classes can still be hard to find at public schools in more rural districts. In 2006 there were some 24,994 *fukushiki* classes operating at the elementary school level. This is out of a total pool of about 280,000 primary school classes (*Monbu-kagakushō* 2006, 6). In other words nearly 9% of the classes held at mainstream public elementary schools in Japan are designated for children with some sort of disability or impairment.

Of course if we compare the numbers of students (rather than classes) the percentage is much smaller. In 2006 the number of students attending *fukushiki* classes at public elementary schools surpassed 73,000, which is just over 1% of the elementary school population in Japan. That same year 0.9% of junior high school students were participating as members of a *fukushiki* class (see Appendix

A: Tables 3 & 4). The special needs system has been expanding quite rapidly, but even in urban areas not all public schools have a *fukushiki* class. When a special needs track is available generally there is only a single multi-grade class per school. At the high school level the special needs track disappears entirely as the Fundamental Law of Education only requires that special supports be made available within compulsory education, which ends in the ninth grade.

At the primary and junior high school level demand for special needs classes has been steadily increasing. Participation in the *fukushiki* track has risen significantly over the past decade even as the general student population has begun to dip due to the low birth rate in Japan. In 1996, for example, there were 15,511 *fukushiki* classes offered at public elementary schools. By 2006 the number of special needs classes had increased over 60% (see Appendix A: Table 2).

Students in the *fukushiki* system are categorized according to seven types of impairment: (1) mental disability, (2) emotional impairment, (3) hearing impairment, (4) visual impairment, (5) speech impediment, (6) long-term sickness or (7) physical disability. Students with cognitive or emotional impairments are placed in the same class, but for the disabilities categories membership in a particular *fukushiki* class is restricted to a single type of disability. Since there is usually only a single *fukushiki* class per school, special needs students may have to travel some distance to find a public school with an appropriate *fukushiki* class or their families may decide to relocate in order to be closer to their child's school. For example, the public school in Tokyo that my son attended had a *fukushiki* track for physically disabled children, but the school did not accommodate children with other types of disabilities.

At Midorikawa Elementary all of the children in the *fukushiki* class were categorized as having either a mental disability or an emotional impairment.²³ In fact these two categories account for a strong majority of the *fukushiki* special needs population, with over 90% of *fukushiki* students falling into one or the other category (see Appendix A: Table 5). The Ministry of Education does not provide statistics on the gender breakdown of the *fukushiki* student population, but my anecdotal evidence suggests that boys slightly outnumber girls in the *fukushiki* system. At Midorikawa Elementary over a three-year period, five girls and seven boys participated in the special needs track. Boys were also in the slight majority in *fukushiki* classes at four others public elementary schools I visited in Tokyo.

Although there were students from two different disability categories participating in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary, the class was never subdivided according to these disability categories.

I want to be clear that *fukushiki* classrooms have very little in common with resource rooms that are available in many U.S. primary schools. The *fukushiki* system is not designed to provide tutorial assistance to students with learning disabilities [*gakushū shōgai*]. While there is a growing awareness and discussion of learning disabilities ["LD"] in Japan, the Ministry of Education has hesitated to move toward a system in which special assistance would be provided to a subset of students attending mainstream classes (Heyer 2006, 7).

The *fukushiki* system is a separate fulltime program with its own classroom(s), its own schedule, and at least one accredited fulltime instructor. It could be characterized as "a school within a school." The students assigned to

the *fukushiki* class can belong to any grade level. Thus in elementary school the youngest members in a *fukushiki* class may be only six years old, while some of their classmates may be as old as twelve. The mixed age-grades of the students and the limited size of the class are the two features that immediately distinguish a *fukushiki* classroom from an age-grade classroom.

Some students begin elementary school as members of the *fukushiki* class, while other students transfer into the track from their mainstream classes midway through their elementary school careers. At Midorikawa transfers into the *fukushiki* class usually occurred at the start of third or fifth grades when the mainstream class membership is also reorganized (see Appendix A: Table 6). In addition to the movement of students from mainstream classes into the *fukushiki* track, over time there is also a movement of *fukushiki* students into the protective schools. This is particularly clear at the end of junior high school when the *fukushiki* system effectively ends. (The separate protective school system continues through high school, but *fukushiki* classes do not.)

Like all public school teachers in Japan, the fulltime *fukushiki* instructors must have their teaching licenses; however, there is no requirement that they have certification or training in special education. While I have only anecdotal evidence, in the section of Tokyo where this fieldwork was carried out it appeared that roughly half of the *fukushiki* instructors had special education licenses or were in the process of getting their special education credentials.²⁴

Methodologies

Ethnographic Research & the Committee on Human Subjects

My initial interest in the cross-cultural study of special needs and borderline children grew out of personal experience. As a child I was quite late learning to read and just managed to struggle through the early grades of elementary school.²⁵ Many years later I wondered if I might have been tracked into a special needs classroom had one been available at the time. Would my sense of self have been significantly altered if I had been segregated from my peers? I have to leave that sentence with a permanent question mark.

Since my dissertation proposal involved the study of minors and persons with disabilities or special needs, I had to secure approval for this research from the University of Hawai'i's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.²⁶ After two meetings and several rewrites my research project was approved, but the Committee required that I (1) obtain the written consent from the special needs student's legal guardians in Japan, (2) disguise the identities of all persons in the study, (3) ensure that my research would not cause the students or their caregivers undue stress or "psychological pain."

Ideas about rights, liabilities and legal permission are certainly not uniform across cultures. Japanese caregivers are unaccustomed to signing consent forms that are "legally binding" so this requirement created awkwardness at the start of my study. Before beginning my classroom observations I provided the children's families with one-page summary of the aims of my project (in Japanese). After we had established a mutual relationship, I secured their written permission for this research.

Accessing a Special Needs Classroom in Japan

Before beginning graduate studies at the University of Hawai'i, I had worked and studied in Tokyo more or less continuously for about a decade (1987-1996) and therefore had a pre-existing network of contacts to draw upon. During preliminary trips to Tokyo in the summers of 1999 and 2000, I began contacting previous professors and friends of friends to make inquiries about the possibility of doing ethnographic research in a special needs classroom.

Although I had a network to draw upon, finding a school that would allow a foreign researcher into a special needs classroom for an extended period proved to be difficult. I met with many educators and parents of special needs children, but when the conversation turned to my desire to observe and follow a special needs class for an academic year (or longer) inevitably the issue of *jinken mondai* [human rights] would emerge. In the context of Japanese schools "human rights" are increasingly used as a synonym for "privacy issues," which have gained importance (and much media attention in Japan) with the rise of the internet.

Thus at a time when "human rights" at school were being interpreted primarily within a "privacy rights" frame, a micro-level ethnographic study of special needs children was not a proposition that many schools would entertain, even with my assurances of anonymity.²⁷ This made the initial phase of this research rather difficult, and there were times when I considered abandoning this topic for something less controversial.

Would my research lessen or increase the stigmatization of these children and how would it reflect on the teachers and the schools? As I met with instructors, school administrators, Board of Education representatives and with parents these concerns were rarely articulated, yet ever present in the discussions.

Through a roundabout series of introductions, I eventually was able to meet a veteran special needs instructor (*Ichikawa-sensei*), who was teaching at a large public elementary school.²⁸ I think that *Ichikawa-sensei* took an initial interest in my research primarily because he thought my participation in the *fukushiki* class might be stimulating and beneficial to his students. *Ichikawa-sensei* was a confident teacher and something of a risk-taker. After speaking on the phone and exchanging letters from Hawai'i, *Ichikawa-sensei* lobbied the administration of his elementary school on my behalf. He also sent a letter home to the *fukushiki* students' parents explaining that an American researcher would be coming to the class regularly to observe and "help out" in the classroom.

Ichikawa-sensei's preliminary footwork on my behalf made my entry into Midorikawa Elementary School quite smooth. Also after meeting with the principal, I was given a clear structural position within the school community, as a researcher and assistant teacher assigned to the *fukushiki* classroom. This allowed for me to be incorporated into school events and faculty meetings without questions arising about my status.

I also was invited to observe classes at a private junior high school that integrated autistic children into mainstream classes. I briefly observed at both schools, but in the end decided to limit my classroom research to Midorikawa

Elementary. The question of typicality was one factor that tilted me toward focusing on the public primary school. The private junior high had developed a unique program, which bore the mark of an innovative, charismatic founder who had very strong views on how special needs education should be implemented. Yet his integrated approach could not said to be representative of special needs education in Japan.²⁹

I cannot say definitively that the special needs classroom at Midorikawa Elementary was “typical”; however, Midorikawa Elementary’s *fukushiki* class is one small node in a national system. There are thousands of similar (and distinct) *fukushiki* classrooms at public elementary schools and junior high schools throughout Japan.

Classroom Ethnography

As I became familiar with the routines in the *fukushiki* classroom and with core group of eight students and their three teachers, my role gradually shifted from an outside observer to a regular participant in the class. Both the teachers and the students encouraged this shift. We came to know one another while sharing lunch, puzzling over math problems, playing kickball, racing to clean the classroom floors, and practicing *hiragana* [Japanese phonetic alphabet] or *kanji* [Chinese characters] with the older students.

The dilemma of trying to simultaneously be both a participant and an observer were put in sharp focus for me as soon as I arrived at Midorikawa Elementary. Participating in common tasks and daily banter is a prerequisite for reciprocal relationships to emerge, and yet this kind of active daily engagement

makes a reflective stance rather difficult.³⁰ My engagement in classroom activities also made the practical task of note taking tricky, yet detailed fieldnotes are essential when one sits down to write. I did keep running notes on each days' activities, but the thickness of my scribbles varies more or less in direct proportion to how involved I was in the particular activity. During the final months of my fieldwork, I sometimes explicitly refrained from participating so that I could capture more detailed descriptions in my notes.

During the second year of my research at Midorikawa Elementary I also kept a video camera on hand and frequently recorded classroom instructions and playtime interactions.³¹ I was initially planning to use short excerpts from this filming to elicit reflections from the students and their teachers about the class; however, I abandoned this aspect of the research primarily because of time constraints. There was little extra time in the busy school day to review video footage. I ended up using the video footage primarily as a supplement to my written notes, rather than as an analytic strategy for eliciting the informant's interpretations of their actions.³²

Life Histories

It was important to find a way to incorporate the mothers' views into this study because these women were the ultimate decision makers in most of the key choices that affected their children's school lives and influenced their future trajectories. Also from the perspective of the elementary school, the mother and the child are often seen as a joint team in Japan (Benjamin 1997, 196-99).

Fortunately at Midorikawa Elementary there were many opportunities for the teachers and myself to interact with the *fukushiki* students' mothers. On most school days the younger children's mothers would drop by in the afternoon to escort their children home and there would be a few minutes to chat. Every few months there were group parent-teacher meetings that I participated in, and there were also a number of informal off-campus gatherings.

While I would not contend that I became a complete insider in the *fukushiki* community, I was included in virtually all the students' activities and most of the teachers' meetings at Midorikawa Elementary. I think that gradually most of the children's mothers came to view me as a sort of insider/outsider in their children's school lives and as a potential ally.

Toward the end of my fieldwork I asked these women if they could find time to sit down with me privately for an extended conversation about their special needs children's lives. Six of the eight mothers accepted my somewhat unusual request for these life histories and made time in their busy schedules for a long, tape-recorded interview.³³ I am particularly grateful and indebted to these women for their voices, their candor and their time—particularly for their time, for in our “modern” lives time is the one commodity that is perpetually in short supply.

I believe these women's narratives, which I analyze in chapter five, were unusual because they spoke at length, and often were quite candid, about a topic that was usually encased in silence. These dialogues were possible because we had a mutual relationship that preceded and extended well beyond the parameters of the interview itself. There was a degree of a mutual entanglement

in one another's lives. Indeed, had I not spent many months with their children in the *fukushiki* classroom and met with these women in various venues prior to these interviews, these conversations would not have been possible.

The stories that *fukushiki* mothers shared with me were personal, emotionally entangled, indexed by tears and laughter, and protected by social etiquettes and taboos that are designed to deflect inquiry and to silence. Indeed outside of the private interview session these topics were almost always avoided or deferred.

Is it ethical, practical, or even possible to try to coax informants to speak candidly about topics that are dangerous enough to be camouflaged in euphemisms and marked by silence or sideways glances? Such questions troubled me, particularly when I sat down to write about these interviews. But when I reversed our roles and imagined myself as a parent of these children I found that there was a lot that I would have liked to have made public, especially behind the cloak of anonymity.

I think this 'hypothetical role reversal' is actually a good standard for researchers to apply to fieldwork situations that might evoke discomfort in, or in some cases even danger to, one's informants. If we were to reverse our roles, would I still wish to continue along this path? This was the question I asked myself when the silence broke into nervous laughter or hushed tears. Sometimes I leaned forward into those tears and other times I pulled back and pursued another topic.

Media Discourse: The Special Needs Child as a Hero

While most of my “data” is derived from long-term participant observation of a single *fukushiki* classroom and from in-depth interviews with a small number of informants, in chapter two I step outside this data set to analyze a highly popular television series. In the spring of 2004 Nihon Television (NTV) launched an unusual, eleven-part mini-series about a first grade boy with autism, who attends a classroom much like the *fukushiki* class at the center of this study. This was the first nationally televised, serial drama in Japan to focus on the difficulties that special needs children face in elementary school. The drama, entitled *Hikari to Tomoni* [With the Light], was a surprising hit, attracting millions of viewers to the weekly Wednesday evening broadcasts. Moreover, the seven-year old autistic character at the center of the plot was cast in the role of a hero.

In this dissertation, I use the *Hikari to Tomoni* narrative to illustrate some of the ways in which special needs children are constructed within a national (and at times supranational) discourse on motherhood, education, and the future of the nation’s youth. This televised drama not only reveals conflicting attitudes towards the education and integration of developmentally delayed children within Japan’s public schools, it also hints at conflicts that many mothers and children face as families try to guide their children toward success within Japan’s educational meritocracy.

Overview of Chapters

My three-pronged approach to this interpretive study of special needs children in Japan is divided into six chapters. This introductory chapter outlines

my research questions, my orientation toward the problem studying of “special needs” children, my methodologies and provides basic demographic information on the *fukushiki* class system in Japan.

Chapter two is devoted to an analysis of the serialized television drama about the struggles and triumphs of Hikaru, a fictional first grader with autism. I start with this frame so that the reader can place the later ethnographic sections within the broader media, educational and social contexts in which special need education is articulated in Japan.

I present my ethnographic description and analysis of the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary in chapters three and four. In chapter three I describe a “typical” day in the *fukushiki* classroom and examine the pragmatics of elementary school life for the students in the special needs track. Chapter four follows the *fukushiki* students and their teachers to a mountain “resort” for their annual overnight study trip. This physical distance from their parental homes brings the issue of dependency into focus and hints at future tensions over how much independence these children will be able to achieve when they exit compulsory education.

Chapter five, the longest chapter, takes a close look at how six women narrate and interpret the life history and future trajectory of their special needs children. In these narratives there are several recurring themes: feelings of guilt, regret, and bewilderment over their children’s delayed development, ambiguity over issues of visibility regarding their children’s mostly invisible impairments, and frustration with the ways in which they perceive that their children’s future options are limited by the educational and social welfare bureaucracies. I argue

that while the Japanese state has a well-articulated strategy for organizing, managing, and attempting to control “differences,” primary caregivers have their own tactics for avoiding or delaying some of the state’s interventions.

The final chapter returns to my initial questions about special education, personhood and citizenship in Japan. As the state makes a small place for “special” [*tokubetsu*] needs children within mainstream public schools, what does this reveal about the discourse and practices through which “normal” [*ijō nashi*] children’s lives are crafted? I argue that the stigmatization and peripherality that accompanies special needs status serves to emphasize and police the performance of normalcy within Japan’s public schools.

Notes

¹ Monbu-kagakushō 2006: *gakkō kihon chōsa hōkokusho - heisei jūhachi nendo* [Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006], Preface p. 7 & p. 36.

² Translated literally the *fukushiki gakkyū* designates a “plural type class” or a “multiple format class,” but the term could be rendered, less opaquely, as a “multi-grade classroom.”

³ *Kibasen* [騎馬戦], literally “knight battle,” is a standard event at Sports Festivals held at most elementary and junior high schools in Japan. In the competition one person mounts onto the shoulder of two or three classmates, who act as “horses.” Numerous mounted knights and their horses simultaneously enter the arena and vie to topple one another or to remove their opponents’ caps. In the fierce pushing and pulling and fleeing that ensues the possibility of incurring a minor injury is not insignificant. Thus most elementary schools restrict participation to fifth and sixth graders, and teachers stay close by, attempting (sometimes unsuccessfully) to intercept dismounted knights before they crash to the ground. By drawing himself participating in this event, Yoshi was probably asserting not only his courage and strength but also his *senpai* [upper class] status vis-à-vis his younger *fukushiki* peers.

⁴ The honorific suffix *sensei* [先生] indicates that the person has been given the authority to provide guidance and instruction. In a show of deference and distinction, this suffix is added to the family name of all teachers, professors and many other specialists, such as medical doctors, lawyers, practitioners of traditional arts, etc. In this dissertation I use the *sensei* suffix primarily to indicate schoolteachers.

⁵ The somewhat less common, more formal alternate term is *gai-koku-jin*, literally “outside-country-person,” with *jin* being used to indicate both nationality and/or race (two categories are often conflated in Japan). *Gaijin* conveys either a neutral or somewhat derogatory nuance, depending on the context and the tone and intonation of the speaker. If the speaker wishes to be more polite the deferential *san* suffix can be added to create the somewhat unwieldy derivative expression: *gaijin-san* (Mr. or Ms. foreigner).

⁶ Class size was capped at forty-five students in the late 1960s and then limited to forty students in 1991 (Lewis 1995, 15). However, in spite of the rapidly declining birthrate over the past several decades, typical class sizes at elementary and junior high schools in urban areas has often remained near the maximum number allowed. At the time of this research most of the mainstream classes at Midorikawa Elementary accommodate between 36 and 38 students. In Tokyo there is (or was) a small parent based movement pressing for an enrollment cap at 30 students [*sanjū-nin gakkyū undō*], but the relatively large size of mainstreams classes was not usually a major point of concern or contention. This is not surprising in part because the current generation of parents can remember attending somewhat larger classes during their own school days.

⁷ In 2001 the former Ministry of Education [文部省, *Monbushō*] merged with the Science and Technology Agency [科学技術庁, *Kagaku-gijyutsuchō*] to form the present Ministry of

Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [文部科学省, *Monbu-kagakushō* or MEXT]. My fieldwork occurred during the transitional period when the government's bureaucratic structure was in flux. Throughout the dissertation I use "Ministry of Education" to stand in for the considerably more unwieldy "Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology."

⁸ The Japanese concept of *jikaku* [self-awareness] has parallels with Mead's concept of self-realization through dialogic interactions with a generalized third person. For a brief discussion see Nakamura 2006, 92.

⁹ Other theorists have added gender to Goffman's original list (Asch & Fine 1997; Wendell 1997). Some scholars, such as Robert Murphy, argue that Goffman's overly broad framework is counterproductive and that studies of disability should avoid establishing linkages between groups that are marginalized for very distinct reasons. Yet with my fieldwork at Midorikawa Elementary, I felt it would have been misleading to avoid confronting the obvious issue of stigmatization.

¹⁰ The "whole child" educational approach argues that elementary schools need to focus on more than just covering core academic subjects such as math and reading. Educational systems and teachers should take into consideration the social and emotional needs of young students as well as their moral development. Lewis argues that American public schools are too often organized like factories that are increasingly focused on *producing* academic skills in the students body (1996, 89); whereas Japanese public schools are able to achieve impressive academic results by first addressing the social needs of the children to form deep emotional bonds with their teachers and peers. The whole child philosophy argues that intellectual development cannot be extricated from the child's social and emotional needs (Lewis 1996, 6; Peak 1991, 72-5; Cummings 1980).

¹¹ I generally agree with this largely positive assessment of the educational ethos within public primary schools in Japan; however, to some extent the highlighting "whole child" education in the scholarly research on Japanese compulsory education is a corrective response to the over-reporting of Japan's so-called "examination hell" by Western media.

¹² Okano and Tsuchiya do provide an overview of educational issues facing minority students in Japan (1999, 110-140) and Lewis touches upon the issue of how elementary classroom socialization might impact on students who fall outside the norm (1995, 173).

¹³ Being able to work collaboratively with one's peers usually is more critical than test performance. In fact, the social promotion of low performing students is common in Japan through the end of compulsory education. The importance placed the ties within one's age-grade means that repeating a school year is virtually unheard.

¹⁴ The resistance to tracking in Japan and the consistent support for a strongly egalitarian ethos within the public school system should be understood in the context of Japan's pre-war system of "higher schools." From the late 1880s through the end of the war, Japan had a two-tiered educational system. The masses had access to a basic public education, but only the children of prestigious or independently wealthy families could hope to gain access to the "higher schools," where future bureaucrats and business leaders were

groomed for leadership positions. Roden has described these public schools as similar to “elite boarding schools in the West,” which had the implicit mission of imbuing pupils with the distinction of a ruling elite (Roden 1980, 13 & 43). While public support for a single track compulsory public education system appears to still be quite strong, the educational reform package adopted by Prime Minister Abe’s Administration in the spring of 2007 call for increasing competition between public schools and opens up the possibility of ability-based tracking within the compulsory system. To what extent these reforms will actually be implemented remains to be seen (Tawara 2006).

¹⁵ For instance, in the 2005 school year the Ministry of Education reports that 99% of Japanese elementary school students attended government run schools. That same year 93% of junior high school students attended public schools (*Monbu-kagakushō* 2006, 34; Ministry of Education Statistical Abstracts Webpage (accessed 10 July 2007): <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/statist/06060808/pdf/031.pdf>).

¹⁶ This egalitarian ethos within Japan’s compulsory public school system is offset, and to some extent made possible, by the separate, highly competitive system of private crams schools [*juku, yobikō*], which supplement public education with a course of rigorous preparation for entrance exams to secondary schools. Domestic commentators often characterize the *juku* system as a “shadow educational structure” that actually permits the public schools to maintain the façade of equal educational opportunities for all. In urban Japan attending at private cram school for a number of years is seen almost as requirement if you are planning for your child to have a fighting chance at passing the entrance tests to an elite high school or a name brand university.

¹⁷ The legislation (H.R. 1350) was amended and reauthorized in 2004 to guarantee a “free and appropriate public education” in the “least restrictive environment” possible (see Library of Congress online; accessed 2 July 2007): <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d108:HR01350:@@L&summ2=m&>).

¹⁸ I purposely use the lower case version of the term “deaf” here to indicate persons with significant hearing impairments as opposed to those who may or may not align themselves with the Deaf cultural politics. Deaf activists use the upper class version to show that signing constitutes membership in a distinct cultural-linguistic community. Nakamura points out that in Japan it was not until the 1990s that the public schools began to recognize the use of signing at schools, and the Ministry of Education still does not sanction the sign language as a means of instruction in elementary schools (2006, 25).

¹⁹ I am faced with the question of whether to adopt the English gloss “impairment” or “disability” for the Japanese term *shōgai* [障害]. In the 1980 version of the World Health Organization’s publication on the classification of disabilities (*International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps*), “impairments” were defined as “any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function” (WHO 1980, 27). Whereas “disability” was used to indicate “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being (WHO 1980, 28). However, with the rise of the Disability rights movement this language has become increasing

problematized and problematic. The term “handicap” has been vanquished as politically incorrect and “impairment” is now used much less frequently as we can see from the revised title of WHO’s international classificatory system: “*International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health: ICF*” (WHO 2001, 1). In this dissertation I generally gloss *shōgai* as “disability” since this terminology less problematic in an English context; however, when the specific context of the Japanese sentence seems to require it, I also use the term “impairment.” Semantically “impairment” is closer to the original nuance of the Japanese term *shōgai* is as *shō* [障] means “to hinder or interfere with” and *gai* [害] means “to cause injury, harm, or damage.” A *shōgaibutsu* [障害物] is a physical obstacle or an obstruction.

²⁰ Clearly some students who would be classified as having “special needs” in the U.S. system are participating as members of mainstream classes in Japan. I noted several such students at Midorikawa Elementary. Also see *Inside Japanese Classrooms: The Heart of Education* (Sato 2004, 164).

²¹ Notable exceptions are Katharina Heyer’s comparative study of disability rights movements in Germany and Japan (Heyer 2002), as well as Karen Nakamura’s recently published ethnography of Deaf culture in Japan (Nakamura 2006).

²² In 2006 the most common class size at mainstream elementary schools in Japan was 31-35 students per class; this average is somewhat higher in urban centers. Protective schools, on the other hand, provide one instructor for every two or three students, which reflects the severity of the disabilities that are common in the segregated special educational system (Monbu-kagakushō 2006, 24 & 13).

²³ Many of the children classified as having an emotional impairment [*jōcho shōgai*] in the Japanese system would most probably be regarded as having behavioral problems in the U.S. context. Children who are diagnosed with attention deficit disorders in the United States would find themselves in the emotionally impaired category in Japan because ADHD is not a separate category used to distinguish among students in Japan’s public schools.

²⁴ Several *fukushiki* instructors confirmed this estimate, and Ichikawa-sensei, who had a special education teaching certificate, noted that these special education credentials created an internal division among the *fukushiki* instructors. Those with training in special education usually remained in the *fukushiki* system long-term, whereas teachers without special ed. certification were more likely to be transferred back into the regular system after a number years of teaching in the *fukushiki* system. Japanese public school instructors are public servants, who have little choice in their specific teaching assignments. Thus it is not uncommon for a teacher without special education training to be assigned to lead a special needs class because of demands within a particular district. Note that Nakamura writes that even within public schools for the deaf it is not uncommon for instructors, who have no previous training or experience with deaf education, to be assigned to lead deaf classes (2006, 63).

²⁵ I still have a clear memory of trying to strike a studious pose as I pretended to silently read simple picture books during “reading time” in the first and second grades. This play-acting did not fool my second grade teacher, who strongly recommended a remedial, summer program in reading. In retrospect the long hot summer I spent reluctantly sweating through phonics charts with a skillful tutor, whose name I have long since forgotten, was crucial to my later successes as a student.

²⁶ It sounds commonsensical that universities should be required to provide ample safeguards for human subjects involved in any research projects under their direction, yet there are serious flaws with the current review system. The main problem is that the risks posed by research in social sciences are very different from the types of concerns that need to be addressed in bio-medical research and drug trials. Yet over the past several decades as Institutional Review Boards expanded their initial mandate they have adapted rules, which were originally developed to provide legal protections to individuals who were participating in bio-medical studies, to social science research. The current review system creates unnecessary problems and significant delays for many researchers; however, few openly question this system because a conflict with the Committee for Human Subjects could quickly put one’s research initiative in jeopardy. Note, for instance, that when the American Association of University Professors published a stinging critique of this review process they did so under anonymous authorship (Acedeme 2001).

²⁷ Anonymity is now an issue at many Japanese schools. For instance, the public elementary school that my son attended in the western suburbs of Tokyo banned photos, in which the students’ faces were discernable, from all school publications and also remove such photos from the school’s website. As a parent, this policy struck me as somewhat alarmist, although I must say that my views on the subject seemed to have been in the minority. Still, when schools ban the use of student photos in the name of human rights, which “human rights” are being promoted?

²⁸ In chapter three I provide more detailed account of how I gained access to the special needs classroom at Midorikawa Elementary. I also discuss how my “informants” sought to recast me in the role of an assistant instructor at the school.

²⁹ Also note that this “integrated approach” was possible because the private junior high school could be selective about the composition of its student body. The school only accepted mildly autistic children, with few behavioral issues. In the *fukushiki* classes there is much wider range of special needs, including children with significant cognitive impairments, speech impediments, and others who would most probably have been labeled as ADHD in the U.S. context.

³⁰ Bourdieu describes the position of a social analyst as a “spectator on a hill overlooking the town (Webb et al. 2002, 138).” But as an anthropologist in the classroom, I felt like everyday the town’s people had opted to come out to that hill for a picnic, and I was invited to lunch.

³¹ I provide a more detailed account of this filming in chapter three.

³² For an interesting discussion on the use of video footage to elicit informant's interpretations of their own lived worlds see Tobin et al. 1989, 4-7.

³³ My request was "somewhat unusual" because, although Japanese elementary school teachers do hold regular conferences with parents, those exchanges are tightly controlled by the limited time frame and the need to stay on topic, within parameters that are predetermined by teachers and school administrators. This interview that I was requesting was open-ended; I was asking these women to tell me their perceptions as parents of children with special needs. Time was an issue for us as well, especially since many of these women were working part-time and/or had small children to look after. However, the six women who took part in the interviews that are the focus of chapter five all juggled their schedules so that we could have at least 90 minutes to talk.

Chapter 2

Together With Hikaru?

Introduction

Six-year-old Azuma Hikaru is under his desk again. He has compressed himself into a little ball with his knees drawn tightly to his chest. As he gently rocks back and forth on his heels, Hikaru stares intently at some point off in the distance. His first grade teacher, *Rio-sensei*, is not surprised or annoyed by Hikaru's odd behavior. She does not try to coax him out from under his desk or ask him about his intentions. Instead she squats down herself and rocks along with her new student. *Rio-sensei* has time. There are no other children pulling at her sleeve, vying for her attention. Hikaru-kun [*little-Hikaru*]¹ attends a class of one at Shichigatsu Elementary, a public school that cannot be found on any map.

Although Azuma Hikaru is well known in Japan, even famous, Shichigatsu Elementary School, *Rio-sensei* and Hikaru-kun himself exist *only* in a fictional space. They were first etched into being by a manga artist, Tobe Keiko, and then in the spring of 2004 their story unfolded dramatically before the nation in a widely popular eleven-part television mini-series entitled *Hikari to Tomoni*.² This "human drama" [*hyūman dorama*] was the first fictionalized series in Japan to focus on the struggles of an autistic child at school.³ The television program went to the top of the ratings charts, attracting millions of viewers to each Wednesday evening installment.

In this chapter I explore an interpretive analysis of the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series, which gave voice to some issues that confront special needs

children at mainstream public schools in Japan. This popular drama paints an idealized picture of “the special needs child,” his devoted elementary school teachers, and self-sacrificing mother, but the narrative also reveals some of the ways in which the category of the *tokubetsu/tokushu* [special] child is differentiated from and constructed against the *futsū no ko* [a regular kid] alternative within the schools.

In the series the talented child actor Saito Ryusei portrays the Hikaru-kun character as a severely autistic child. At the beginning of the drama Hikaru is completely non-communicative, asocial and prone toward panic attacks. He dislikes being touched or held, even by his loving mother, Sachiko, who is bewildered by her young child’s behavior.

As the series progresses the viewer gradually discovers that Hikaru shares a deep, although unarticulated (and inarticulable), emotional linkage with his mother. Their tight emotional bond even becomes a source of envy and longing among a number of the supporting characters, who wish to be like Hikaru or like his loving mother Sachiko. Ironically Hikaru emerges as the ideal child in a narrative that emphasizes the warm bonds of emotional dependence [*amae*] that *should* link mother and child, or more specifically mother and son. Although Hikaru is an autistic child, the narrative portrays him as deeply connected with his mother. Japanese viewers could vicariously participate in the mutual dependence and love that emanates from the Hikaru-Sachiko dyadic relationship, therein re-experiencing, or re-imagining, their own childhood linkage with their mothers. This dynamic may have contributed to the surprisingly wide appeal of the drama.

The creators of the *Hikari to Tomoni* drama also make use of Hikaru's difference to subtly question the ways that children are molded within Japan's educational meritocracy, and to critique life in the metropolis. Hikaru's elementary school is depicted as an idealized space, a tiny, urban *furusato* [hometown], where the emotional bonds of "village Japan" can be rediscovered, re-imagined and perhaps even superimposed over the dry, emotionally brittle landscape that supposedly defines life within the metropolis. The fictional Shichigatsu Elementary school serves as a metaphor for life in a simpler, less rationalized, more emotionally connected "Japan."

The Hikaru-kun Boom

In the spring and early summer of 2004, *Hikari to Tomoni* emerged as the most watched television drama being aired in Japan at the time. The plot and characters were created some four years prior by the manga artist Tobe Keiko, who penned the narrative as a graphic novel that was serialized in the women's manga magazine "for Mrs." The publisher, Akita Shoten, originally only planned for three installments of *Hikari to Tomoni*, with the first being released late in 2000; however, a vocal fan base rallied around this strip and the run was extended through to the present time (summer 2007).

The *Hikari to Tomoni* manga garnered such popularity that beginning in 2001 Tobe's series was reissued in book form. By the spring of 2007 the story had reached volume 10, and domestic book sales had surpassed two million copies. The first three volumes of Tobe's series have been translated into Korean, Chinese and now English. Some of these later sales were

undoubtedly driven by the release of the dramatized television version of *Hikari to Tomoni*, but the manga series itself was also a hit from its initial publication.

Within the community of families with special needs children Tobe's series was well known long before the televised version reached the airwaves. In fact, about eighteen months before the drama appeared on NTV, one of my informants sent me volumes one and two of the manga series. Initial interest in *Hikari to Tomoni* narrative was generated in part by word of mouth support from within the special needs community.

With very little advanced promotion Nihon Television began broadcasting the dramatized version of *Hikari to Tomoni* on April 14, 2004. The weekly episodes were aired in one-hour segments on Wednesday evenings in the 10:00 p.m. slot, a little too late for an elementary school audience. Although the narrative unfolds mostly within the fictionalized space of Shichigatsu Elementary School and the dramatic action follows the exploits of six-year-old Hikaru-kun, adults were the intended audience.

While the 10:00 p.m. slot falls outside of prime viewing time in the United States, this time slot is actually quite desirable in Japan because business people and other workers, who may be kept late at their jobs, are generally able to catch a show that airs in the 10:00 p.m. slot. *Hikari to Tomoni* was a rather unorthodox program for this time slot.

For the most part Japan's evening commercial television airwaves are dominated by office love dramas, police stories, celebrity hosted quiz shows and variety shows.⁴ A program focused on an autistic child's struggles in

elementary school was an unusual surprise. Even more surprising was the positive audience response.



Figure 2.1: NTV's webpage for *Hikari to Tomoni* [With the Light]

Characters from top right to bottom left: Azuma Sachiko (Shinohara Ryoko), Rio-sensei (Kobayashi Satomi) and Azuma Hikaru (Saito Ryusei). Source (accessed 20 October 2007): <http://www.ntv.co.jp/hikari/>.

The strong popularity of the manga version of *Hikari to Tomoni* most probably contributed to NTV's decision to adapt the story into a television drama. The producers must have been pleased when the *Hikari to Tomoni* series consistently captured over 15% of the viewing audience. In fact, 18.3% of Japanese households tuned in for the final episode, which was broadcast on June 23, 2004.⁵ These viewer rates were exceptionally high for a mid-week, social drama. At the height of its popularity *Hikari to Tomoni's* ratings briefly surpassed even those of *Winter Sonata* [*Fuyu no Sonata*] the immensely popular Korea love drama, starring heartthrob Bae Yong Joon.⁶ In the Kantō

area alone more than seven million viewers tuned in to watch the climax episode of the *Hikari to Tomoni* series.

In fact, *Hikari to Tomoni* proved so popular that NTV has since rebroadcast the mini-series in its entirety several times. The drama was also eventually released for sale on DVD and in the VHS format, which is rather unusual for a Japanese television series. By mid-May of 2004 commentators were already talking about a so-called “Hikaru-kun Boom,” and many articles about the program and about special needs children began to appear in all the major newspapers, in many weekly magazines, as well as on numerous online discussion boards.⁷

But I only realized the series was becoming something of a cultural phenomena after my wife went shopping for a pair of shoes for our son, who was then in second grade. She pointed out to me that our local shoe store in Kichijōji was pushing specially designed sneakers that were identical to the ones that Hikaru wore in the series.⁸ For fictional character in a mini-series to have even a small impact on the billion dollar “sneaker wars” confirms the program’s considerable success. Later NTV began directly marketing a number of goods loosely related to the drama. The most popular item was a satchel like the one that Hikaru’s mother uses in the series.⁹

The *Hikari to Tomoni* series was not only a hit with the Japanese public. The program also received a good deal of critical acclaim. In the summer of 2004 Nihon Television won first prize [*saiyūshū sakuhinshō*] in best drama category for the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series at the 41st annual Japanese television “Drama Academy Awards.”¹⁰ This was the first time in ten years

that NTV had secured this award for an original drama. At the 8th annual Media Arts Festival Awards in 2004, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology somewhat belatedly awarded Tobe Keiko a prestigious *Media Arts Excellence Prize* for artistic merit in the creation of the series.¹¹

Mediascapes & The Rain Man Effect

In 1990 Appadurai coined the term “mediascape” in a preliminary effort to theorize about the multiple effects of global cultural flows.¹² It is undeniable that since the middle of the twentieth century film, television and more recently electronic media have rapidly accelerated national and global flows of images, ideas, categories and narratives.¹³ To an increasing extent these global flows do not stop at the borders of the nation.

Although the discourses that surround autistic and other special needs children in the United States and Japan remain quite distinct, there are some parallels that can be drawn between the ripple effects of the immensely popular *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series and the Academy Award winning, 1988 Hollywood film *Rain Man*. In fact, the *Hikari to Tomoni* manga series makes direct reference to the *Rain Man* film, which starred Tom Cruise as Charlie Babbitt and Dustin Hoffman as his autistic brother Raymond.

Both of these media events made autistic persons suddenly much more visible to the general public and ignited considerable discussion of developmental differences in each country. In what has been termed the “Rain Man Effect” the Hollywood film inserted the term “autism” into the

public consciousness in North America and popularized the image of an autistic individual as a savant (Bee 2000, 1; Halliwell 2004, 150).¹⁴

Through a similar process *Hikari to Tomomi* inserted the term *jiheishō* [autism] into everyday discourse in Japan.¹⁵ Prior to the release of *Hikari to Tomomi*, autism was a rather specialized medical term that was infrequently used in casual conversations. For instance, in my observations within the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary (which were prior to the airing of *Hikari to Tomomi*), the term *jiheishō* was seldom invoked by the teachers even though the class included several students with autistic spectrum disorders. After the airing of the mini-series *jiheishō* was widely discussed in Japan's national media and within the general public.¹⁶

In the manga version of the narrative, a doctor breaks the news of Hikaru's diagnosis to Sachiko by making reference to the *Rain Man* film.

"Autism, what is that?" asks Hikaru's surprised mother. The young doctor replies with his own question, "Have you ever seen the movie *Rain Man*?"

With the worldwide circulation of books, films, news, images, and commentaries, it is not too surprising that *Hikari to Tomomi* and *Rain Man* narratives might be rhetorically linked in this manner, yet it is notable that in both the nations it was a fictional narrative that brought a wider awareness of autism and developmental differences to the general public.

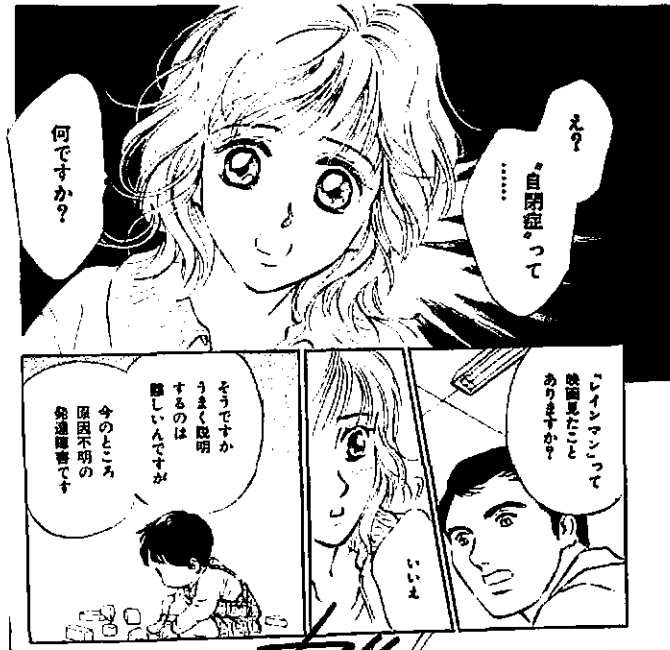


Figure 2.2: *Hikari to Tomoni* Graphic Novel

Sachiko: “Autism,” what is that?

Doctor: Have you ever seen the movie Rain Man?

Sachiko: No.

Doctor: Oh, I see... Well, it is a little difficult to explain, but autism is a developmental impairment. The cause is unknown at this time.

(Source: *Hikari to Tomoni* series, Volume 1, Tobe 2001, 20)

Unlike Raymond Babbitt, Hikaru-kun is not portrayed as a savant, although the tightly written script and skillful acting by six-year-old Saito Ryusei do inspire a different sort of ideal. While the first grade Hikaru-kun character, can be very difficult to reach, he is also pleasingly naive, pure-hearted, dependable, and sometimes even insightful.¹⁷ Within his fictional school community, Hikaru comes to serve as a point of communion and somewhat ironically his autistic character is portrayed embodying a prelinguistic sort of emotional immediacy and bonding with his mother that argues the most important sentiments need not (should not?) be articulated.

Hikaru is purity and light, uncorrupted by the shadows cast within the metropolis.

Hikaru's Silence & Sachiko's Isolation

The *Hikari to Tomoni* television drama opens with series of striking black and white still images of a young couple walking hand in hand along the shore of a picturesque lake. They are laughing, and you can see from the look in Masato's eyes that he is deeply in love with his pregnant, yet ever stylish, wife Sachiko. The audience vicariously shares in the couple's bliss as one happy photo dissolves into the next against a soothing, lullaby-like piano soundtrack. An ultrasound image of a fetus briefly appears and then fades away to reveal Sachiko's ecstatic face as she cradles a newborn baby boy to her breasts. The infant was born at daybreak so the young couple decides to christen their firstborn son "Hikaru" [光: shimmering light].

In the first episode we meet Sachiko, Masato and Hikaru-kun just as they are relocating from rural Shizuoka to the Tokyo-Yokohama metropolis. Masato, who is a junior executive at an unspecified high tech firm, has been transferred to the corporate head office in Yokohama. Everything seems to be going well for the young couple. Masato's mother, Takako, has even provided the funds needed for a down payment on a spacious, modern condo in an upscale new complex. She is only too delighted to share in her son's corporate success.

In this narrative a son's success is the mother's triumph; however, as we shall see, a son's difficulties are often experienced as the mother's failures.

Autism not only silences Hikaru, but also prevents Sachiko from fulfilling her the role an indulgent mother. Even as an infant Hikaru does not like to be held. Sachiko has to learn to restrain herself from reaching out and embracing her young son.

To make matters worse Sachiko is uneasy about the sudden proximity of her mother-in-law, who has a key to their new condo. Sachiko finds the lack of privacy a bit of a burden and complains about it to her husband, but Masato insists that since they are indebted to his mother this arrangement is only natural. It is apparent from this conversation and from Masato's body language that he is still quite dependent upon his mother.

As Masato and Sachiko readjust to life at the urban center of Japan, there are some early signs that something may be amiss with their young son. Although Hikaru has passed his second birthday, he has yet to begin speaking. Hikaru is self-absorbed and fiercely independent, resisting even his parent's embraces. Sachiko is getting worried about their son's behavior and she finally mentions it to her overly busy husband, but Masato brushes her worries aside, saying there is nothing to be concerned about as boys are often slow with language.

One day Sachiko takes Hikaru to the neighborhood park, but she cannot get him interested in playing with his peers.¹⁸ He prefers to sit alone and arrange pebbles in geometric patterns on the ground. One of the other mothers at the park remarks that it is odd that Hikaru-kun is so "cool" [*kūru*], using the English loanword to describe Hikaru. Sachiko manages a weak

smile, but she is finding that Hikaru's detached disposition is beginning to impact negatively on her relationships with other young mothers.

Hikaru's lack of interest in his age-peers effectively isolates Sachiko from her own peer group. The extroverted Sachiko cannot understand her young son's introspective, even asocial posture. Hikaru seems comfortable in his quiet world of one, but Sachiko is becoming depressed by this inexplicable turn of events. Is there something wrong with her son? Is there something wrong with herself? Is she failing as a mother? As Hikaru's difference becomes increasingly clear, Sachiko's social world begins to constrict.

Many authors argue that there is a strong proclivity in Japan for mothers to identify extremely closely with their children's disposition and desires (Peak 1991, 38).¹⁹ Japanese linguistic structures also tend to encourage an almost isomorphic view of the mother-child pair. The subject of a Japanese sentence is frequently implied, rather than stated, so when speaking there is usually no need for mothers to differentiate between themselves and their children. Hendry, who made extended observations of young women and their toddlers at several Japanese preschools, writes "it would almost be like praising herself if a mother praised her child" (Hendry 1986,106). Hendry is speaking of modesty, but her observation reveals a propensity to conceptualize the mother-child dyad as a single unit with shared needs and desires.

As Sachiko finds herself increasingly isolated and significantly depressed, she approaches an inner crisis. Finally she decides that she simply must confide her worries to her husband. But when she reveals to Masato

that she fears there is something odd about their young son's behavior, her husband explodes. "Is there any mother in this world who would label her own child as 'odd'? Are you really qualified to be a mother [*sore demo haha-oya ka*]?" By turning Hikaru's difference into a question of Sachiko's legitimacy as a mother, Masato strikes at the heart of Sachiko's worst fears.

With no one left to turn to, Sachiko takes her son to a hospital for a thorough medical examination. The doctors soon suspect that Hikaru is autistic, but no one at the medical center is willing to articulate this diagnosis to Sachiko. The medical experts tell Sachiko that it is best to wait and see. Sachiko periodically brings Hikaru to this clinic for various tests. After several months have passed a young doctor, who is trying to be helpful, says, "You know we have classes for autistic children and their mothers. Why don't you and Hikaru plan on stopping by?"

A startled Sachiko replies, "A—utism, what's that? If it is some kind of illness, can you cure it? [*byōki nara naorimasu ka?*]"

The doctor asks defensively, "Weren't you told? [*kiite nai desu ka?*]"

In this discursive space, autism silences not only from within, but from without. Autism impedes Hikaru's acquisition of language, while it simultaneously isolates Sachiko, cutting her off from her peer group. The medical establishment's initial response is also silence, as if not naming the illness might make it disappear. And Sachiko soon finds herself mimicking the doctors, for she cannot find the words to tell her husband about this diagnosis.

When Masato asks Sachiko directly about Hikaru's tests at the clinic, Sachiko says that everything went fine. There is nothing out of the ordinary about Hikaru. Masato is overjoyed at this news. He buys a bottle of good red wine and that night, after Hikaru has fallen asleep, they celebrate together. Sachiko plays along sipping her wine guiltily.

But the very next day when they are out for a drive, Sachiko says in a deadpan voice, "Have you ever heard of autism?"

Masato answers that he has heard of the term, but when he realizes that his wife is talking about their own son, he pulls their car to an abrupt halt. "You said all the tests were negative! How could you lie to me about something like this!" In a panic over the bad news, the disbelieving Masato insists on an even more pervasive veil of silence. "Don't say a word of this to my mother [*o-fukuro ni iun jya nai*]," he commands. Everyone's initial response is to try banishing the autism by silencing the diagnosis. To give Hikaru's developmental delay a name is to give it a source and a reason to persist.

A few days after this argument Masato, Sachiko and Hikaru must attend a memorial service for Masato's deceased father. Hikaru, who is unaccustomed to the austere surroundings of the Buddhist temple and the monks' atonal chanting, has a panic attack. Under the stern reproving glances of her mother-in-law, Sachiko scrambles to quickly remove her hysterical son from the temple's inner sanctum. One of the relatives at the ceremony openly complains, "That child is completely undisciplined! What sort of upbringing could he be getting [*oya no shitsuke ni natte nai no yo...*]?"

Masato's mother, Takako, shares this view. Immediately after the service, Takako confronts her daughter-in-law in the temple's garden. Sachiko says truthfully that she has no idea why Hikaru panicked at the service, but this answer only serves to further infuriate Takako. "How could that be? You are his mother, are you not [*dō iū koto? haha-oya deshō?*]" Here again the dialogue reveals the assumption that mothers should have access to their children's inner world.

A teary-eyed Sachiko finally admits that she has just learned Hikaru probably has a developmental impairment. "Actually, the hospital recently told me that Hikaru might be autistic."

Misunderstanding the diagnosis, Takako rejects this explanation out of hand, "What are you talking about? A small child like Hikaru couldn't possibly be depressed."

An exasperated Sachiko weakly replies, "But autism isn't the same thing as depression [*utsubyō to chigau tte...*]."

Takako is in no mood to be lectured to by her daughter-in-law about childrearing.

This is all your fault. You always taking the easy way out and not focusing your attention on raising Hikaru [*kosodate ni te-wo nuiteru kara sonna koto ni nacchatte*]... Can you really say that you have made no mistakes in the way you are raising that child [*anata no kosodate dewa machigatte nai to ieru*]?

As Fujita argues, the discourse on childrearing in Japan at times makes it appear as if any failing in the child is "always mother's fault" (1989, 67).²⁰ Takako storms out of the temple's garden. Thereafter she stops visiting her son's condominium and even refuses to speak with her daughter-in-law.

Masato appeals to his mother arguing that Hikaru's autism could not possibly be Sachiko's fault. But Takako is steadfast in her rage against the diagnosis, "Tell Sachiko I will come by, if and when 'the autism' is cured." Takako interprets Hikaru's impairment as a personal affront on the part of Sachiko. How could her daughter-in-law be so incredibly incompetent as a mother?

Onegai Politics & Japan's Educational Meritocracy²¹

Hikaru's paternal grandmother rallies against, and denies, her grandson's developmental impairment, but Sachiko, exhausted from trying to conceal her son's condition, finally accepts this diagnosis. She subsequently enrolls herself and Hikaru in a class held at the hospital for autistic children and their mothers. Even within this semi-medicalized discourse, which normally isolates disease within individual bodies, the mother-child dyad remains firmly intact. Hikaru's autism is *shared* with his mother, less so with his father. The hospital's early intervention program is designed for autistic children and their mothers (fathers go unmentioned). This class at the hospital not only provides Hikaru with a group of similar peers, but also puts Sachiko in contact with other women who are facing similar challenges as mothers with developmentally delayed children. No longer isolated or despondent, Sachiko regains her self-confidence and rediscovers her enthusiasm for life. She stops hiding in her apartment and re-enters the community.

With Sachiko's transformation complete the narrative is free to fast forward several years to the point where Hikaru is about to enter elementary school. While children with significant developmental impairments or disabilities [*shōgai*]²², are strongly encouraged to attend segregated "protective" schools, Sachiko hopes to send Hikaru to the local public school, which has a special needs class for developmentally delayed students.

There is an emergent disability rights movement in Japan, but often disability advocates and caregivers find that their interests are best served by engaging the bureaucracy positively through "*onagai* politics" [the politics of pleading].²³ That is, by invoking the understanding [*go-rikai*] and indulgence [*amae*] of the larger community, rather than attempting to assert any specific rights based claims.

When trying to gain a place for Hikaru in the local public school, Sachiko wisely opts for this *amae* approach. She pays several visits the primary school and appeals for support to the principal and the special needs teacher, *Rio-sensei*. The sympathetic principal tells Sachiko that he will do what he can, but it is she who must be persistent and keep "lowering her head to the local Board of Education officials [*nankai mo kyōikuinkai ni atama-wo sagete tanonde mite kudasai*]." The principal means that Sachiko must appeal directly to the Board and ask for the members' indulgence regarding Hikaru's education. This approach eventually succeeds. At the close of episode one Hikaru is admitted to Shichigatsu Elementary and placed in a classroom of one with *Rio-sensei* as his private tutor.

The remaining ten episodes of the series focus on Hikaru's struggle to connect with Rio-*sensei* and his peers at Shichigatsu Elementary. After spending the first few weeks mostly hiding under his desk, Hikaru warms to, and finally bonds closely with, his patient and resourceful teacher. An outgoing first grade girl named Moe also befriends Hikaru.²⁴

The relationship that emerges between Moe and Hikaru and the anxiety this engenders between their respective families serves as a primary source of dramatic tension for the remainder of the series. In episode two Moe's mother, Kaoru, tells her daughter directly to "keep her distance from that boy [*sotto shita hō ga ii...amari kakawaranai hō ga ii*]" because Hikaru is 'different.' But Moe is attracted to Hikaru precisely because his life is so very different from her own.

Moe is very bright, but over-programmed and quite unhappy. She excels at her primary schools studies, but her parents insist that she also attend piano lessons and supplementary classes at the local cram school. Moe dutifully, yet unenthusiastically, attends these lessons, even as she longs for a more carefree childhood. She is also secretly envious of the intimate and at times playful relationship that exists between Hikaru and Sachiko.

Autism eliminates Hikaru-kun from Japan's education race, but this paradoxically presents Sachiko and Hikaru with an unanticipated opportunity to forge a relationship outside of the "educational mother/student-child" [*kyōiku mama/kodomo-seito*] metaphor. Hikaru's autism eliminates many options, but simultaneously enables both Hikaru and his mother to escape from the built-in pressures of Japan's educational

meritocracy.²⁵ Sachiko learns to praise and support Hikaru irrespective of his performance as measured against his peers. Autism creates a space in which Sachiko can love her son unconditionally as unconditional love is the only kind of affection that Hikaru is capable of receiving. The intimate bond that emerges between Hikaru and Sachiko becomes a point of longing and desire for a number of the supporting characters in the narrative.

Unlike Hikaru, Moe is an excellent student with the potential to emerge at the top of Japan's educational pyramid and her parents are determined that she will. Moe's father has successfully negotiated the educational meritocracy and achieved economic success, although his preoccupation with corporate obligations allows him very little time for his daughter. He rigidly insists on a superlative performance from Moe, but leaves the details of his daughter's education entirely to his wife. Moe's mother, Kaoru, resorts to using her absent husband's high expectations to pressure Moe to excel.

After a poor performance at a piano lesson, Kaoru warns her daughter that if she does not improve she may lose her father's affection [*shikari shinai to papa ni kirawarechau-n dakara*]. In the Japanese sentence the object of the father's imagined "disapproval" remains ambiguous. It could be either Moe or Kaoru. Again the implication being that the mother-child dyad is a single unit. The two are one. If Moe fails, Kaoru also fails, and they both risk losing the father's affections. Thus Moe's mother is both threatening and pleading with her daughter at the same time.

Moe responds to this pressure by psychologically distancing herself from both parents. She dreamily idolizes Hikaru's seemingly carefree existence. At one point Moe tells her stunned mother that she "wants to become Hikaru." To Moe, Hikaru represents a return to an innocent childhood, a childhood that was stolen away when she was thrust into the high stakes education game.

Accusations, Apologies & Pity

Early in the narrative Hikaru is slightly injured in an accident on the school playground. His right arm is cut and requires stitches. *Rio-sensei* rushes Hikaru-kun to a nearby hospital, but the attending doctor has a very difficult time treating the panic stricken, screaming child. The hospital staff finally manages to give Hikaru tranquilizer, and they are able to treat the cut. Afterwards in the hospital hallway a self-important doctor complains loudly to the attendant nurse, "What an incredibly self-absorbed child that was! He was completely out of control. Must have been spoiled something rotten."

Hikaru's father, who is rushing to the hospital from his office, arrives just in time to overhear the doctor's loud complaints. Masato bows deeply and apologizes for his son, "So sorry for all the trouble. My son is autistic; I'm so sorry [*jiheishō de sumimasen, sumimasen*]." *Rio-sensei*, who is in Hikaru's hospital room, overhears Masato's apology and burst into the hallway herself. She confronts the doctor and nurse, lecturing them both on autism. Then she turns to Masato and scolds him for apologizing about Hikaru's impairment. From the hospital bedroom Masato's mother, wonders aloud if they will

forever have to be lowering their heads in an endless series of apologies for Hikaru.

The doctor is rendered speechless by *Rio-sensei's* sharp words. All he can manage to do is stare awkwardly off into the distance. The nurse does whisper, "Such a pitiful thing..." as she and the doctor withdraw. Later *Rio-sensei* tells Sachiko,

You should never apologize for Hikaru's autism. Some people may think that I'm a 'pitiable' [*kawaisō*] creature, a 34-year-old woman, who is still single! But I never apologize for being single, and you shouldn't be bowing your head because of Hikaru's autism.

This raises the question of whether a parent of an impaired child should ever apologize their child. The *Hikari to Tomoni* narrative sends mixed signals on apologies. *Rio-sensei* says definitively no apologies, but then the viewer sees Sachiko spending a good deal of her time apologizing for her son. At one point in the narrative, Hikaru gets lost and creates some havoc as he wanders about the town. The principal of Shichigatsu Elementary subsequently telephones Sachiko and requests that she pay a visit to each residence and business where Hikaru appeared, offering her apologies for her son's odd actions. Sachiko dutifully complies.

Together with Whom?

As I mentioned, the title of the mini-series [光とともに] contains a double meaning, as there are two readings for the first character. The title thus simultaneously means both "With the Light" and "Together with Hikaru." The second rendering implicitly suggests the question, "Together

with Hikaru?" Much of the dramatic tension in the mini-series revolves around how this question is resolved. Who should be together with Hikaru and whom should Hikaru be together with? In episode seven a first grade boy who has been pondering this problem makes a pledge (and a request) that he (and his classmates) "not let Hikaru be isolated or alone." Hikaru, on the other hand, is often quite happy to be by himself. The autistic child's difficulty negotiating peer-to-peer relationships, conflicts with the Japanese elementary school ideal that all classmates are "friends" [*minna ga tomodachi*].

The question of how to integrate, and when to exclude, Hikaru from the lives of the other children at Shichigatsu Elementary can never reach a final resolution. In the middle of the series *Sakurai-sensei* (Moe's teacher) inadvertently discovers that Moe has been told by her mother to avoid Hikaru. *Sakurai-sensei*, a young idealist, decides to have a chat with Moe's mother. Kaoru is not happy about being called to the school on Hikaru's behalf. She responds to *Sakurai-sensei's* inquiry bluntly, "Look, it is *my* responsibility to raise *my* daughter. That keeps my hands more than full so I don't have time to be thinking about other people's kids."

Kaoru storms out of her conference with *Sakurai-sensei* only to bump into Sachiko in the school hallway. Kaoru is so upset that she directly confronts Hikaru's mother, "Hikaru-kun! Hikaru-kun! That's all I hear around here. It's as if this whole school is set up for the personal benefit of your son and your son only." Sachiko is left speechless as Kaoru rushes past.

The tension between the two families comes to a head, and is partially resolved, at the annual Sports Day [*undōkai*], a key public event for all

elementary and junior high school students in Japan. For the first graders a fifty-meter race is the climatic event of the day. Children of similar speeds are grouped together and then these teams of four or five students race against one another. Hikaru is incapable of racing, but *Rio-sensei* has practiced walking the fifty meters course with Hikaru. The plan is for Hikaru to walk the course alone while *Rio-sensei* offers encouragement from the sidelines.

Unfortunately Hikaru becomes distracted by a pebble he spies on the track. Entirely oblivious to the stares of several hundred spectators, Hikaru squats down and begins methodically examining this stone. After a long awkward moment the first grader all run to the end of the course and cheer for Hikaru. Hikaru does finally stand up and proceed. As he crosses the finish line his age-grade mates send up a victory cheer, and Hikaru's parents shed tears of joy at their son's accomplishment.

Moe's parents are also in attendance at Sports Day. Her father arrives just in time to view Moe's race. He is expecting a strong performance from his athletic daughter. But under the pressure of her father's gaze Moe stumbles, skinning her knee as she falls to the track. Tears streaming down her face, she manages to pick herself up and limp to the finish. As Moe crosses the line her father turns his head away and mutters, "Dead last."

Moe's mother surprises herself by commanding her executive husband to be silent. She brushes away a tear as she whispers to herself that she wants to become more like Hikaru's mother, echoing her own daughter's desire to become Hikaru. In order for Moe to "become Hikaru," Kaoru must first become more like Sachiko. Both mother-child pairs are locked into the

internal logic of their own dyadic relationship. Within this narrative frame, the fate of the child and that of the mother is always co-created.

The *Hikari to Tomoni* series uses Hikaru's struggle with autism as a lens to focus attention on a wider critique of Japan's educational meritocracy and the pressures it deflects onto the mother-child relationship. As Creighton argues, from about the mid-1960s onward "the pressure to pass entrance examinations intensified [in Japan] and academic achievement became the primary focus in evaluating [both] child and maternal performance (Creighton 1994, 40)."

Hikaru cannot join in this education race. He has no desire or hope of acquiring an academic pedigree, which is a prerequisite for entrance into the middle and upper ranks of the private and the public sectors. Autism dramatically limits Hikaru's economic and social horizons as well as his prospects for autonomy, but his difference from his peers ironically liberates Sachiko from the logic by which her performance as a mother is equated with Hikaru's educational accomplishments. Kaoru and Moe do not have this same *luxury* and so their relationship remains necessarily more conflicted.

Longing for an Urban *Furusato* (Village)

The *Hikari to Tomoni* television drama invites viewers to vicariously share the emotional bond that links Hikaru to his mother. The series also makes skillful use of cinematography to create the sense of an imaginary *furusato* [rural hometown] centered on Hikaru's elementary school. Nostalgic longing for a less hectic, more "natural" and emotionally connected lifestyle

is a theme that is subtly woven into the *Hikari to Tomoni* narrative. In the mini-series, Shichigatsu Elementary School emerges as a pleasant, green *furusato* set amidst the concrete jungle of urban Japan.

Furusato [古里：故里], which literally means “old village” or “native place,” is a key term within debates about the uses of traditionalism and nostalgia in contemporary Japan. As Robertson argues, *furusato* is phantom-like construct that we can only hope to catch a glimpse of once it has been lost (1991, 10). That is, the rural village emerges a point of nostalgic longing only after a thoroughly urbanized lifestyle came to be the norm in Japan. The subsequent *furusato* discourse invokes emotionally laden ideas about the virtues of rural communities and value of vanishing traditions.

Within this dialectic, *furusato* images of a harmonious rural village, supposedly at balance with the natural world, always exists in opposition to (and in protest of) the crowded anonymity of the stark metropolis (Kelly 1986; Robertson 1991, 190). Creighton argues that the romanticization of the *furusato* is a nostalgic response to “contemporary feelings of ‘homelessness’ among many urban Japanese (1997, 239).”

Longing for a simpler, emotionally connected life in a timeless, unspoiled village has little to do with actual rural community life in Japan, but nostalgia for “the cult of the past calls for illusion rather than authenticity (Tuan 1977, 194).” Here the promise of the *furusato* represents a return to authenticity. Creighton argues “images of symbolically mediated past agrarian existence have come to represent not just the ideal of community but also the good life, wholesomeness, the moral values of Japan (1997, 242).” Or

as Yano writes, “the meanings given to place through the concept of *urusato* have transformed the local into the national (2002, 18).” In this discourse of unfulfilled, nostalgic desire, the *urusato* [local village] becomes virtuous “Japan.”

The filmmakers of *Hikari to Tomoni* play on this sense of urban homelessness and a longing for an emotionally embedded existence by casting Shichigatsu Elementary, and the surrounding urban community, as a sort of urban *urusato* where there is still the possibility of an interconnected existence. The mini-series invokes the *urusato* metaphor on two different levels. Hikaru’s school depicted as at harmony with nature, and Hikaru’s teacher, *Rio-sensei*, serves as a bridge reconnecting the Azuma family with the surrounding community. Shichigatsu Elementary thus answers the supposed longings of urban, single-child families to rediscover a more inclusive, more inter-connected way of life in an urban landscape that is less disconnected from the soil under one’s feet.

Every morning Sachiko accompanies Hikaru to his elementary school. Mother and child leave their high rise, high tech condo and walk hand in hand along a tree lined, grass path that follows the course of a small clear stream leading to the gates of the schoolyard. While the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series was filmed in a modern realistic style, which makes frequent use of close-ups to heighten the emotional tension, these scenes shot around the elementary school grounds have a soft, far away, quality.

The filmmakers have superimposed a fairytale, countryside veneer over the top of the Tokyo-Yokohama metropolis. At times the filming is

reminiscent of Kurosawa Akira's cinematic touch in a movie like *Dreams* (Kurosawa, 1990). The cityscape, now transformed into a nameless countryside, is too beautiful to be real; the landscape is romanticized to the point of timelessness. A soft yellow light filters through the trees leaves down onto the laughing faces of young children leisurely strolling to school. Songbirds flutter in the branches and Tokyo's ubiquitous, ill-tempered crows are nowhere in sight.

As the children (and the viewers) approach the Shichigatsu Elementary School, both the natural and the social world are transformed. The controlled urban environment, typified by the Azuma's upscale, highly manicured condominium complex, dissolves away as we enter into a timeless *furusato* that is centered on and emanates out from Hikaru's primary school.

The drama uses multiple strategies to link the school with an idealized rural community. When a problem arises the principal of the Shichigatsu Elementary, *Yabuki-sensei*, pulls on his denim overalls, dons a straw hat, picks up his hoe and heads outside to tend the school's large, well kept garden. One of the eleven episodes unfolds in this garden, where *Rio-sensei* is trying to encourage Hikaru-kun and a mainstream classmate to collaborate on raising tomato plants. In many of these countrified scenes the viewer can almost forget that the story is set in Yokohama.

Creating a *furusato*-like community centered on Hikaru's elementary school was a judicious choice since many Japanese viewers have highly romanticized, *natsukashii* [nostalgic]²⁶ memories of their elementary school days. Adults often conspire with children in Japan to foster emotionally

heightened memories of key childhood events, such as the annual Sports Festival at school. Teachers will, for example, remind students of the importance of “making happy memories [*ii omoide-wo tsukuru*].” Lewis argues that creating such happy memories, and encouraging peer bonding, are two central goals of elementary school education throughout Japan (Lewis 1995, 72).

In the televised narrative Hikaru’s elementary school is situated in a quasi-rural frame, but it takes more than a quaint setting to make a *furusato*. A *furusato* must fulfill the individual’s desire for community, belonging and sense of purpose. Within the *furusato* dreamscape pretexts [*tatema*] are dropped, and one can be at ease and feel at home with oneself and one’s fellows. Drawing on Doi (1986), both Creighton and Yano argue that the concept of *furusato* and the discourse on motherhood are fundamentally interconnected as both reflect a desire for “belongingness” and a wish to *amaeru*, that is, to be able to draw on the good will of emotionally connected others (Creighton 1997, 243; Yano 2002, 174-76).

In the mini-series, 34 year-old Rio-*sensei* is unmarried, and yet she serves as a maternal figure to other characters in the drama. She sacrifices her personal desires in order to nurture those around her. In episode one Rio-*sensei* abandons an *o-miai* (arranged marriage) meeting in order to rush to the aid of two-year-old Hikaru-kun, who has wandered onto a rooftop. In the process of rescuing Hikaru she rips her expensive kimono, symbolically jeopardizing her hopes for a successful marriage union.

Once Hikaru enters Shichigatsu Elementary *Rio-sensei* soon becomes personally involved with both Hikaru's parents. Even Hikaru's grandmother, who had severed her ties with Sachiko, eventually seeks out *Rio-sensei* for advice about how to renew her relationship with her daughter-in-law. *Rio* also encourages Sachiko to seek out the understanding and assistance of mothers with mainstream children attending Shichigatsu Elementary.

Rio-sensei and Sachiko team up to produce a monthly newsletter about children with developmental disabilities. Mid-way through the series we see Sachiko smiling confidently as she pedals her new bicycle around town delivering this newsletter by hand. No longer isolated in her condo, she has in fact been transformed into a source of inspiration for other young mothers in the community, who wave "*ganbatte*" [good luck] as Sachiko peddles by.

The drama portrays Shichigatsu Elementary as a *furusato* oasis in the midst of the emotionally dry metropolis.²⁷ Through Hikaru's naive innocence and *Rio-sensei's* selflessness, the school extends its "wet" influence outward into the urban desert. By the end of the series even the stern, elderly innkeeper, who has previously chastised Sachiko for her son's odd behavior, comes to rally behind Hikaru. She tells *Rio-sensei*, "I am not a particularly soft hearted person, but I hope the day soon arrives when children like Hikaru are accepted as a natural part of the community [...*Hikaru-kun mitaina ko ga ite atarimae*]." By recasting Hikaru's condition as "natural," she attempts to situate Hikaru firmly within the wider community.

As *Rio-sensei* strives to bind the community together, she chides everyone to reflect on what is really important, that is, their emotional ties to

one another. In the final episode Rio convinces Sachiko to leave Hikaru in the care of some friends so that the two of them can take a daytrip to the actual countryside. Here we see the familiar theme of traveling to rural Japan in order to reconnect with and rediscover one's true self (Creighton 1997, 239). Later Rio-*sensei* takes Hikaru's father, Masato, drinking at the neighborhood *izakaya* (pub). The local *izakaya* is itself a spatial metaphor for wet social relations rooted in emotional interdependency and mutual support.

Hikari to Tomoni uses autism as a prism for reevaluating the Japan's educational meritocracy. The mini-series also implicitly critiques the corporate ethics of late capitalist Japan. In an ironic twist, Hikaru succeeds as a son by *not* being able to compete in the education race. This ensures that the ties of *amae* [dependency] with his mother will continue indefinitely. He is the forever child, which preserves Sachiko's role as a mother perpetually.

In a parallel sub-plot Masato, succeeds as a father to his son by failing at the office. When it comes to light that Masato has an autistic child at home, his supervisor immediately removes Hikaru's father from a key corporate account. However, Masato tells a rival colleague, who takes over the account, that he has no regrets. In fact, this demotion is a blessing in disguise as Masato now finally has time to discover his fatherhood. Note that Masato depicts fatherhood as an unexplored territory, a distant landscape in need of discovery; motherhood, on the other hand, is close at hand and perpetually accessible.

Whose Voice?

When Hikaru enters elementary school he has only a very limited vocabulary, and little sense of social appropriateness. Thus when Hikaru-kun is in a group, Sachiko often feels compelled to speak for him.²⁸ In their twice-daily walks to and from school Hikaru and Sachiko are eventually joined by a small group of students who befriend Hikaru. When Hikaru and his friends' paths diverge, Sachiko bends down to Hikaru's eye level and says his goodbyes for him in the slang popular with first grade boys.

Not long after Hikaru enters Shichigatsu Elementary, *Rio-sensei* asks Sachiko if she would speak with the mainstream first grade class to describe how Hikaru is both different and similar to his age-mate peers. Sachiko visits the class and invokes *kokoro* [heart/spirit] to link Hikaru's existence with that of the mainstream students. She speaks to the first graders in Hikaru's voice or is it her own? "While I may be a little different, I have a heart just like yours."

This is one of the few scenes that is shot as a monologue. Sachiko/Hikaru speaks and the first graders look on. What could they possibly say to Hikaru's mother? And since Sachiko is speaking for Hikaru, in Hikaru's voice are they to address Hikaru when they speak to Sachiko? Here the mother-child dyad dissolves into isomorphism. Sachiko becomes Hikaru, and Hikaru finds a voice in his mother.

At the end of the school year a few teachers decide to throw a surprise for *Rio-sensei*, who is returning to graduate school. Each first grader has prepared a few lines about what they hope to become in the future:

supermodels, nurses, doctors, bakers, pop idols, pianists, homemakers, pharmacists... When it is Hikaru's turn to speak, Sachiko leads her son to the front of the room. She takes a long, deep breath and says in loud clear voice, "My name is Azuma Hikaru. When I grow up I will be a cheerful person who works hard."

Sachiko is purposely vague about the kind of work that Hikaru might be able to do in the future. At one point she admits to her mother that, "It is going to be difficult for Hikaru to enter the workforce." She knows her son will always need her, and whispers tearfully, "I must outlive Hikaru by at least one day." Sachiko cannot even permit herself to imagine her own death because that inevitability also implies the demise of her much-loved son. The two are one.

Conclusions

The *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series inserted a highly idealized depiction of autism and special needs education into the Japanese public domain. In this narrative Hikaru is ironically cast as the hero and as an ideal child, who remains uncorrupted by the forces of the educational meritocracy or by the shadows cast by the competitive metropolis. Hikaru lives his life in a secret light, and he brings this light with him to Shichigatsu Elementary school, where his peers see him as an asset and even as a point of communion. The mainstream children rally around Hikaru. They want to befriend him and to be befriended by him.

The mainstream students and teachers try hard to incorporate Hikaru into their elementary school community, but this does not necessarily reflect the reality of the special needs education at Japanese public schools. As I will show in chapters three and four, I found that at Midorikawa Elementary the *fukushiki* track often served as a site of anxiety, and the special needs students were marked by some degree of peripherality and stigmatization. This stands in stark contrast to the dreamscape painted in the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series in which Hikaru-kun emerges as an unlikely hero, someone who the regular track students rally around and try to emulate.

The *Hikari to Tomoni* series skillfully intertwines Hikaru's story with two preexisting narratives of longing and desire. One storyline addresses the psychodynamic dance that binds mothers and their children together in a joint struggle to successfully negotiate the demands of Japan's educational meritocracy. The other narrative speaks to the nostalgic longing of the urbanite populace to return to a simpler, less hectic, more "natural" and emotionally connected life within the dreamscape of a rural, and yet simultaneously modern, Japan.²⁹

By empathizing with the Sachiko-Hikaru dyad, Japanese viewers connect with their own desire to return to the emotional center of mother's breast and the comfort of the ancestral village, which metaphorically are one and the same destination (Yano 2002, 178).

In the final episode Hikaru and Sachiko are walking home together from Shichigatsu Elementary School when Hikaru suddenly stops beneath a tall slender tree. True to his name Hikaru has always been fascinated by

sunlight and reflections. He stares contentedly up at the sun-dappled branches. Sachiko waits patiently for a minute or two and then walks over and joins her son under the tree. The two of them stare at the leaves that are gently shifting in and out of the sunlight and the shadows. Sachiko smiles and Hikaru beams. It is a moment of boundless happiness as Hikaru has finally taught his mother how to see the light.

Notes

¹ *Kun* and *chan* are diminutive suffixes added to names or to nicknames of children and peers to denote intimacy, fondness, affinity and playfulness. *Kun* is usually used for boy's names and *chan* is generally added to girl's names, although the playfulness implicit in these terms allows for these gender rules to occasionally be bent.

² The Japanese title of this series 光とともに has an implicit double meaning. If the first character is read as "hikari" [light] then the title can be translated as "With the Light," but 光 may also be read as "hikaru," which is the name of the main character. In that case, the title could be rendered as "Together with Hikaru." Nihon Television decided to refer to the drama in English by the somewhat more poetic rendering of "With the Light"; however, when the series was at the height of its popularity in Japan it was often referred as *Hikaru to Tomoni* [Together with Hikaru].

³ Stribbe documents how the 1990s saw portrayals of disabled persons on Japanese television dramatically increase. He argues that these disabled characters were primarily restricted to passive roles, safely contained within a medicalized model of disability (2004, 24).

⁴ In Japan *Hikari to Tomoni* was categorized as a "social" or "human" drama [社会派ドラマ; ヒューマンドラマ]. Some commentators referred to the series as a "family" drama [家族ドラマ].

⁵ JDorma.com, <http://jdorama.com/drama.899.htm>, accessed 29 September 2007.

⁶ Video Research Ltd., <http://www.videor.co.jp/data/ratedata/backnum/2004/vol26.htm>, accessed 2 December 2006.

⁷ In the summer of 2004 there were many commentaries published in the national press about the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series. There was also a marked jump in reporting about special needs children in the Japanese newspapers. For a typical example, see *Mainichi Shimbun*, 15 June 2004, "Kurashi World."

⁸ My seven-year-old would not take the bait; he chose a black and silver pair by New Balance with Velcro straps.

⁹ As of September 8, 2007 copies of Sachiko's bag were still available for sale on Nihon Television's website: <http://www.ntv.co.jp/hikari/>.

¹⁰ Japan Drama Academy Awards, http://www.television.co.jp/drama/drama_academy/happyo41.html, accessed 2 December 2006.

¹¹ Japan Media Arts Festival, <http://plaza.bunka.go.jp/english/festival/winners/backnumber.html>, accessed 26 September 2007.

¹² In *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, Appadurai coined five terms in an early attempt to grapple with the effects of globalization on imagined communities. These terms are: (a) ethnoscape, (b) mediascape, (c) technoscape, (d) finanscape and (e) ideoscape (1990, 6-7).

¹³ This extends the trajectory put in motion by print media and much later intensified by radio broadcasts. Benedict Anderson was the first to use the term “print capitalism” to describe the historical process in which movable print technology, which arose under a system of emergent capitalism, eventually had a decisive impact on the imagined ties within the nation (Anderson 1983).

¹⁴ Nazeer, an autistic individual who obtained a Ph.D. in philosophy from Oxford University, describes how many of his university professors were disappointed to discover that he was not anything like the autistic savant portrayed in *Rain Man* (Nazeer 2006, 224). This attest to the ability of some media images to overpower and end up defining the objects they set out to portray. Hoffman’s performance of autism displaces, the reality of autism as a lived experience. In this discursive trajectory the Hollywood image overpowers and supersedes an experiential reality, which it then calls into question. If Nazeer is not a savant can he really be autistic?

¹⁵ Stribbe shows how the term “barrier-free” [*bariafuri*] was popularized in a similar fashion through a serialized drama entitled *Beautiful Life* [*Byūtifuru Raifu*], which was broadcast in 2000 (2004, 230).

¹⁶ A search on *jiheshō* in the online archives of the Asahi Newspaper produces only three articles in all of 2003, but 65 articles are were published on the topic in the two and half year period from January 2004 to September of 2006. (Note that the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series was released in mid-April of 2004.) See <http://sitesearch.asahi.com/.cgi/sitesearch/searchoption.pl>, accessed 26 September 2007.

¹⁷ The Japanese term that might be use to describe Hikaru at his best moments is *sunao*, 素直: positive acceptance of things as they are, without any resistance or ulterior motivations, literally “without adornment or altercation.”

¹⁸ There often is considerable anxiety associated with the “debut” of one’s toddler at the neighborhood park. Social linguists have generated extensive commentary on presentational aspects and psychodynamics implicit in a concept like *kōen debyū* (park debut), a term which only came into widespread usage in the early 1990s (Nakanishi and Iwado 2004, 107).

¹⁹ Mothers typically identify closely with their children, but Japanese socialization patterns and conversational strategies tend to stress the inseparableness of the mother-child dyad and the desirability of an entangling of the child’s desires and the mother’s intentions (Ben-Ari 1997, 15 & 20).

²⁰ The tendency to blame mothers for problems with their children’s development is certainly not unique to Japan. Even the Austrian-American physician who is

accredited with first diagnosing autism in 1943 (Leo Kanner) argued that the most likely cause for the illness was the proliferation of “refrigerator mothers,” who lacked proper maternal warmth for their children (Nazeer 2006, 190).

²¹ “Onegai Politics” [literally “the politics of pleading”] is a term that I borrow from Karen Nakamura, who uses the phrase to describe some of political strategies pursued by the Japan Federation of the Deaf (2006, 65).

²² *Shōgai* translates literally as an “obstacle” or “impairment,” but carries a distinctly negative connotation, particularly when viewed in the larger context of related linguistic terms. Gottlieb provides an interesting socio-linguistic analysis of the stigma and social tension embedded in this contested terminology (Gottlieb 2001, 987).

²³ For a concise overview of the disability rights movement in Japan see *Severe Disabilities, Liberalism and Social Welfare Policy in Japan and the US* (Nakamura 2005).

²⁴ The name Moe should not be confused with unrelated slang term *moe*, which has been adopted by anime fans to signify a fetish-like fascination with fictional characters, typically overtly cute adolescent girls.

²⁵ For satirical look at the multitude of ways that the educational system impacts on family dynamics see: *Kazoku Gēmu* (The Family Game) directed by Yoshimitsu Morita (1983) and *O-Juken* (The Exam: Daddy’s Last Run) directed by Takita Yojiro and released in 1999.

²⁶ *Natsukashii* [懐かしい] is a frequently invoked, yet somewhat elusive, emotional posture that could be translated as “a tender fondness and nostalgic longing for the people, places and events of one’s past.”

²⁷ There is a stereotypic image in Japan that paints the urban, competitive space as emotionally empty. The terms wet (*uetto*) and dry (*dorai*), which were adopted from English, are often invoked to highlight the supposed emotional contrast between urban and rural space. Wet (*uetto*) interpersonal relations, are emotionally laden and have their roots in dependency (*amae*), whereas a dry (*dorai*) emotional stance is construed as rational and detached. Interpersonal relationships in a *furusato* are depicted as multi-layered and wet, while urban life is often criticized for being overly calculated and thus dry. *Hikari to Tomoni* can be described as a “wet drama” (*uetto dorama*) because it attempts to align the viewer with Hikaru and Sachiko’s emotional struggles. That is, the mini-series seeks to interpolate the viewer’s emotions and tends toward the melodramatic. For further discussion of “wet” and “dry” see Yano, who invokes this binary to explore motifs in Japanese popular music (2002, 102 & 125).

²⁸ For a nuanced discussion of the dilemma of when to speak, or remain silent, for those who have been silenced (literally) by a disability, see Kelley and Betsalel’s thoughtful article “Mind’s Fire: Language, Power, and Representations of Stroke” in *Anthropology & Humanism* (2004, 104-116).

²⁹ This is not meant to discount the artistic merit of the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series. As the various awards attest, the series was skillfully crafted with a well-written script, tight editing, a subtle piano soundtrack and skillful acting, particularly by Saito Ryusei and Shinohara Ryoko.

Chapter 3

Renting the “*fukushiki*” Identity

Introduction

In this chapter I begin by reviewing the process through which a small minority of students in Japan are tracked into special educational programs. I argue that there are conflicting social currents pushing children with learning differences both toward and away from participation in special needs classes. On the one hand the strong discourse on “educational equality” in Japan argues that children in the same age-grade should have access to the similar educational resources and the same educational content. This view tends to discourage participation in (or even the creation of) specialized programs within the public school system. Educators and parents are therefore often prone to deemphasize differences in ability, arguing that these can be overcome with sufficient perseverance (Sato 2004, 5; Peak 1991, 164).

On the other hand, the state has an interest in ensuring that all mainstream students are able to perform (academically and socially) at or near grade level. In fact, three factors make accommodating special needs students within mainstream, public school classrooms in Japan particularly difficult. These are: (1) the relatively large size of mainstream classes, (2) the frequent use of cooperative peer groups to accomplish tasks, and (3) the disinclination on the part of the educational bureaucracy to provide any one group of mainstreamed students with “special” educational aids (that is, extra resources).

In Japan the parents of developmentally delayed or disabled children must consider both of these two conflicting discourses as they make educational

choices for their children. For borderline children, the *fukushiki* option offers a middle course that permits a limited number of students to participate in small, specialized classes at their local public elementary school, rather than struggling in mainstream classrooms or being segregated into the protective school system.

After outlining the screening process for the *fukushiki* system, I describe a “typical” day in Midorikawa Elementary’s special needs classroom. For most elementary school students in Japan the emphasis on *kōhai/senpai* [junior / senior] relations makes one’s age-grade a particularly salient pole of identity; however, at the primary school level a *fukushiki* classroom accommodates children from seven to twelve years of age within a single class. In this chapter I examine daily classroom practices and routines in Midorikawa’s *fukushiki* classroom. I argue that the *fukushiki* students forged a sense of common identity that was negotiated through the filter of their joint exclusion from the mainstream classes. This sense of commonality and affinity was given voice in the *fukushiki* label and made real through their everyday encounters with one another and their instructors in the *fukushiki* classroom.

The labels we use to define ourselves are of critical importance because as Bakhtin—as well as his contemporaries Sapir (1949) and Whorf (1983)—argued there is an “absolute hegemony of language over perception (1981, 369).” The words we use to interpret the world around us, and to define ourselves, are half ours and “half someone else’s (ibid, 293).” By this Bakhtin means that language always precede the individual, and that the words we inherit are never neutral, but rather is “overpopulated—with the intentions of others (ibid, 294).” Thus each of us must struggle to make language our own. The students in the special

needs class at Midorikawa Elementary inherited the generic *fukushiki* [mixed-type] label from the state, but over time they came to appropriate this terminology for their own purposes.

Borrowing from Bakhtin's dialogic theory of human subjectivity, Wortham argues that individuals and groups cannot avoid "'rent[ing]' categories from the society in order to make sense of themselves and others (2004, 167)." The special needs students at Midorikawa Elementary were renting the *fukushiki* category from the state. This category emerged as the primary filter through which they came to interpret, and impart meaning on, their school lives. Yet these students did not simply passive accept the generic *fukushiki* label, rather they infused this terminology with their own positive meanings.

At one point in my fieldwork it was suggested that the name of their class could be altered, but the students rejected this idea because for them the *fukushiki* designation was no longer generic. The age-grade (that is, one's school year) serves as a primary axis of identity for most elementary school children in Japan; however, for the special needs students at Midorikawa Elementary it was not their age-grade, but rather the *fukushiki* category itself that structured and gave meaning to their school days.

Screening & Mixed Messages on Inclusion

There are two different routes into special needs classrooms in Japan. Some children are tagged during their preschool years and enter the special needs system from the first day of first grade. These children are identified and labeled as "developmentally delayed" [*hattatsu ni okure ga aru*] well before

entering elementary school. Young children with obvious impairments, such as problems with fine motor skills or delayed speech, are usually identified either by their preschool teachers or at one of the many free health check-ups provided to all infants and children under six.

When a woman becomes pregnant in Japan the medical facility informs the local government office, which issues a *boshi kenkō techō*, a Mother-Child Health Passbook. This passport-sized booklet outlines a schedule of free, semi-mandatory medical check-ups for the pregnant woman and her young children. The passbook also provides information on hospitals and clinics in the area. The holder submits the *boshi techō* at all subsequent medical check-ups during the pregnancy and at visits to the pediatrician's office during the first six years of the child's life. This system provides free check-ups and subsidized medical coverage for mothers and young children in Japan.

The *boshi techō* also creates a standardized record of the woman's pregnancy and the infant's immunizations, illnesses and developmental milestones (Hendry 1986, 29)¹. In fact, a double medical record is generated, one in the doctor's files and another abbreviated version in the passbook itself. When a child enters elementary school some of the information from the passbook is transferred into the child's educational file, which then follows the student throughout their educational career. In effect, at six years of age, the state's monitoring and recording keeping strategies switch from the *boshi techō* to the student's files held and managed by the school.

This is one way in which the public health and educational systems are closely integrated in Japan. This linkage provides an effective system for

identifying and, when deemed necessary, screening out children with impairments or developmental delays. Daycare centers must adhere to guidelines set by the Ministry of Health, Labor & Welfare, while preschools follow a similar set of monitoring procedures established by the Ministry of Education. These guidelines require that a child's developmental progress and health be monitored and documented according to a standardized format. Not only must preschool teachers maintain detailed files on every child's development, but teams of doctors, nurses and dentists, also make regular visits to preschools and daycare centers to check on and document the children's health and developmental progress. Preschool teachers subsequently provide caregivers with detailed information on their child's development as measured against various national norms.

In his 1997 study Ben-Ari reports that Japanese daycare centers are meticulous about keeping records, which document the children's development in a wide array of areas. One of the checklists used at the daycare center in Ben-Ari's study was originally developed in the United States to evaluate handicapped children. This checklist was translated into Japanese and altered slightly to create a 6-page, 136 item questionnaire that was used to evaluate all the children at the center. Ben-Ari makes a convincing argument that Japanese preschools' intense focus on assessment and documentation of the children creates a "narrative of normality," which serves to regulate and constrain, not only students, but also their mothers and teachers (Ben-Ari 1997b, 69).

If it appears that a young child has an impairment or a developmental delay, parents are strongly encouraged to consult with their municipal Parenting

Support Office [*kosodate shiensehitsu*]. Those children approaching elementary school age are referred to an Educational Consultation Center [*kyōiku sōdanjo*]. Both of these offices provide information to caregivers on options for chronically sick, impaired, or developmentally delayed children. In the Tokyo metropolitan area there are more than fifty Educational Consultation Centers, which effectively function as a means to screen children who fall outside the norm into “protective schools” or special track programs within mainstream schools.²

The public health and childcare system in Japan is intent on identifying and screening out children with impairments or developmental delays. However, most caregivers and many primary school teachers I spoke with voiced a strong preference for trying to accommodate these “special” children within mainstream classes whenever possible. Primary school teachers are usually reluctant to suggest the special track option to caregivers and will only do so if the child is clearly struggling in the mainstream class, is being overtly disruptive, or is unable to establish ties with peers.

Stigma and the lack of appropriate classes are two factors that work to discourage Japanese caregivers from seeking out specialized instruction for their children. As long as a child is not seriously physically impaired or relentlessly disruptive, a request to remain within the mainstream system is generally accommodated, even when a child is having serious trouble with the academic content that is being taught (Sato 2004, 164).

Thus the caregivers of borderline children frequently will opt to try to keep their children in mainstream classrooms. Parents who choose this route, however, understand that public schools will not generally provide special

assistance to struggling students (Okano and Tsuchiya 1999, 240-1; Sato 2004, 50). In the Japanese educational context “special assistance” has an anti-egalitarian and even undemocratic ring. This rhetorical emphasis on equal access to educational resources serves as a strong impetus to, in effect, “persevere” within the mainstream system (Tsuneyoshi 2001, 58).

For all of these reasons recommending that a child be moved into the special track is seen as a rather extreme solution. Most primary school teachers, and a majority of parents in Japan, expect that elementary school classes will include children with a range of personalities and abilities. In the course of this research I visited many elementary schools in Japan. There were often one or two children who were clearly different from their peers and would most probably have spent at least part of the day in a specialized classroom had they attended a primary school in the United States.³

Enrollment in the *Fukushiki* Track

During the twenty-one month period of my fieldwork there were always eight students enrolled in the special needs class at the center of this study. In 2001 there were 1,057 students registered at Midorikawa Elementary. Thus the *fukushiki* class membership represented less than 1% of the total student body. That year three girls and five boys were attending the *fukushiki* track. As special needs students graduated, new students were always waiting to replace them, so the total class enrollment remained constant at eight.⁴ Over the period of my research, six boys and five girls participated in Midorikawa Elementary’s *fukushiki* class.

While I do not make any broad statistical claims, this ratio of boys to girls appeared quite typical. When I visited three other special needs classrooms at public elementary schools in the Tokyo area, I found a slight majority of boys and very similar class sizes. At these other primary schools the ratio of boys to girls in the special track was: 5 boys to 3 girls, 6 boys to 2 girls, and 4 boys to 3 girls.⁵ Thus while the boys outnumbered the girls, they did not overwhelm them. When I inquired if there was a conscious effort to try to maintain gender balance, the answer was always “no.” And yet both parents and teachers did seem to view roughly equal numbers of boys and girls as preferable to a class dominated by one or the other sex.

As I mentioned in the opening chapter, there is a pedagogical argument in Japan for relatively large classes as this is seen as promoting social development by providing students with opportunities to learn how to cooperate within the structure of a self-regulating peer group (White 1987, 115; Tsuneyoshi 2001, 27).⁶ Typical class size in the mainstream classes at Midorikawa Elementary was in the range of 33 to 38 students.

These large classes serve a majority of the students quite well; however, problems arise for students who cannot keep up with the pace of the class or for a variety of reasons do not do well within a self-regulating peer group. The social panic over bullying [*ijime mondai*] in the 1990s and “school refusal syndrome” [*hikikomori*] in recent years both appear to be entangled with the social pressure that emanates from self-regulating peer groups (Okano & Tsuchiya 1999, 194).

Some children who cannot keep up with their mainstream peers, as well as those who have social problems with their classmates, end up transferring into

the *fukushiki* track. Some others stop coming to school entirely or spend their days in the nurse's office [*hokenshitsu tōkō*] (Lock 1988). Thus there is a process of gradual exclusion that sometimes comes to bear on children who, for a variety of reasons, have significant trouble within the mainstream school system.

The *fukushiki* classes can also be viewed more positively as providing critical support for children who need individualized attention. For example, although there were only eight members in Midorikawa Elementary's special needs track, there were three fulltime instructors assigned to this class. The *fukushiki* students received instruction from two fully accredited male instructors (Ichikawa-sensei and Fujita-sensei) and a female teacher's aid (Iida-sensei). These three instructors spent the entire school day with the *fukushiki* students and the mainstream music teacher also visited the *fukushiki* classroom once or twice a week. There was one teacher available for every two or three students compared with one teacher for thirty-five plus students in the mainstream classes.

Class Membership & Classification

During the 2001-2002 academic year there were three first graders in Midorikawa's *fukushiki* class: Kai and Kento (boys) and Momo (a girl). There were two fourth graders: Aya (a girl) and Hiroki (a boy) and two fifth graders: Yoshi (a boy) and Fumi (a girl). The senior member of the class was Naoki, a sixth grade boy. The following March Naoki graduated and a first grade boy, Daisuke, joined the group. Twelve months later two girls joined the class: Yuri, a first grader, and Shoko, a third grader. At that point I was drawing my fieldwork to a close.

TABLE 3.1: *Fukushiki* Class Members (name, sex, categorization)

Fukushiki Class: 2001-2002 School Year

1 st Grade	2 nd Grade	3 ^d Grade	4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade
Kai (<i>m; C</i>)			Hiroki (<i>m; E</i>)	Yoshi (<i>m; C</i>)	Naoki (<i>m; C</i>) <i>class-leader</i>
Kento (<i>m; E</i>)			Aya (<i>f; C</i>)	Fumi (<i>f; E</i>)	
Momo (<i>f; C</i>)					

Fukushiki Class: 2002-2003 School Year

1 st Grade	2 nd Grade	3 ^d Grade	4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade
Daisuke (<i>m; E</i>)	Kai (<i>m; C</i>)			Hiroki (<i>m; E</i>)	Yoshi (<i>m; C</i>) <i>class-leader</i>
	Kento (<i>m; E</i>)			Aya (<i>f; C</i>)	Fumi (<i>f; E</i>)
	Momo (<i>f; C</i>)				

Fukushiki Class: 2003-2004 School Year

1 st Grade	2 nd Grade	3 ^d Grade	4 th Grade	5 th Grade	6 th Grade
Yuri (<i>f; C</i>)	Daisuke (<i>m; E</i>)	Kai (<i>m; C</i>)			Hiroki (<i>m; E</i>) <i>class-leader</i>
		Kento (<i>m; E</i>)			Aya (<i>f; C</i>)
		Momo (<i>f; C</i>)			
		Shoko (<i>f; E</i>)			

m: male / *f*: female / *E*: "emotional impairment" / *C*: "cognitive impairment"

Dividing Lines: Emotion or Cognition?

From a Western bio-medical perspective the eight students studying in the *fukushiki* class were a diverse group. There was one girl who was diagnosed as

autistic and several other students who were said to have “autistic tendencies” [*jihei keikō ga aru*], which would have probably been dubbed “autistic spectrum disorders” in the United States. There was one Down syndrome child and several students had mild to moderate cognitive impairments. A number of the *fukushiki* members had mild speech impediments or delayed speech acquisition. Several of the students were also tagged as having *tadōsei shōgai* [attention deficit hyperactivity disorders].

These semi-medical labels were, however, rarely invoked either by the instructors or the parents.⁷ Occasionally at a parent/teacher conference or in private interviews, a caregiver might offer something like, “The doctor wrote ‘autistic tendencies’ on my child’s chart so I suppose that is the main problem...” But this medicalized terminology was not operationally important within the school.

The educational bureaucracy did, however, divide the *fukushiki* students into two subgroups: students with cognitive impairment [*chiteki shōgai*] and student with “socio-emotional impairments” [*jōcho shōgai*]. For administrative purposes at the school these were the two labels that were operationally significant. Many of the *fukushiki* students had both types of impairment to some degree, but in their school files they were classified as belonging to one or the other group.

The distinction between these two categories was established and maintained by Ministry of Education’s classificatory schema, which was made relevant through the nationwide annual statistical survey of the schools: *Gakkō Kihon Chōsa Hōkokusho*. School administrators were required to report how many

students belonged to each category. On a practical level there was a more important reason, and motivation, for insisting on a clear dichotomy between these two categories. The teacher's union had successfully argued that a fully time, fully accredited instructor was necessary for each impairment category.⁸ Therefore if a single *fukushiki* class contained a mix of students classified as emotionally and cognitively impaired, then two instructors should be assigned to that classroom, one for each "type" of student.

In the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary, Fujita-sensei was technically in charge of the cognitively impaired students and Ichikawa-sensei was assigned to the students with emotional issues. However, at the practical level of classroom instruction this distinction was irrelevant because the students were never divided into groups according to their impairment category.

Instead, age was usually used as the criterion to split the class into two working groups. On a typical day there would be some segments (such as music, physical education, art, ethics, recess, lunch period, classroom cleaning, etc.) in which all eight students participated together and other lessons in which the class was divided according to grade level (for example, during Japanese, math, and science). When the class was split the first through third graders would study in one group and the older students in another. There were some instances when a younger student (such as Kento) demonstrated more aptitude in math or Japanese than an older classmate, but at Midorikawa this was never used as a reason for reorganizing the intra-class groupings.

While the two diagnostic labels ("cognitively" and "emotionally" impaired) were important for the educational bureaucracy, normally the terms

were hidden away from view (literally in the student's files) and had little impact on classroom routines. As far as I could determine the students seemed to be unaware that any such distinction was being made among them. I also never heard this antipodal terminology invoked by a parent and only very rarely by the instructors.

Labels: "fukushiki" or "nakayoku"?

For most of the school day the eight *fukushiki* students studied together as a single class. Thus as a practical matter the special needs students at Midorikawa Elementary viewed and spoke of themselves as members of a single class of *fukushiki* students. That is how their school lives were organized so it was logical that this was the category through which they interpreted their school personas.

After I had been working in the class for about one year, Ichikawa-sensei suddenly proposed to the students that they might consider adopting a more descriptive class name. Ichikawa-sensei argued that *fukushiki* [multi-type] label did not convey the kind of class they aspired to be, and he suggested an alternative name, the *nakayoku gakkyū* (The Best Buddies Class).

It seemed to me at the time that the students were surprised to learn that the name of their class could be altered so easily. The special needs students had grown accustomed to, and learned to identify with, the *fukushiki* designation. Ichikawa-sensei's suggestion thus met with ambivalence and opposition. Yoshi, a fifth grade boy, was particularly opposed to a name change. He argued that the new name sounded babyish, "We are not preschoolers." In retrospect Yoshi was

quite astute in his assessment. This is the sort of name that is popular at the preschool level in Japan.

For several days Ichikawa-*sensei* pushed for the adoption of the new class name, finally insisting that the idea be put to a vote. Usually the instructors waited for a consensus to develop before they moved to vote on anything of importance. However, with Yoshi's determined opposition, Ichikawa-*sensei*'s suggestion was easily defeated. The students opted to keep the generic *fukushiki gakkyū* designation.⁹ *Fukushiki* was the category these students were renting. It was the source of their shared identity, and they did not like the idea of someone coming along and trying to alter or "improve upon" that identity.

Opting in Midstream

A majority of the *fukushiki* students Midorikawa Elementary transferred over to the special needs track from mainstream classes at some point in their elementary school careers. Aya, Hiroki and Fumi transferred into the *fukushiki* track at the beginning of second grade. Yoshi and Shoko joined Midorikawa's special needs track class at the start of third grade, and Naoki joined at the beginning of the fifth grade.

Public elementary schools in Japan typically mix the class membership ever two years. Students who meet in the first grade will usually study together until the start of the third grade when classmates are mixed. Class membership remains the same in the third and fourth years, and then classmates are re-mixed again at the start of the fifth grade. There may be some deviation from this pattern, but the expectation is that classes will be reorganized in the third and

fifth grades. More often than not, the homeroom teacher also remains with the same group of students for two years. Thus in most cases, class membership and the homeroom teacher change simultaneously.

At Midorikawa Elementary when a mainstream student was struggling to keep up or was having serious problems with peer relationships the homeroom teacher might suggest that the family consider transferring the student into the *fukushiki* track. Usually this switch occurred at the start of the third grade, or less frequently at the beginning of fifth grade, when the class membership of the mainstream classes was also mixed.

A Day in Midorikawa's *Fukushiki* Classroom

Classroom Layout & Symbolic Alignment

At Midorikawa Elementary the eight *fukushiki* students were not lacking in resources. Not only were three full-time instructors assigned to the class, but the *fukushiki* students also had the exclusive use of two full sized classrooms.

Each classroom could be entered at the front or back through double sliding wooden doors with large square windows at the midway point. When these doors were slid open or shut the heavy opaque glass jingled as the doors moved along their well-worn wooden tracks. All the classrooms in this building opened onto a long corridor that ran along the north side of the aging, three-story structure. As you walked along this hallway you could easily determine if a classroom was in use by glancing at the opaque windows.

The two *fukushiki* classrooms were adjacent to one another on the first floor at the east end of the building. There were three mainstream first grade

classrooms located on the same floor. The second and third floors of this building were used for second and third grade classrooms. In symbolic terms, the two *fukushiki* classrooms were aligned with the first grade classrooms. The upper levels of the school buildings were reserved for the upper level classes. Thus when *fukushiki* students came in casual contact with mainstream students in the hallways was it was usually with the youngest members of the school community. This arrangement located the *fukushiki* class in physical space at the same level as the first graders.

Situating the *fukushiki* classroom on the ground floor made some practical sense because there were usually first or second graders included in the multi-age special needs classroom. Also locating the *fukushiki* students next to the first graders probably helped limit any teasing that may have occurred if the older students had been in closer proximity to the *fukushiki* class. On the other hand, some of the older *fukushiki* students may have resented that their classroom was housed in the little kids' section of the campus.

All of the classrooms at Midorikawa had originally been designed to accommodate forty plus students. In the *fukushiki* classrooms there were fifty-six wooden boxes built into the rear and side walls of the classroom that were used to store student supplies. These five-sided boxes served as open storage lockers. In the mainstream classes each child was assigned one of these boxes, where they kept their leather book bags, extra books and any other items they brought to and from school each day. With only eight students in the *fukushiki* class, each child was allocated two locker boxes, one to store their *radoseru* and another for their physical education uniform and extra change of clothes. Each morning the

children stuffed their jackets, school caps (to be worn to and from school), book-bags and any other odd supplies into their assigned boxes.

If the lockers became overly messy, the instructors had the students pull everything out and reorganize their things. In spite of this intervention, Hiroki's storage boxes seemed to be in perpetual need of a good housecleaning. On the other hand, Fumi and Yoshi boxes usually had their boxes in good order, and the instructors praised them for keeping their personal items under control.

Iida-sensei used a few of the extra boxes to organize common items, like the books the children borrowed from the bookmobile that visited the school every few weeks or art projects in various stages of progress. Ichikawa-sensei also took possession of a number of the boxes to store age-grade appropriate texts, although these books were seldom used in the actual lessons. With two classrooms and only eight students, a majority of the storage boxes went unused.

Both classrooms were the traditional rectangular shape with a blackboard running across the length of the front wall. The building, which dates back to the early 1960s, was aging but had recently been repainted and the year before I arrived all of the windows had all been replaced. Thus there was a light airy feel in the classroom as the entire far wall was made up of windows that extended from the ceiling to the floor.

Since the *fukushiki* classrooms were located on the first floor, students and teachers had direct access to the school garden and playground through sliding doors located at the front and rear of the room. Against the windowed south wall there was a large meeting table that was used for art projects and teachers' meetings.

The children's wooden topped desks were usually placed toward the front of the room and arranged in two rows of four desks each. When the students' desks were lined up in this fashion, the differences in height between the first graders' tiny desks and those of their fifth and sixth grader peers was striking. No matter how the desks were positioned there was always a good deal of open space available at the rear of the room. During break time the children ran around, skipped rope and even played indoor kickball or wrestled with one another at the back of the room.

Each of the three instructors was provided with a heavy grey metal desk, the kind that is ubiquitous in Japanese public offices. The two accredited instructors' desks were placed at either side of the blackboard facing the students. The assistant teacher's desk was oriented toward the windows overlooking the school grounds.

Just in front of the blackboard there was a low grey table with a movable wooden podium. When using the board or addressing the class, instructors stood behind this table. At times students were also invited to address the class from this center table. When a student was speaking from behind the podium their classmates were expected to pay attention. Sometimes, when *Ichikawa-sensei* wanted to speak more intimately with the students, he would come out from behind the teaching table and place his chair directly in front of the students' desks.

Thus the physical space within the school and the classroom were both indexed by different levels of formality and hierarchy. During school hours there was a more serious, business-like atmosphere on the upper floors of the building

where the older students studied. This was particularly true of the upper levels of the newer building on campus where the fifth and sixth grade classrooms were housed. Within the *fukushiki* classroom the space became more formal, or more adultcentric, as one moved toward the blackboard.

The Secondary Classroom

Directly adjacent to the main *fukushiki* classroom was an additional classroom that was mostly empty. This extra room was not as well-kept or organized as the main classroom primarily because it was used much less frequently. In fact, the classroom had no student desks and the walls were unadorned. Most of the time this room remained dark, and there was a stillness that seemed to cling to the walls.

This secondary classroom created an empty space between the first graders next door and the *fukushiki* students at the far end of the corridor. This served as an additional buffer, a symbolic dead zone or a no-man's land, that emphasized the gap and the distance that existed between the *fukushiki* students their mainstream peers. At Midorikawa Elementary only the *fukushiki* classroom was isolated in this manner.

Several months into my fieldwork I asked Ichikawa-*sensei* about the extra classroom. When I breached this topic, he seemed ready for the question as if he had had to answer this query on previous occasions. Ichikawa-*sensei* said that it was important for the *fukushiki* track to have access to two classrooms because the older and young students needed to be separated for grade-appropriate lessons. It was true that for some lessons the students were divided by age-grade.

At those times the lights were switched on in the extra classroom and a few desks would be temporarily moved into this room.

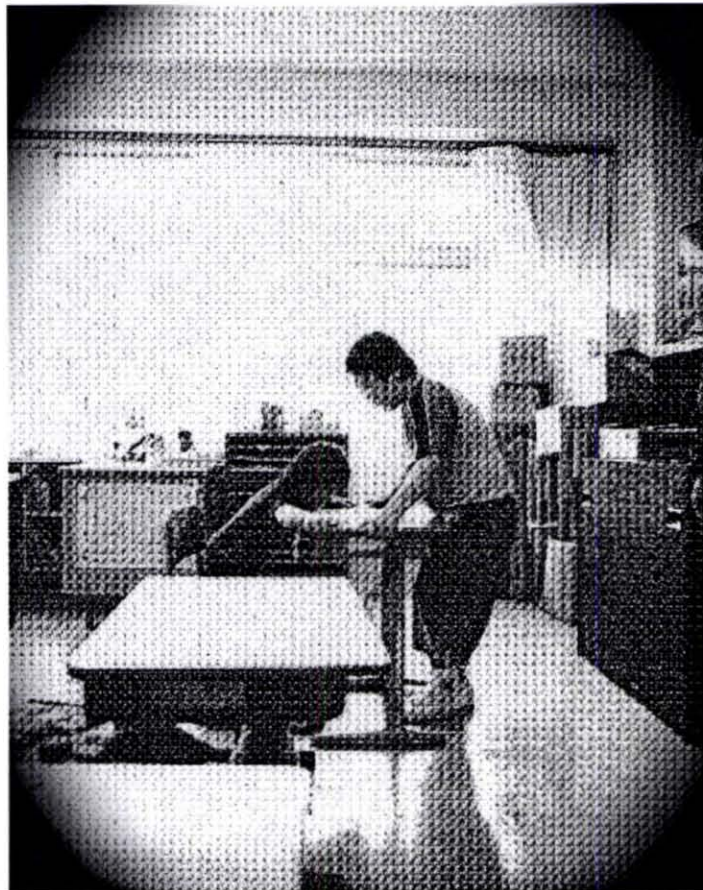


Figure 3.1: Senior Classmate Helps to Move a Desk
(Photograph by: Ōhashi Hitoshi; altered by author)

About eight months after I arrived at Midorikawa, Ichikawa-*sensei* came up with an idea to better utilize the secondary classroom. He informed Fujita-*sensei*, Iida-*sensei* and myself that there were some funds left over in the special educational budget. We needed to quickly find a use for these funds.¹⁰ To my surprise Ichikawa-*sensei* suggested that we use this money to buy an indoor trampoline. He argued that the exercise would be good for the *fukushiki* student's coordination. The trampoline arrived a few weeks later. We assembled it on a

Saturday and placed it in the middle of the adjoining classroom. With the arrival of the trampoline, the extra classroom suddenly was transformed into one of the *fukushiki* student's most popular spots to congregate during recess, yet for most of the day this classroom continued to remain dark. Thus in terms of available funds, facilities and teaching staff, the *fukushiki* students actually had access to considerably more resources than their mainstream peers.

Daily Routines

Rotating Class Leader

Japanese public elementary schools employ pedagogical strategies that encourage students to participate directly in the management of the classroom. The most ubiquitous form this takes is in the rotating role of the *nicchoku* [leader for the day]. The designated *nicchoku* has the responsibility of running the morning and afternoon class meetings, as well as announcing the start and finish of each class period. When the instructor is ready to begin a lesson the *nicchoku* is expected to get the attention of his or her classmates. This revolving leadership post teaches students to organize themselves and also serves as an effective buffer between the teacher and the class as a whole. This strategy removes the instructor from the role of disciplinarian and shifts responsibilities for organization onto the students themselves (Benjamin 1997, 114; Lewis 1995, 107).

In the mainstream classes at Midorikawa Elementary the *nicchoku* post was shared each day by two students, but in the small *fukushiki* class the role of leader for the day was held by a single student. With only eight students in the

class, each *fukushiki* student had to assume the mantle of the *nicchoku* several times a month.

First graders in the *fukushiki* class were paired with older students for much of their first year. That is, officially the individual first grader became *nicchoku* for the day, but an older student was always standing along side to provide coaching on what to say next or how to proceed. The first graders looked not to the instructors, but to their senior classmates for help with the *nicchoku* role. Even students who could not yet read and those with speech impediments were expected to assume the rotating leadership post. Tasks were broken down into small component parts and confidence was gained through repetition and practice. It was assumed that with time every student would become competent in this leadership role.

The Morning Meeting

The morning meeting required that the leader for the day gain the attention of his/her peers and spell out the agenda for the day. There was a correct and an incorrect way to execute the morning meeting. Here is how the morning unfolded on a typical Wednesday in the fall of 2001. When I entered the *fukushiki* classroom at 8:35 a.m. the three instructors and eight students had all already arrived. Ichikawa-sensei and Fujita-sensei were conferring about the day's schedule. Momo, a first grade girl was telling Iida-sensei and Aya about some television program she had seen the previous night. Fumi, a fifth grade autistic girl, was sitting at her desk organizing colorful plastic hairpins in a small box.

When the class began, this box would need to be put away, so she seemed intent on getting it right before the bell rang.

The boys were all in the open space at the back of the classroom. Fourth grade Hiroki was tossing a Nerf ball about, trying to catch the attention of his fifth and sixth grade classmates, who were giggling about something. The first grade boys, Kai and Kento, were sitting on the floor playing with three wooden bowling pins. Kai was laughing because the pins would not roll straight. Kento was trying to figure out how to aim his pin so that it would arrive near Kai's feet.

At 8:45 *a.m.* Ichikawa-sensei had the students return to their desks. He asked the class, "Who is today's *nicchoku*?" On this day fourth grade Aya was in charge. She stood up and walked importantly to the front of the room, where she took up a position behind the podium. Aya put her hands on the table, leaned forward and waited a moment, signaling that her peers should quiet down. Then in her serious voice she said (more as a statement of fact than as a greeting), "Good morning everyone. Good morning teachers."

At Midorikawa Elementary in the regular classrooms and in the special needs class this was the set phrase that was always used to open the daily meeting. Some students mumbled through these two sentences, while others said them in a loud clear voice, but I never heard a student try to use a different salutation.

Aya then invited her classmates to provide some basic information about the day. She prompted the class with an unfinished sentence. "Today is..."

The class, accustomed to this routine, completed Aya's sentence for her, "...Wednesday, October third."

“The weather is...”

The class retorted more or less in unison, “... rainy.”

Then Aya turned to the blackboard and wrote, “10/3” along with the characters for Wednesday (水) and rain (雨).

“Now it is time for the morning health check.” Aya began to individually ask each of her classmates how they were feeling. This portion of the meeting differs somewhat from the routine in the larger mainstream classes, where any absences or health problems were simply noted down on a card that was past to the nurse’s office each morning. In a class of thirty plus students there was no time to individually inquire about each pupil’s state of health every morning.

However, there was time for such discourse in the *fukushiki* classroom. Several students answered Aya by simply stating, “I’m fine” [*genki desu*], but a number of students described some small complaint or ailment.

Fumi answered the question twice in an extremely high-pitched voice, “I’m fine. Fine!” Ichikawa-*sensei* intervened here, asking Fumi to please use “her regular voice.” She then used a very low tone voice to say once more that she was fine. Aya ignored Fumi and proceeded to the next student.

Momo said, “I have a runny nose.” Hiroki said he had a slight headache, and Ichikawa-*sensei* asked if he had eaten breakfast. Hiroki said that he had tea and some bread.

Naoki told Aya that he was a little sleepy.

Aya did not respond to Naoki’s statement, instead she issued a sharp warning to Hiroki, who had angled his chair so that he could chat with Yoshi behind him. “Hiroki, no chatting and keep your hands in lap!” Aya delivered

this warning in a shrill tone, but Ichikawa-*sensei* intervened again, saying in a light-hearted manner, “Older sister so strict [*one-san kibishii!*]”

Aya proceeded in her somewhat overly serious manner. “Today there are five periods. In the first period we will break into two groups for Japanese. In the fifth period Kuramatsu-*sensei* will visit our classroom for a music lesson.”

“Will the person in charge of health check reporting please take today’s chart to the nurse’s office at the end of the meeting.” This chart listed any students who were sick or late so the nurse and administrative staff could confirm the day’s attendance.

Aya then read from a paper attached to the black board. “Today’s lunch is meat and potato stew [*nikujoyaga*], rice with millet, fried fish, cucumber salad with soy dressing, and milk.”

She then turned to the instructors and said, “Time for a word from our teachers.” Just as the *nicchoku* role rotated around the class, the morning “teacher’s talk” also rotated between Ichikawa-*sensei*, Fujita-*sensei*, Iida-*sensei*, and myself. Having me take my turn at “teacher’s talk” was one of the ways that the teachers and students recast me as an assistant teacher, as opposed to a visitor researcher or an outside observer in their classroom.

On this morning Ichikawa-*sensei* reminded the students about their third and fourth period art project creating a mural for their fall play based loosely on Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Aya then resumed her *nicchoku* role, “Time to practice singing this month’s song.” Before Aya could finish her sentence Hiroki shouted out the name of the song. Aya immediately fired back at Hiroki, “Shut up—you idiot

[urusai baka]!" Here Iida-sensei intervened, telling Aya to please use gentler words. Aya looked defiant, but said nothing more. The children stood up and sang the song, following along with an audiotape.

Iida-sensei stopped the cassette tape and Aya announced the end of the morning meeting, "That is the end of the meeting. Now please stand and bow [owarimasu, ki o tsuke, rei]."

The *fukushiki* students casually bowed more or less together. Momo and Kento (first graders) took the bowing more seriously than some of the older students, who only slightly inclined their heads. Aya returned to her desk smiling, clearly pleased with her performance.

Kata & the Public Performance of Normalcy

Although Aya was free to improvise somewhat with her comments about the lunch menu or her warnings to Hiroki to keep his hands to himself, there was a clear pre-established pattern [*kata*] to these morning meetings. Younger students learned to replicate this pattern by mimicking their older classmates. In fact, older students were paired with younger students in order to teach the correct sequence of events and the correct phrases for each step.

For the morning meeting students always (1) walked to the front of the room and stood behind the podium, (2) greeted the class, (3) elicited the day, date and weather, (4) asked about individual student's health, (5) reviewed the daily schedule, (6) announced the items on the lunch menu, (7) asked a teacher to say word to the class, (8) asked the students to stand and sing that month's song, and (9) had the class bow. Not only was this sequence of events replicated, but

even the phrasing invoked at each stage varied little. There was a correct and incorrect way to perform the morning meeting.

Most of the *fukushiki* school day was spent in an informal, relaxed, even playful mode, but there were a number of these more formal moments interspersed throughout the day. Tobin has argued that during preschool Japanese students learn to recognize, differentiate [*kejime*] and effortlessly shift between formal and informal classroom modes (1992, 24). One reason that the *fukushiki* students sometimes stood out from their mainstream pairs was that they had not completely mastered this art of distinguishing between these two modes of presenting themselves.

Sometimes the students may have understood that a more formal mode of presentation was required at a certain moment in the day, but because of developmental, cognitive, emotional and/or speech impediments they may have had difficulty enacting this more formal, constrained presentation of self. This seemed to be the case with Fumi, who often used an unusually high-pitched voice and exaggerated postures precisely at these more formal moments as if to announce that she could not or would not comply the pre-established pattern of “correct” behavior. Fumi rarely used these exaggerated tones and gestures during the less formal moments of the school day. It was only when the class’s attention was focused on her that she slipped into a more defiant posture.

One way the instructors tried to help the *fukushiki* children master some level of competence at conducting themselves within the norms that governed behavior during these more formal moments of the day, was to break an activity

down into very small segments that could be practiced and then reproduced when the context demanded.

In Japan the traditional arts often invoke a discourse of preexisting *kata* [patterned forms or patterned movements] that underlie the practice of a specific art form such as Noh theatre, the tea ceremony, flower arranging, martial arts, kabuki, et cetera. Before any proficiency can be gained in specific art form the underlying *kata* must be intensely studied and replicated. Masters are said to have absorb and become one with the countless *kata* that support their particular practices. Yano argues that within this cultural theory, *kata* are not merely superficial (concerned with the replication of pre-established forms) but also profound because the mastery of the outward form is seen as transformative of the inner self. "The creative goal of kata-training is to fuse the individual to the form so that the individual becomes the form and the form becomes the individual (Yano 2002, 26)."

Mastery of *kejime* [distinction between formal and informal modes of self-presentation] and the successful enactment and smooth timing of the *kata* required within the particular social context were the two crucial elements that at times separated the *fukushiki* students from their peers. For example, it appeared that Aya was pleased with her performance in the morning meeting described above. Without any prompting she successfully implemented the entire sequence of steps that comprise a morning meeting in a *fukushiki* or a mainstream class. On this level Aya's performance was exemplary; however, if this meeting had occurred in a mainstream classroom there would have been moments of both tension and humor. Aya's smooth implementation of the steps stood in sharp

contrast to the abrupt, biting tone she took with Hiroki, who was a rival. Aya's emotional tenor therefore was not in harmony with the *nicchoku* role she was performing for her classmates. Ichikawa-sensei tried to gently point this out by lightly joking that she was "such a strict older sister," the implication being that there was a disharmony between her role as the class leader role and her personal vendetta against Hiroki.

It was difficult or impossible for the *fukushiki* instructors to directly alter the emotional dispositions of the students; however, the instructors did try to point out when a student's outward attitude was not in keeping with their classroom roles. Also the instructors tried to identify and isolate more formal moments in the day and then break these down into component parts that could be studied, practiced and reenacted. The third grade Aya was quite competent with the *kata* for running a morning meeting, but her enactment of the *nicchoku* role came off as slightly comic because she was not yet able to step, however briefly, away from personal politics and into a more formal, outwardly unbiased role of class leader.

Public Kata, Private Kata

Elementary school teachers in Japan implicitly and explicitly draw upon the cultural logic of *kata* to teach about how to do tasks in a competent and correct manner, but some tasks are more public than others. The *fukushiki* teachers at Midorikawa Elementary were most concerned with using *kata* to help the students master a more public presentation of self. For example, how to

successfully run a morning meeting. Idiosyncrasies that had more private ramifications usually received less attention on the part of the instructors.

On that Wednesday in October the *fukushiki* students subdivided into two groups for the first lesson of the day, which was Japanese. Three older boys carry the first graders' desks into the adjacent classroom. The first graders followed, dragging their chairs behind them. Ichikawa-*sensei* and Iida-*sensei* practiced the Japanese syllabary with the first graders, while Fujita-*sensei* and myself practiced writing *kanji* [characters] with the fourth, fifth and sixth graders.

On this day the upper level students were practicing the character 対 ["versus" or "in opposition to"].¹¹ Fujita-*sensei* wrote out the stroke order meticulously out on the blackboard. The students were to copy the stroke order and practice writing the character ten or fifteen times. Then Fujita-*sensei* elicited sentences that include this character from the students and the students were asked to write their best sentence up on the blackboard.

There is a correct stroke order for every character. The established stroke order tends to give the character the best balance and also makes it easier to remember. Normally elementary school teachers insist that students master the correct stroke order. Most of the *fukushiki* students did follow the correct stroke, but Fumi always used a very unconventional approach with her writing. Technically her writing style [*kaki-kata*] was incorrect. She was not following the proper *kata* for writing this character; however, Fujita-*sensei* did not attempt to intervene in Fumi's work. He knew that Fumi was very particular about the way

she wrote her characters and he could not, or did not try to, convince her to adopt the standard approach.

Being autistic Fumi often insisted on using her own procedures for many everyday tasks. When idiosyncratic procedures had little impact on the public space, the instructors generally allowed the students, to use their own approach. In fact, the teachers often praised Fumi for her handwork. In Fumi's case the conventional stroke order was not seen as a priority. Her deviation from the correct *kata* impacted only on the mostly private space of her individual paper. In this case attending to "correct form" and established procedures, while perhaps desirable, was not required. However, when Fumi's unconventional behavior attracted notice then the instructors provided some guidance and tried to show Fumi alternative ways of doing things.

Body Talk & Comportment

The *fukushiki* teachers did not restrict their focus to academic subjects; quite often they drew attention to the body and even pointed out how the students held themselves in public. The instructors did not avoid talking about embodied experience and sometimes dealt with upon topics that would have been seen as inappropriate in the United States. This "body talk" was not unique to the *fukushiki* classroom. Such discourse is quite common in Japanese elementary schools. It was certainly not unique to the *fukushiki* classroom. Primary school educators in Japan focus attention on the socialization of both the child's mind and his or her body. The *fukushiki* teachers tried to ensure that the

special needs students were aware of what was seen as appropriate to a particular context.

During the second period of the day all eight students gathered again in the main classroom for a science class. Ichikawa-sensei had the students push their desks up against the wall and arrange their chairs in a semi-circle. Then with some flourish he produced a storybook. This book was entitled *Unko no e-hon* [A Picture Book about Bowel Movements]. I was a little surprised by the title and amused at the contents of book, which describes many different types of feces: *unchi, unko, ungo, unnyo, unpi*.¹²



Figure 3.2

“A Picture Book about Bowel Movements”
By Murakami, Yachiyo (2000)

The *fukushiki* students were delighted with this reading selection, particularly the boys, although the girls also giggled as Ichikawa-sensei read the book with a flourish. After finishing the story Ichikawa-sensei asked each student if they had had a bowel movement that morning. “What sort of feces, was it? *Ungo, unpi...?*” This generated a lot of laughter.

First grader Momo, unsure of the nuances in these various slang terms, was slow to offer a reply. She looked to Aya for guidance and decided to stay with the most conventional word, *unchi*. Ichikawa-sensei then described his own feces that morning and, sensing the unease of the American researcher, asked about mine as well. "Um, *unpi* perhaps?" I offered as the students laughed. The *fukushiki* students and their instructors clearly enjoy this playful bantering about their bodies.

The feminist scholar bell hooks writes that in her experience, "The public world of institutional learning was a site where the body had to be erased, go unnoticed" (1994,191). Feminists have offered many critiques of the Cartesian mind/body split, which privileges the mind and casts the body as profane. Some theorists argue that this split serves as a mask for oppression.

In the *fukushiki* track at Midorikawa Elementary bodies were mutually noticed and discourse about the body was common, even pervasive. Students were often encouraged to give quite detailed accounts of their physical state. If they were feeling under the weather, they would not simply say, "I feel a little sick." Instead they might offer, "I'm constipated" or "I had diarrhea last night."

Discourse about the body in other contexts was also common in the *fukushiki* class. For instance, Hiroki and Yoshi were both somewhat overweight. Ichikawa-sensei pointed out that they both needed to avoid oily foods, and he would occasionally discourage them from taking second helpings of high calorie items. Hiroki, however, was always very hungry, and there were times when he may not have been eating very well at home. When he asked for second or third helpings at lunch, the instructors generally allowed Hiroki to eat as much as

desired. *Ichikawa-sensei* was slightly overweight himself, and the students frequently joked with him about needing to go on a diet. *Ichikawa-sensei* smiled and agreed with them or sometimes he reported on the high calorie foods he had successfully avoided the previous weekend.

When I looked back over my fieldnotes I found many places where I recorded some discourse about the body that might sound strange or out of place in a U.S. classroom. I probably noted this discourse because as a child growing up in the United States I had been socialized to avoid such topics in the classroom. Teachers and students at Midorikawa Elementary engaged in talk about their bodies with more frequency and more specificity than is typical at American primary schools.¹³

The *fukushiki* instructors were also aware of, and commented upon, how students carried their bodies and presented themselves to others. These concerns were not unique to the special needs classroom, but since the *fukushiki* students were already marked as different from their mainstream peers, the *fukushiki* instructors appeared to be particularly sensitive to the students' public presentation of self.

When Naoki got fluster he tended to drop his head forward and look at the floor rather than at his counterpart. The instructors told Naoki to hold himself upright and look at people when he spoke. Hiroki dressed quite haphazardly; often his tennis shoes would be untied and sometimes his clothes were slightly dirty. *Ichikawa-sensei* would tell Hiroki to tie his shoes and come to school in a clean set of clothes. Fumi often crossed her arms. *Iida-sensei* gently asked her to uncross them when speaking to her classmates. (Subsequently

whenever Fumi caught me with my arms crossed, she would tell me to uncross them.)

The *fukushiki* instructors called attention to the fact that body posture and tone of voice impacted on how one was perceived by others. The instructors tried to bring an awareness of this dynamic into the classroom discourse so that to the special needs students might become more attuned to their presentation of self.

Social Norms & Sharing Lunch

The *fukushiki* instructors (particularly *Iida-sensei*) saw it as the teachers' responsibility to not only guide the students' academic progress, but also (or perhaps even more fundamentally) to mold their bodies to be in harmony with the norms of the mainstream public social space.

To prepare for lunch the *fukushiki* students turned their desks toward one another in order to facilitate conversation and make lunchtime a more social occasion. The three first graders were always paired with an older classmate. On this Wednesday Fumi was the "school-lunch-helper" [*kyūshoku-gakari*], which meant that she wiped off everyone's desktops before the food arrived. Then students covered their desks with a lunch mat or napkin they had brought from home. *Iida-sensei* supervised asking students to prepare their desk neatly.

Fujita-sensei and Naoki rolled a long folding table into the classroom. The students quickly assembled this serving table. Next all eight students pulled long white garments [*haku*] over their school cloths, donned white hats and placed white masks over their mouths. Dressed somewhat like doctors, the class walked

down the long corridor to the school kitchen, which was crowded with mainstream students gathering lunch for their own classes.

Each *fukushiki* student was responsible for carrying one lunch item or some dishes back to the classroom. If anyone should happen to drop an item there might not be a replacement available so the students learned to be careful with the class lunch.

Once the lunch items arrived safely in the classroom, the food and dishes were arranged on the long serving table. Two instructors and several older students helped dish out the servings.¹⁴ Students had to arrange dishes on their trays and negotiate their way back to their desks. This balancing act was not easy for the first graders, particularly if soup was on the menu.

In a democratic spirit all of the instructors and administrators at Midorikawa Elementary ate exactly the same lunch as the students. The *fukushiki* teachers also sat with the students so that they could chat over lunch and gently supervise the students' table manners.

Some of the younger students did not have good fine motor skills so it was not easy for them to use chopsticks skillfully. This was an issue that the teachers and parents frequently discussed at parent-teacher meetings. Being able to use chopsticks adequately well is seen as a very basic social skill that one needs to master in Japan. The *fukushiki* teachers saw it as their task to ensure that the students could use chopsticks and eat relatively neatly.

The teachers were very patient with the younger students, but by the middle grades they expected the students to have developed adequate table manners. Again this was part of a presentation of self. If one's table manners

were childish or infantile, it was seen as an outward expression of inner immaturity, and the teachers chastised the older students for messy eating.

In the *fukushiki* classroom fine motor skills were not just a matter of physical dexterity, these skills reflected on the child's social persona. It appeared that there was less intervention concerning eating properly in the mainstream classrooms, but the much higher student/teacher ratio also made such intervention more difficult to achieve.

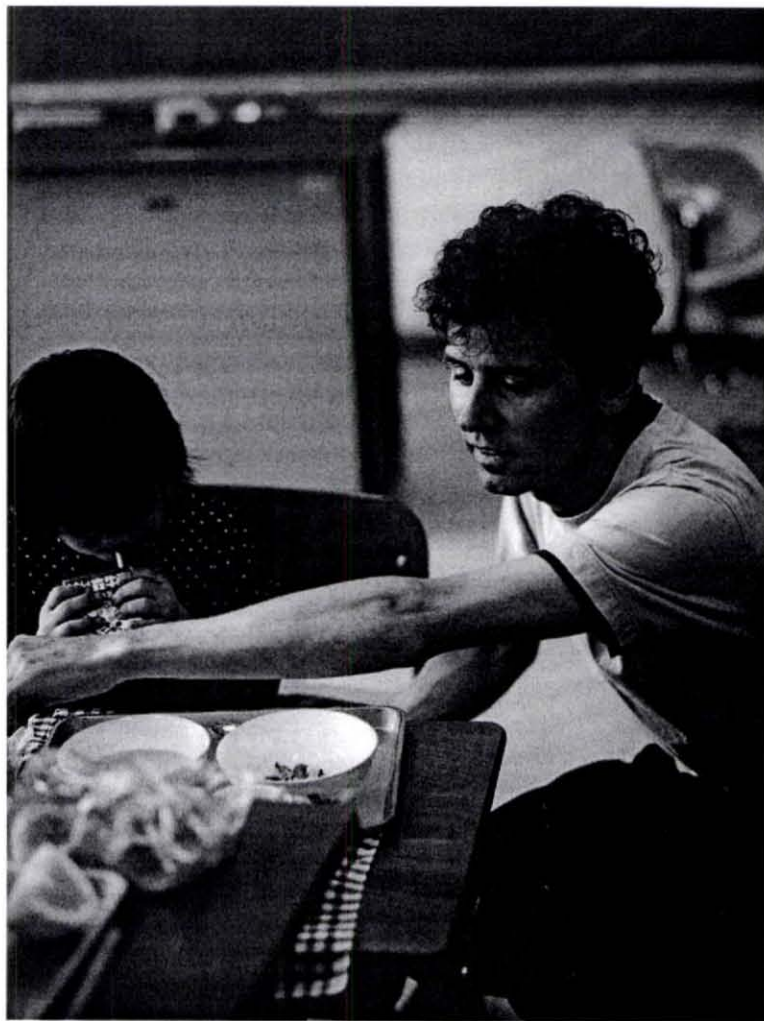


Figure 3.3: Lunch Time in a Special Needs Classroom
(Photograph by: Ōhashi Hitoshi)

Recess

By a few minutes before 1:00 p.m. even the slower eaters had finished eating lunch. The students carried their dishes back to the school kitchen and the serving table was returned to the hallway. After the desks were wiped down the students were free to play until 1:30. This playtime was basically unsupervised. Although there were a few mainstream instructors on the playground, the *fukushiki* teachers did not attempt to monitor the special needs students during this period of free play. The students could stay inside, in either of the two classrooms, or go out on the playground where hundreds of mainstream students were also playing.



Figure 3.4: Free Play in the *Fukushiki* Classroom
(Photograph by: Ōhashi Hitoshi; altered by Mori)

The *fukushiki* students usually played together, rather than mixing with their mainstream peers. A few of the less social students (Fumi, Kai and later Daisuke) often played alone. Occasionally I did see Hiroki and Yoshi join in a game of soccer or kickball with some of the mainstream students, who they knew from their years studying in the mainstream track, but such interactions were the exception rather than the rule. At 1:30 p.m. the bell rang announcing the end of recess.

Cleaning the Classroom

When the students had regrouped it was time to clean the classrooms. Everyday after the lunch recess, the Midorikawa Elementary students cleaned the school. This involved moving all the desks to one side of the room, sweeping and then wiping down the vinyl floor by hand with wet rags. The desks were then moved to other side of the room and the procedure repeated. This was the one activity when the low student ratio worked against the *fukushiki* students. With only eight students available to clean two classrooms and a hallway, this cleaning was a major task.

To clean the floors, the students filled several buckets with cold water in which they wet their rags. The floor was then wiped down by hand. I wanted to suggest that this cleaning would have been a lot easier and more efficient if we had used mops, but I knew that hand polishing the floor is a Japanese tradition linked symbolically to training at Zen temples and other places of meditative learning. By hand polishing the floor the students are said to learn humility, simplicity, self-reliance and perseverance (Tsuneyoshi 2001, 30). Yet in the

fukushiki class at Midorikawa Elementary the activity was anything but meditative.

The sweeping was done quickly, and Fumi was always in charge of the dustpans. There was trouble if a student or teacher picked up a dustpan that Fumi preferred or attempted to sweep up a pile of dirt that she had her eye on. Fumi had assumed the role of dust collector and to tread there without her okay was ill advised.

In the *fukushiki* class cleaning the classrooms was actually one of the most playful segments of the day. The students turned this daily chore into a racing derby. Two or three of the *fukushiki* students generously wet their rags and then carefully arranged these wet rags in a line on the floor. Bending forward the students pressed both hands firmly into their rags. "Ready, go [*yoi-don*]!" Heads down, they propelled themselves forward with their legs. As the wet rags slid across the floor, the students went head first toward the other side of the room, touched or banged into the wall and then race back. Although a bucket of dirty water was occasionally overturned, the floors did get clean. The instructors encouraged this racing and even officiated over the competition. Cleaning appeared to be a somewhat less playful activity in many of mainstream classrooms, but this may well have varied with the class.

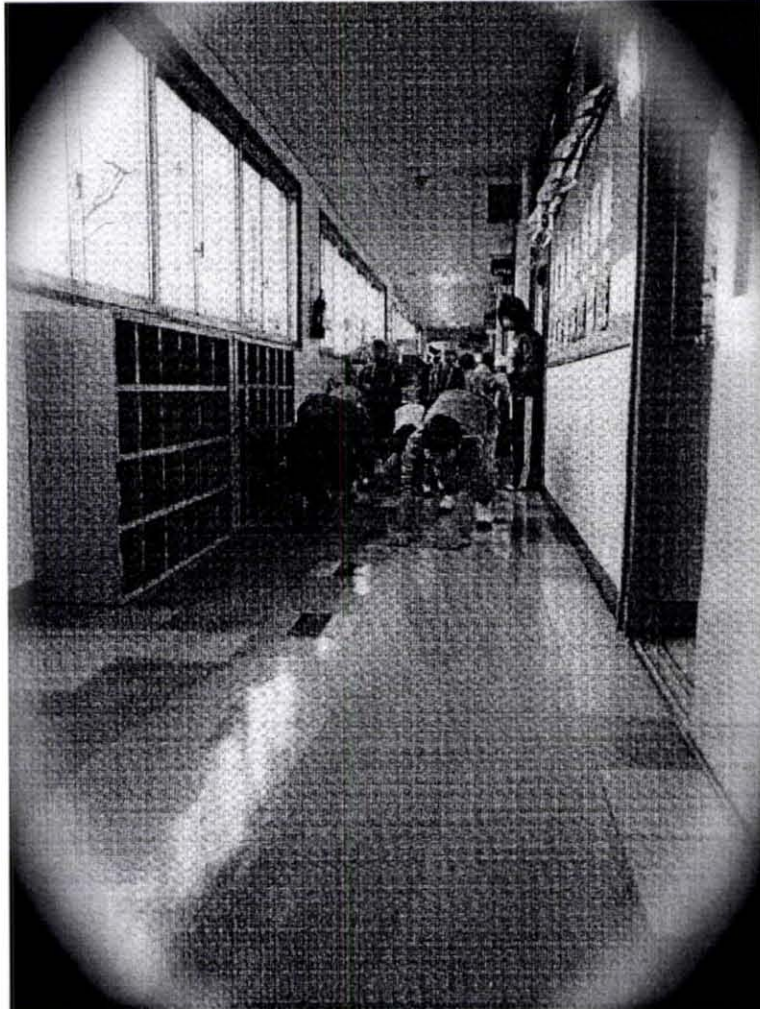


Figure 3.5: Making a Game of Cleaning the Floors
(Photograph by: Ōhashi Hitoshi; altered by author)

Afternoons & the Final Meeting

In the afternoon there were one or two more lessons depending on the day of the week. Sometimes the upper-level *fukushiki* students stayed for one period longer than the first and second graders, and there were also club activities once a week for fourth, fifth and sixth graders. The clubs were the one place where the special needs students mixed regularly with their mainstream peers.

The school day drew to a close as it had begun with a final class meeting [*owari no kai*]. One of the instructors wrote the next day's schedule up on the board and the students copied this into their "contact notebooks" [*renrakuchō*]. Parents and teachers also exchanged written messages via this same notebook. After the schedule had been copied, the students arranged their backpacks and returned to their seats. Instructors observed how the students went about packing up their things and provided some assistance to the first graders. Hiroki, who was often in a rush to go, was frequently told to repack his bag more neatly.

In the small *fukushiki* class the *nicchoku* began the day by asking about his or her classmates' health and drew the day to a close by inquiring about each student's impression of the day. These meetings took a somewhat more abbreviated form in the mainstream classes because there was no time to ask all thirty plus students about their health or their impressions of the day. In the *fukushiki* class "impressions" [*kansō*] usually took the form of naming the lesson they most enjoyed that day. On the Wednesday I sketched out in some detail, science (the period in which Ichikawa-sensei read the story about bowel movements) was far and away the most popular class period, although Fumi gave her vote to the late afternoon mural painting project.

Students who had significant speech impediments were also asked to articulate some impression of the day, even if it was just a one word answer. The *fukushiki* instructors always insisted that classmates listen to everyone's impressions before the group was free to go home.

Conclusions

Through these daily classroom encounters the *fukushiki* students forged a sense of common identity across age-grades, which was unusual and perhaps even impossible, in the mainstream classes. The *fukushiki* identity was negotiated through the filter of shared experiences and solidified through their mutual exclusion from the mainstream classes. The students' sense commonality and affinity was given voice in the seemingly generic *fukushiki* label, which they claimed as their own.

The special needs students were in effect renting their *fukushiki* identity from the state. It was the Ministry of Education that created and funded the *fukushiki* track. At Midorikawa Elementary, the special needs students embraced their shared status as "*fukushiki*," and this category imparted meaning on their days. Yet this common source of identification would inevitably slip away as these students approached the end of compulsory education. Like many phases in the life-cycle, the *fukushiki* identity came with an expiration date.

In chapter four I follow the *fukushiki* students on a three-day study trip to the mountains that takes them out of their special needs classroom and away from their parents' arms. In this chapter I explore the anxiety that surrounds questions of autonomy and dependence with regard to the lives of special needs youths in Japan. In the near term the *fukushiki* class provides a source of positive identity and friendships for this small group of special needs students, but what happens post-graduation? This is the question that was on forever on the minds of the children's parents.

Notes

¹ Japan extends low cost medical coverage to pregnant women and their young children; however, the substantial cost of the actual hospital delivery is surprisingly not covered by the nationalized medical system. The Ministry of Health and Welfare maintains that the cost of delivery cannot be deferred onto the national health insurance program because pregnancy is not an “illness.” Local governments do, however, retroactively offset the cost of a normal hospital delivery by issuing a one time “congratulatory” [*shussan iwaikin*] payment of several thousand dollars just after the baby is born.

² Tokyo Metropolitan Educational Center Official Website (Accessed 10 July 2006): http://www.e-sodan.metro.tokyo.jp/info_document/list_row.html

³ In my son’s third grade class, which had an enrollment of 30 students, there were two classmates who had some degree of impairment. One child had a mild form of multiple sclerosis, while another had a speech impediment and may have been somewhat cognitively delayed. Even the casual observer could see that these two students had impairments. And yet there was no knee jerk reaction to quickly transfer mildly disabled students into a specialized classroom. There is no reason to think that my son’s classroom was exceptional. Most of the mainstream elementary school teachers I spoke with indicated that they currently or previously had students with various impairments or learning disabilities. Japanese teachers often asserted that such students added variety and “spice” [*tokuchō*] to the class.

⁴ This argues that demand for the *fukushiki* track appears to be significantly outpacing supply. When I paid a visit to Midorikawa Elementary’s *fukushiki* class in the spring of 2007, membership had increased to ten students, while the staff levels had remained the same at two fully accredited teachers and one teaching assistant.

⁵ Sometimes it is impossible to obtain an exact enrollment figure for special track classes because one or two students may participate in the *fukushiki* track on a provisional basis. These students only come to the special needs class if they are having a difficult day in their mainstream class. I am uncertain how common this practice is, but during the 2002-2003 school year there was a fifth grade boy at Midorikawa Elementary, who would occasionally leave his mainstream class and attend the *fukushiki* class. One month he came several times, the next not at all. Only a very few students can be accommodated in this manner as the *fukushiki* classes are usually at or near maximum enrollment. At Midorikawa this option was seen as a temporary stopgap solution and may have been an unusual practice. When a child was having serious social problems in their mainstream class, the more common temporary solution was for the student to spend part or all of the day in the nurse’s office. With over 1,000 student attending Midorikawa Elementary, it was common for there to be one or two such students in the nurse’s office [*hokoenshitsu tōkō*].

⁶ During Japan’s baby boom public elementary schools often placed as many as fifty students, or even slightly more, in a single classroom. In the mid-1960s class size was

capped at 45 students and then in 1991 the maximum class size was again reduced to forty students (Lewis 1995:15).

⁷ By “semi-medical” I mean that the labels gain an air of medical authority because medical professionals have attached them to children, but the criterion used to make firm line distinctions between mental and emotional impairments are necessarily fuzzy. Even the diagnosis of something much more specific like autism or autism spectrum disorder, which probably have a neurobiological source, remains somewhat subjective (Nazeer 2006, 198-9 & 204-6). As of 2007 there was still no reliable, organic test for autism.

⁸ Ichikawa-*sensei*, who was quite active in the union, revealed this to me.

⁹ I write that *fukushiki* is a “generic term,” and yet the children in Midorikawa Elementary’s special needs track clearly did not see it that way. Although the students had initially borrowed the *fukushiki* terminology from the authoritarian discourse of the school administration, at some point they had made the term their own and infused it with their own emotive associations.

¹⁰ One day in late February of 2002, Ichikawa-*sensei* said to that there was a surplus of about ¥600,000 remaining in that year’s special educational budget. We needed to decide quickly on how to spend these funds or our budget would be decreased the following year. Any purchased had to be made from a particular catalog that had been pre-approved by the Board of Education. I mentioned that the prices in this catalog appeared to be significantly higher than going market rates. For example, the unicycles were priced just over ¥50,000 apiece, but my local bicycle shop had similar models for about ¥20,000. Ichikawa-*sensei* said that the items were probably expensive because they had been specially designed for use in public schools. After this meeting Iida-*sensei* told me in private that someone had probably arranged an exclusive contract with the city. In any case, the higher prices did help exhaust the extra funds more quickly.

¹¹ Note that this character 対 is one of the 118 characters scheduled to be taught in the third grade in Japan’s national curriculum. While most of the students in the special track at Midorikawa did learned to read and write, as a whole the class lagged behind the Ministry of Education’s standardized curriculum.

¹² Japanese has a rich vocabulary for describing defecation, a topic that is surrounded by much less taboo in Japan than in the United States. These slang terms for feces [*unchi*, *unko*, *ungo*, *unnyo*, *unpi*] have a playfulness that is virtually impossible to convey in English.

¹³ For another view of the socialization of the “body hexis” in Japanese preschools see Ben-Ari’s *Body Projects in Japanese Childcare* (1997), particularly pages 15-21.

¹⁴ The lunch menu, which was printed out monthly and posted in all the classrooms, was quite varied. It generally consisted of some type of soup, fish, meat or tofu, rice or bread, a vegetable or cold salad, milk, and some fruit or something sweet. Everyone was expected to try every item. Having strong food preferences or not being able to drink the milk provided was seen as a less than desirable. In the *fukushiki* class teachers never force

students to eat items they disliked, but instructors did note the items that students avoided and talk about eating preferences with caregivers during parent-teacher meetings.

Chapter 4

Travel & Transformation: Autonomy & Community

Introduction

For the special needs students at Midorikawa Elementary the *fukushiki* frame was not limited to their time in the special track classroom, rather “*fukushiki*” became a central reference point in their young lives, impacting on the students’ peer networks and on their sense of self. The *fukushiki* identity not only structured relationships with their mainstream peers at Midorikawa, but also framed interactions with students from other public schools.

In this chapter I follow the *fukushiki* students out of their classroom and into the mountains on a two-day Study Trip to a lodge in northern Saitama prefecture. While the stated goals of the annual trip were independence and self-reliance, the path to achieving these objectives was through a collaborative sense of purpose and interdependence with peers and teachers.

Fieldtrips are common at Japanese public elementary schools, with several half-day trips typically slated for any given academic year. In the later grades there often is an overnight excursion planned to some cultural site. These trips are almost always organized within a particular school and implemented by grade-level. This was impossible in the case of the *fukushiki* students as the students’ grade levels were mixed and the *fukushiki* class membership at any given school was quite limited. Thus in the case of this Overnight Study Trip, *fukushiki* teachers and students from seven schools organized a joint trip, which

tended to reinforce the sense that the *fukushiki* identity extend out beyond a single school community.

The Study Trip took the *fukushiki* students far away from home, but meticulous preparations and rehearsals prior to departure helped parents, teachers and students to cope with any anxiety. Indeed there was a sense that even mundane tasks (such as taking a seat on the bus or folding a blanket) could be practiced and perfected. Learning to smoothly execute seemingly mundane, everyday tasks is an important theme for all elementary school students; however, mastery of the mundane through the use of patterned practice [*kata*], was especially stressed for the *fukushiki* students, as issues of competence and normalcy were always hovering in the background.

Departures & Arrivals

On a bright Tuesday morning in early September of 2001 fifty-five *fukushiki* elementary school students, twenty-three instructors, one assistant teacher-anthropologist, and a driver boarded a blue-grey, Hino touring bus and headed north, away from the Tokyo metropolis. Two hours later the bus exited the Kanetsu highway and pulled neatly onto a narrow two-lane road that wound through low strung mountains in northern Saitama. After a morning of boisterous singing some of the students had drifted off to sleep, others were intently scanning the horizon as older classmates pointed out landmarks they recalled from previous years' trips.

"We are almost there!" The bus braked, made a wide left-turn and bounced over a low speed bump into an uneven gravel parking lot. As the bus

pulled to a stop, the driver announced, “We have arrived at the entrance to Takemori Genki Plaza. You were all very good travelers [*o-tsukaresama deshita*].”

“Where is the plaza?” I was asking myself. A few of the younger students voiced a similar reaction, “Here? But there is nothing but trees...” The shady parking area, which had been carved out the forest, was empty except for our bus. The lot was situated at the base of a steep hill that was dotted with short pines and interspersed with various types of taller leafy trees. The thick late summer foliage blocked out most of the soft morning sunlight.

Several instructors jumped off the bus and helped the driver to open the cargo-hold where the students’ backpacks had been neatly stacked earlier that morning. A middle-aged woman stood at the front of the bus issuing instructions, “After exiting the bus locate your backpack, check the name tag and regroup with the teachers from your school. Don’t go wandering off. We have a busy schedule.”

Once I was outside Ichikawa-*sensei* pointed out a narrow trail at the far end of the lot that disappeared into the forest. “That’s the path over there. We will start off together as a class, but the students can walk at their own pace.”

Instructors from the seven participating elementary schools took a head count and helped the younger students shoulder their heavy packs. The driver surveyed the scene from the step of his bus, occasionally shouting out words of encouragement, “Good luck. Take it one step at a time. You can do it. Have a nice stay. See you tomorrow...”

Fujita-*sensei* led the way as the eight *fukushiki* students from Midorikawa Elementary headed toward the trailhead. Twenty or thirty children and their

instructors had already disappeared into the forest. Their voices drifted down through the trees to those of us who were still milling about in the parking lot.

We paused for a moment before entering the woods, and Ichikawa-sensei issued this advice, “The path is uneven so watch where you are putting your feet. Okay, let’s go [*gambaru-zo*].”

“My pack is so heavy! How far is it?” Momo asked tentatively as soon as we had entered the forest.

“Momo, don’t talk like that [*momo-chan, wagamama iun jya nai*]. If you try you can do it; everyone can do it.”

The older boys stayed right on Fujita-sensei’s heels. After a few minutes of climbing he allowed them to plunge ahead. After all, the motto of the trip was “Striving for independence [*jiritsu o mezashi*].”

The annual Overnight Study Trip to a public, mountainside facility in Saitama prefecture articulates a theory of individual effort, transformation, maturity and independence that is ironically linked to communal ties of shared friendship and a common identity, rooted in the students’ special status. The path to independence lies in securing small successes within the structure of group and showing proficiency in both everyday tasks and special challenges. The way for Momo-*chan* to transform her *kokoro* [heart/spirit/interior self] and discover a new sense of maturity and autonomy was to place one foot in front of the other and face the challenge of the mountain—a mountain that has been successfully climbed on many prior occasions by her *fukushiki* peers. By literally following in their footsteps Momo, and the other *fukushi* students, were linking their fates with that of their predecessors.

Prepared Mother, Prepared Child: Action & Kokoro

The annual Overnight Study Trip [*shukuhaku gakushū*] was scheduled for the second week of September. At Midorikawa Elementary preparations for this two-day excursion to the mountains began immediately after the summer holidays.¹ With three first graders (Momo, Kai & Kento) participating in the 2001 outing, Midorikawa's *fukushiki* instructors were particularly meticulous in their instructions about how to prepare for the trip, as if by talking about and preparing for the trip any anxiety that the younger students (and their parents) might feel about these two days apart could be preempted and neutralized.²

The preparations required an involved parent attentive to detail. By successfully completing the pre-trip preparations, parents (usually mothers) demonstrated to their children, to the *fukushiki* instructors, to other parents and even to themselves just how diligent and involved they were in their children's school lives.

On first Monday in September, Iida-sensei discussed the upcoming trip and distributed a handout entitled "What to Bring & How to Pack Your Backpack." The black and white print showed an illustration of a backpack with five compartments: two large side pockets and the main body of the pack subdivided into three smaller compartments. The individual items to be placed in each compartment were written over the appropriate section of the illustration.

I was impressed by the specificity of these pre-trip instructions.

In the left pocket: one "etiquette bag" [*echiketto bukuro*]³—in case of motion sickness on the bus, a handkerchief, three plastic bags, a packet of tissues, and a pair of indoor shoes. In the right pocket:

towel, toothbrush (in a plastic bag) and one clothespin. Top pocket: boxed lunch (only pack as much as you can eat), thermos containing water or tea, wet hand towel [*oshibori*], a mat for sitting, and a light raincoat with hood. Middle pocket: plastic bag for dirty clothes, small towel for washing (enclosed in a plastic bag), towel for drying (no large bath towels please), underpants and pajamas (top and bottom). Lower Pocket: two comfortable tee shirts, two pairs of pants, two pairs of socks, underpants, and indoor shoes. Place each change of clothes in separate plastic bags.

A separate handout provided advice about how to dress for the trip and listed additional items to bring along. Girls were asked not to wear skirts, although short balloon pants were permissible. Boys could wear either long or short pants. Most mothers opted to dress their children in shorts, as early September on the Kantō plain is usually still hot and muggy, even in the low mountains where we would be staying.

While the school did not dictate which backpack to purchase, acceptable designs were limited. The packs were all to be made of lightweight nylon and have three equal size central compartments and two side pockets. This severely restricted the range of acceptable choices. Not surprisingly caregivers ended up purchasing nearly identically packs, although there was some variation in colors, light and dark blue, pink, light green, tan and black.³ Having similar travel gear helped to create a sense belonging to the same team and being engaged in a joint adventure.

On each travel item, even on both socks, the child's name was to be written in indelible ink. "As far as possible" names were to be written on the outside of the children's clothing so that ownership of the items would not be in doubt.

Before departing on this two-day excursion I could not help thinking that these meticulously detailed pre-departure instructions were a little excessive; however, once we had boarded the crowded bus, I soon realized that there was considerable utility in knowing exactly where each child's water bottle or tissues could be found. Without the cooperation of the children's detail conscious caregivers those water bottles would never have found their way into the top pocket of the student's packs.

荷物（リュックの入れ方）



※ 出来れば、名前を 外側に書いて下さい。

Figure 4.1

List of Travel Gear with Detailed Packing Instructions

The school encouraged or co-opted the caregivers to participate in the role of support staff, responsible for overseeing the preparation of their children's

travel gear to very tight specifications. By embracing this role and preparing the packs with their children, parents were anticipating and even vicariously participating in their child's upcoming adventure. For single parent households and working mothers with multiple children these preparations must have been a considerable burden, yet all eight children in the *fukushiki* track at Midorikawa arrived at school on the day of departure with their travel packs in good order. Even Hiroki, whose parents were in the midst of a divorce, managed to bring all the required items on the trip.

These detailed pre-trip preparations helped caregivers allay any fears about their young children spending the night away from home. Surely if this much thought had gone into planning the trip then the instructors must have also anticipated other potential problems that might arise. By preparing their packs so conscientiously, the children and their caregivers were preparing themselves and steeling their *kokoro* for this time apart from one another.

In the days preceding the trip the school requested that caregivers carefully monitor their children's health. A week before the trip *Iida-sensei* distributed a health card to each student, and for three days prior to the scheduled departure, caregivers were asked to record their child's temperature the first thing each morning. On these pre-departure health cards parents were to note the timing of their children's bowel movements and to comment on their appetites. There was a separate space for recording any other concerns the parents might have about their child's physical health or emotional state.

Thus children and caregivers were bound up together in the mutual process of preparing mentally, physically and materially for approaching trip. By

completing concrete steps like meticulously preparing their travel packs and recording body temperatures each morning the parent-child (mother-child) dyads were demonstrating to themselves, and to others, that each child was in fact ready to embark on this journey away from home. To some degree the overnight stay in mountains far north of Tokyo's city limits would test the children's independence. This was one of the stated goals of the excursion. Since the issue of autonomy was a long-term, overriding concern for the caregivers of the *fukushiki* children, being especially well prepared for the two-day trip took on a special importance. The annual Study Trip represented a controlled experiment in limited autonomy. The parents, *fukushiki* instructors and the children themselves needed for this trip to be a success.

Rehearsing Performances & Emotional Responses

A number of the *fukushiki* students had trouble adapting to new routines, so anticipating, talking about and rehearsing for the trip was seen as essential. The best way to ensure a successful trip was to be well prepared and well rehearsed. On the second Monday in September, one day prior to our departure, the *fukushiki* students were to bring their health cards to school. Hiroki forgot his card, so Fujita-sensei telephoned his father to make sure that the document, as well as a copy of his national health insurance card, would arrive with Hiroki on the departure day.

At Monday's morning meeting, Ichikawa-sensei reviewed the health cards, asking questions about the students' physical condition, their appetites and their preparations for the trip. Fujita-sensei and Iida-sensei then took the students'

temperatures and compared these with the readings on their cards. Momo had just recovered from infection she picked up while visiting relatives in Shanghai.⁴ Her temperature was normal, and everyone seemed to be in good shape for the trip.

Much of Monday's school day was occupied with final preparations and pre-trip rehearsals. The instructors carefully reviewed the itinerary with the class, encouraging the older students to add comments about how events had unfolded in previous years. The destination and trip schedule had remained the same for a number of years, so older classmates could offer concrete advice to junior members of the class.

At the beginning of the second period the instructors had the students arrange their chairs side by side, mimicking the seating arrangement on the bus. The students then were given their seat assignments, and they practiced getting onto the "bus" and arranging themselves as they would actually sit on the real bus. To my surprise older students were not paired with younger classmates, as was the typical pattern in the *fukushiki* class.

For this excursion the students were paired with classmates of a similar age: Kento with Kai, Momo with Aya, Fumi with Yoshi, and Hiroki with Naoki.⁵ Later in the day I asked why the usual *senpai-kōhai* [senior-junior] pairing was not being used for this trip. Ichikawa-sensei explained that since fifty-five special needs students from seven different schools were participating in the joint excursion this was one opportunity when the special needs students should build links within (rather than across) their age-grade. By pairing classmates of similar ages together it was hoped that students of roughly the same age would

aggregate together and ties would arise between students from the seven participating schools.

After twice running through this routine of taking their seats on the bus, each student was asked to come to the front of the class and practice introducing him or herself to the group. These introductions were seen as important because Midorikawa Elementary's *fukushiki* students would be interacting with peers and teachers from six other public schools. The introduction followed the standard format, "I am a --- grader in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary. My name is ---. Nice to meet you."

The instructors told everyone to stand up straight and say their introductions in a loud clear voice. When Fumi used her high-pitched, stilted voice for her introduction, Ichikawa-*sensei* had her perform her introduction two more times in something approaching a normal tone. Hiroki was cautioned not to mumble. Yoshi was told to stop shuffling his feet and look directly at the center of the group. The three first graders also practiced giving introductions, but the instructors were gentler in their assessment of these performances. Still there was a sense that all of the children's performances could be practiced and improved upon before the actual event took place.

The highlight on the first evening was a "candle service" [*kyandoru sabisu*]. On the Monday before our departure the older students enthusiastically described to their younger classmates how a flame would be passed among the students until everyone was holding a lit candle. The prospect of using burning candles at night excited everyone. The older students showed the younger students how they would organize themselves and move about during the

candle service. After running through the ritual several times, the instructors had each student come to the front of the classroom and practice voicing their reactions to the ritual with staple phrases like, "Today's candle service was so much fun [*tanoshikatta desu*], so interesting [*omoshirokatta desu*]."

It struck me as odd that the instructors would want the students to practice giving pre-formulated reactions to an imagined event. How could the children know how they might feel about the candle service before actually experiencing it? When I mentioned this to *Ichikawa-sensei*, he replied that the *fukushiki* students get flustered easily, so they needed extra practice with public speech. They needed to know in advance what they might be asked about and what sort of answer would be seen as appropriate. By practicing this routine in the classroom the students would feel more comfortable and be more competent at the actual event. With adequate practice everyone could succeed.

Ichikawa-sensei seemed to view public speech as a special type of self-presentation. He felt that such speech could often be rehearsed, critiqued and improved upon. This view of self-presentation through discursive performance has parallels with Goffman's theories on the presentational aspects of everyday life. In Goffman's view people often cooperate and conspire to co-created social dramas in which everyone has a specific role to play. In the classroom, the workplace or within a family, roles are usually well defined. When a child (or adult) deviates too far from a prescribed role, delivers an unconvincing performance or refuses to properly acknowledge the roles of the other players in the game, the discourse tends to become strained and the social fiction being spun becomes difficult to maintain (Goffman 1971, 13-15).

Ichikawa-*sensei* seemed to have an intuitive grasp of the performative nature of social action and speech.⁶ By having the *fukushiki* students practice presenting their “reactions” to imagined events, he was providing the children with a chance to be more successful in the roles they were going to be required to act out the next day at the camp. These roles and the dialogue that should accompany them could be predicted and practiced in advance. The candle service particularly lent itself to rehearsal because of the tightly prescribed ritual-like format.

Smooth execution of the children’s performative roles in the candle service, and at other points in the Study Trip, was seen as trumping the content of the words themselves. By delivering their lines well the students were being given an opportunity for social success (one of the goals of the trip), and they might even be more likely to experience the emotions espoused in their pre-rehearsed “reactions” to an unseen event.

Liminality & the *Fukushiki* Identity

The annual Overnight Study Trip was planned, implemented and staffed by special track instructors from seven public elementary schools. This jointly coordinated trip illustrates the liminal position of the *fukushiki* students within their individual school communities. While the *fukushiki* students are nominal members of an age-appropriate class, the overnight excursion argues that the special needs students’ primary source of school identity was crafted around their membership in a multi-grade *fukushiki* class. The joint study trip served to

reinforce the children's self-identification not as members of a particular school community, but as *fukushiki* students.⁷

Victor Turner used the term "liminal state" to describe an ambiguous, transitional social status in which an individual temporarily eludes or slips between more stable social positions. "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial (Turner 1969, 95)." In some ways *fukushiki* students occupy a liminal position within the Japanese educational structure. While they have some degree of disability, *fukushiki* students are not so impaired as to have to attend a segregated protective school. While they are able to attend mainstream public schools, the *fukushiki* track operate completely independently of the age-grade classes, and mainstream students often know little about their seldom seen *fukushiki* peers. In this sense they occupy a liminal position between two more stable fixed social positions.

Participants in the 2001 Trip

The joint study trip illustrated how the special needs students' school identities were constructed primarily through their participation in the *fukushiki* track. On the Overnight Study Trip it was the students' special needs status, not their grade level, which determined eligibility for the excursion.

Thirty-six boys and nineteen girls took part in the 2001 Study Trip. This reflects the male/female ratio of the *fukushiki* student body at seven public elementary schools. This ratio, 65% boys to 35% girls, was quite close to the boy/girl ratio within the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary during the

period of my fieldwork. Among twenty-three teachers, who accompanied these students on the trip, there were eight male and fifteen female instructors, which was nearly one teacher or teaching assistant for every two students.

Costs, Final Preparations & Leave Taking

Although Japanese public schooling is free of charge, parents do pay a modest monthly fee for the school lunch program and the cost of fieldtrips is also borne by the individual family. (There are, however, public subsidies available for low income households.) In 2001 the fee for the two-day Study Trip including transportation, meals and lodging was ¥7,500 per student or a little over sixty U.S. dollars at an exchange rate ¥120/dollar. Two weeks prior to the trip *Iida-sensei* distributed special brown envelopes for these travel funds. By the Friday before our departure all of the students had brought their trip money to school, sealed the designated envelopes.

On the day of departure the eight *fukushiki* students gathered in the classroom by 8:15 a.m. It was a sunny, blue day. *Fujita-sensei* kept the morning meeting extremely brief. "No fevers, right? Did everyone pack a lunch? Don't forget your packs. Okay, let's go." We quietly exited the school before the mainstream classes had begun.

The chartered bus was picking up the students in front of a public housing project about a ten-minute walk from Midorikawa Elementary. The principal and vice principal joined the *fukushiki* students and their teachers on the short walk over to the meeting area. We reached the departure point just before 8:30 a.m. and found that the students and teachers from the other six schools had already

arrived. Each school group had arranged the student's packs in neat piles near the entrance to the high-rise building. A large group of mothers, many with toddlers in tow, had also come to send off their children.

When a large blue-grey bus pulled around the corner a cheer went up from the children and their teachers. Mothers and siblings clapped and waved. Packs were soon stored in the cargo bay, and the teachers got the students on the bus in short order. Parents tried to catch the attention of their children on the bus and snapped photos as final preparations were completed. A head count was taken twice; all fifty-five students were accounted for. Kento and a few of his fellow first graders pushed their noses against the bus windows as their eyes sought out their mothers in the crowd, but most of the students were busily engaged in conversations with their classmates. As the bus pulled away from the curb at a few minutes before 9:00 a.m., the children's mothers waved and shouted encouragement, "Good luck [*ganbatte*]." The students, teachers and even the bus driver waved back and replied with the standard phrase of departure, promising to return, "*itte kimasu*."

For most of the first graders this was their first overnight trip away from parents and siblings. I turned around in my seat and studied their faces. Kai was staring out the window dreamily watching the unfamiliar buildings passing by, but most of his peers were chatting or giggling with their travel partners. A few students were trying to catch the attention of their teachers seated in front or behind. An instructor from one of the other schools used the on-board PA system to tell the students this trip was a special chance to make new friends.

I wondered if the younger students were thinking more about new friends and new adventures or about the families they had left behind in Tokyo. But the mood on the bus was festive and a teacher soon had the students singing well-known songs from popular animated films.

Discourses of Independence & Friendship

There were two contrasting themes that reiterated throughout the two-day excursion: self-reliance or independence [*jiritsu o mezashi*] and the importance of making of friends [*tomodachi o tsukuri*].

The initial hike from the parking area to the lodge was part of the self-reliance theme. I arrived at Takemori Vitality Plaza with the stragglers having stayed back with the younger students. Their older classmates and teachers were milling about in parking area outside the entrance to the lodge. The uphill walk had taken about 40 minutes, but it was still well before noon. A third or fourth grade boy, who had his foot on his pack, was panting in an exaggerated fashion, "Boy, that was tough [*kitsukatta*]." Ichikawa-sensei chided him, "Hard? The real hike is this afternoon!"

Once everyone had reached the parking lot, we entered the building as a group and announced our arrival to the staff. The study center, which was operated by the prefectural government, could accommodate about two hundred lodgers. In order to keep costs low, staffing was kept to a bare minimum. For the most part lodgers were expected to look after themselves. The relatively modern center, built in reinforced concrete and covered in white tiles, was surrounded by a small nature preserve with numerous hiking trails.

We were shown to a large nondescript conference room. The students were told to leave their packs near the door and take a seat at the front of the room. Two sixth graders, a boy and a girl, went to the front of the hall and announced the beginning of opening ceremony [*hajime no tsudo*]. They asked a female instructor to address the group. She nodded to the two students and walked to the front of the hall, where she said a few words about respecting the mountains, avoiding injuries, trying your best and making new friends. The two students in charge of the opening ceremony then called the *fukushiki* classes to the front of the hall one at a time. The teachers remained seated.

The students faced their peers and announced their camp slogan in unison. These mottos, which had been decided upon within the individual *fukushiki* classes and practiced before the trip, reflected the same sorts of goals that the instructor had been speaking of: "Let's have fun together and avoid injuries" or "We are going to make this a really fun study camp." Midorikawa's motto was "We will support each other and work hard on this study trip." Aya read the motto and the other seven students chorused her words. Then they all cheered, *gambarimasu* [we can do it] three times before resuming their seats. Aya was beaming.

It seemed to me that the overarching goal of striving for independence was in some conflict with the promise to come to one another's aid, but the instructors and *fukushiki* students did not appear to feel any discord between these two rival themes. While there was praise for independence and self-reliance, these were not seen as qualities that one acquired through isolated effort. One demonstrated maturity and a degree of independence by learning to

focus on the common goals of the group and the needs of one's peers. Attending to others' needs illustrated that one had already achieved self-reliance.

After the mottos had all been chanted the students were told to retrieve their boxed lunches from their packs. Plastic mats were spread over the grey-carpeted floor in preparation for lunch. After the two-hour bus trip and the morning hike, the students were hungry and also anxious to compare the lunches that their mothers had prepared. Hiroki's father had made (or bought) a breaded pork sandwich for his son and also included a large sack of red grapes. Hiroki carefully divided these grapes equally among his classmates and teachers from Midorikawa Elementary. Iida-sensei praised Hiroki for his kindness and his attentiveness to his peers. By sharing with his classmates, rather than hoarding the grapes to himself, Hiroki was showing maturity and restraint.

After lunch some students stayed inside, resting on the cool carpet, while others began a rambunctious game of tag. No one objected to the children racing in and out of the lodge.

Hiking Kinshō Mountain: Standing on Whose Feet?

After lunch there was a longer hike planned to the top of a nearby "mountain." Before departing Tokyo the older students had warned their younger classmates (and me) about how difficult this hike was; the instructors had emphasized that everyone could do it if they just stuck to it. The two-kilometer trail snaked over the rolling hills around the Study Center. The physical challenge of this hike represented a concrete illustration of the *jiritsu*

(literally “standing on one’s own feet”) ideology, but the challenge was issued not only to the individual child but also to the entire group.

A few minutes before 1:00 p.m. the instructors had everyone don their sun hats, drape their water bottles over their necks and gather on the parking lot in front of the lodge. How did everyone know to bring water bottles with neck straps? I did not see any mention of that on the detailed pre-trip lists. I dropped my strapless water bottle into my daypack and joined the students outside.

The hike was scheduled in the mid-afternoon, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. The wooded trail looked well shaded, but it was hot getting organized on the sunny parking lot. Once again the students were allowed to walk at their own pace and after a short time the children separated into several bunches of similar ages. The teachers spread out among these groups. Every twenty minutes or so the entire group stopped for a rest and a drink, but the slower students had little time to rest up before it was time to move on again.

We were only a few minutes into the hike when a second or third grade boy slipped and superficially scrapped his right knee. He let out a piercing scream and remained where he had fallen crumpled on the path, sobbing loudly. Two male instructors quickly attended to the child, carefully cleaning his knee and applying two band-aids over the scrap. The other children slowly made their way around the fallen boy. I waited for the boy to recover. After a few minutes the teachers stood the still weeping boy up and said, “You’re fine. Look, it’s nothing.” The boy continued to wail and sat back on the ground. He seemed determined to persistent in his crumpled defeat. Eventually one of the teachers took the boy’s water bottle and the other pulled him to his feet. The boy wiped

his tears on his sleeve and allowed his teacher to lead him along by the hand. After a few minutes he was walking on his own once again. “Not giving up” [*akiramenai de*] also meant that the instructors would not give up on the children. To *gambaru* [stick to it] was not exclusively an individual project; it also was a task that concerned the extended group.

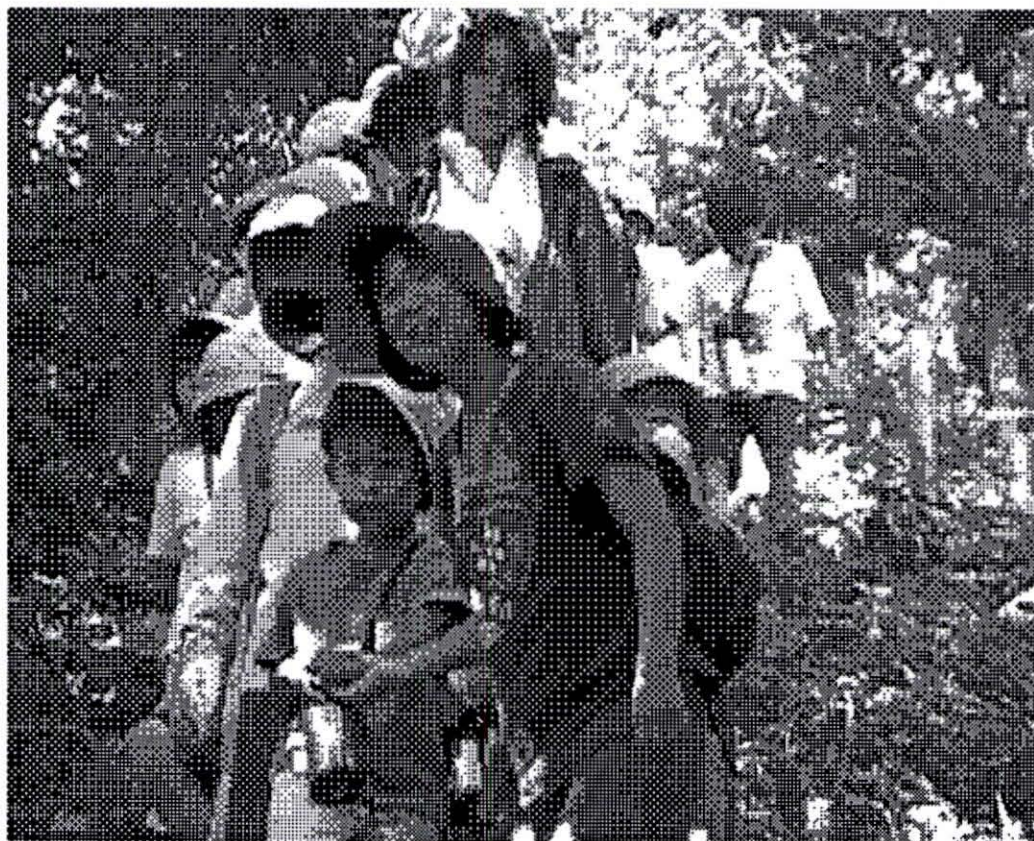


Figure 4.2: Hiking Kinshō Mountain
(Photograph by author)

This ideology of self-reliance and perseverance also applied to little matters. At the first rest stop Momo could not open her pop-up thermos bottle. I was about to flip it open for her, but Fujita-*sensei* encouraged Momo to try again with both hands. Momo was surprised that her teacher would not immediately open the thermos for her. “But I can’t do it,” she insisted.

“Put the bottle between your knees and use both hands. You can do it.” Momo looked like she was about break into tears, but she swallowed hard and managed to get the thermos open. “I did it,” she announced brightly. *Iida-sensei* came over and took a photo of Momo drinking from her water bottle.

The second rest stop was at the top of the low Kinshō Mountain. A marker indicated that we were at 246 meters above sea level. No one knew the height of our starting point near the lodge, but I would guess that we had ascended perhaps 60 or 80 meters. One of the instructors organized a standard memorial photo, positioning the group next to a wooden signpost that attested to our reaching the peak.

Aya, a fourth grader, had been walking with the older children toward the front of the group, so I had not seen much of her on this hike. However, somewhere between the second and third rest stops Aya twisted her left ankle. When I came upon her *Fujita-sensei* was gently encouraging her to try putting a little weight on her foot. Aya was holding back tears and grimacing in pain. In the end *Fujita-sensei* decided that it was best not to strain the ankle any further. He hoisted the 10-year-old Aya onto his back and carried her for the final thirty or forty minutes of the hike.

It was just after 2:30 p.m. when we arrived back at the Study Center’s parking lot. *Fujita-sensei* was sweating and huffing. Aya managed a smile. A staff member brought out a first aid kit and helped the instructors tightly wrap a bandage around Aya’s ankle. The injury was not serious, but the joint had been slightly strained. Aya had succeeded in completing the hike, even if she had not done it standing on her own feet.⁸ In fact, the instructors praised her strong will

and perseverance [*gaman*] for not complaining about the injury. *Jiritsu* was not something was achieved in isolation from one's teachers and peers. Effort, endurance and persistence were seen as equally, or even more worthy, of praise than specific results.

Blankets, Self & Social World

One of the more mundane, and yet revealing, episodes during the two-day excursion occurred in the late afternoon on the first day of trip. After the hike the students were given forty-five minutes of free time. This was followed by projected star show in the Study Center's small observatory hosted by a Japanese version of Isaac Newton. Then the students were told to gather in the main conference hall for room assignments and a demonstration of blanket folding.

Blanket folding? Did we really need a demonstration of how to fold a blanket? I tried to reign in my more cynical inner voice. If the instructors thought that a demonstration of blanket folding was necessary and even important then perhaps there was something of interest here.

When the students had all assembled a female instructor walked to the front of the hall with a blanket over her left arm. She put this blanket on the center table and addressed the group. Weren't they lucky they were to be able to stay in such a nice, modern lodge up in the mountains? Had they noticed how clean and well kept the facilities were? How would the lodge look tomorrow morning when they were ready to depart?

“Takemori Vitality Plaza only has a minimal staff and yet the rooms are all in perfect order. The previous lodgers had taken excellent care of the rooms. Would the *fukushiki* students be able to do the same?” She emphasized that it was the students’ responsibility that the rooms be returned to the exact state in which they had been found.

The staff would wash the sheets, but the lightweight blankets and pillows must be returned to the closets. Not only were these items to be returned to the closet, but the pillows were to be fluffed up and the blankets were to be folded in a very specific manner. The corners of the blanket had to be perfectly aligned before folding the blanket in half and half again. When all the corners were straight, the blankets were to be oriented so that the open sides of the folded blanket faced the back wall of the closet and the smooth side of the blanket faced out toward future guests.

The instructor demonstrated the proper method for folding the blankets three times and then called upon several students to come forward and reproduce the technique. During the demonstration this instructor stopped at each fold and commented upon common mistakes and ways to avoid these. It felt a little like we were attending an introductory origami class. Were the students watching closely? The correct technique could only be mastered through careful observation and exact imitation. The folding process was broken into tiny steps so that any novelty was avoided and each folded blanket (or paper crane) would appear identical to the next.

The instructor was demonstrating not just *a* way of folding blankets, but rather *the* blanket folding *kata* [pattern, technique, tradition] established by the

staff at the Study Center. In the traditional arts *kata* refers to highly prescribed actions that aim at economy of movement, simplicity of form and strive to replicate an aesthetic beauty that has been carried down through many generations of masters. As Yano points out, *kata* is also a verbal suffix in Japanese that denotes a certain way of doing a task. *Kata* “places emphasis on technique, on the process of doing... *Kata* at once establishes, constructs, and verifies a relationship with the past [through a master teacher] (Yano 2002, 25).”

But why a *kata* for a mundane task like, blanket folding? That afternoon we spent a surprising amount of time practicing how to perfectly execute the folding of those blankets, yet we were not trying to master some traditional art form. What could the instructors have hoped the *fukushiki* students might gain from this activity?

The female instructor charged with the task of teaching how to fold the blankets was not simply demonstrating an efficient method for folding blankets. She made it clear to the students that a staff member had taken the time to show her “the proper way” [*tadashii yarikata o osowatta*] to fold and store these blankets. That is, the lodge had established a tradition that the teachers and students were being asked to respect. If the *fukushiki* students were going to be good guests at this lodge then they had a duty to uphold and maintain this blanket folding tradition.

I was impressed with the seriousness that this instructor imparted to blanket folding. After her presentation I asked her about her very precise instructions. She replied, slightly defensively, that: (1) this style of blanket folding was in fact mandated by the lodge and (2) that it was important for the

students to learn to execute everyday tasks well and take pride in their work. In effect by learning to properly fold and store the blankets, the students were also learning how to adapt themselves to shifting requirements of the social world beyond their natal homes. By folding the blankets perfectly, they were also perfecting themselves.

Mastery of external tasks, even a simple chore like blanket folding, was seen as important because proficiency at mundane endeavors increased the child's confidence in operating in the world beyond their parents. Mastery of the mundane was seen as particularly important for the *fukushiki* students. The more everyday tasks they could perform seamlessly, the more easily they could be incorporated into the wider social world.

Thus mastery of the proper *kata* for blanket folding was connected to the discourse on striving toward independence. Competence with a seemingly trivial tasks put the *fukushiki* students one step closer to independence, which was one of the trip's primary goals. Here "independence" did not mean of *freedom to do as one pleased*, but rather something closer to the learned *ability to comport oneself according to the demands of the particular situation*. That is, on this Study Trip the discourse on independence was a narrative of maturity.

Japanese organizations often have highly prescribed ways of carrying out specific tasks. Thus it was important for the *fukushiki* students to grasp that the procedures governing everyday activities could vary according to the traditions of the specific organization. If we visited another lodge we might well encounter a different blanket folding tradition. If the special needs students could learn to quickly adapt themselves to a new set of established procedures, this could be

very useful to them in their future work lives. It was pointless and even counterproductive to question the arbitrariness of the particular pattern, and in fact, none of the students (or their teachers) questioned the procedure.

Finally if the students could learn to be observant of the social landscape and organize themselves in accord with external norms that were established through previous precedent, then they could also learn by extension to organize and manage their own personal lives in a manner that would find favor, or at least avoid unnecessary friction, with peers and elders.

Before ending the blanket folding “seminar,” the instructor asked the students to return to their rooms and take a good long look at how the contents of the closets were organized before they disturbed the blankets and sheets. She reminded them that the following morning it would be the students’ responsibility to reproduce this same degree of tidiness, erasing any trace of their stay in the room.

I was somewhat skeptical of how seriously the students would take her solemn advice so I casually follow the older boys (Hiroki, Naoki, and Yoshi) back to their room. Yoshi actually did open the closet, but the three soon began to jostle with one another about who would get to sleep in the top bunk bed. Twenty minutes later when I returned, the boy’s room had been transformed by a fierce, ongoing pillow fight. The instructors could hear the commotion, but no one tried to intervene. And yet the next morning all of the rooms were returned once more to good order with little intervention from the instructors.

Ritual Fire, Communitas, & A Friendli(er) World

The event that was most anticipated before the trip, and most frequently memorialized in post-trip art classes, was the candle service. While the goal of the two-day trip was officially “striving toward independence,” the key word in the candle service was *yūjō*, friendship. This word was repeated many times in the course of the ceremony.

The ties of affinity that were carefully fostered on this trip were crafted within the special needs community. The irony was that *fukushiki* student’s shared sense of identity was rooted in their mutual exclusion from the mainstream classes. The candle service was much talked about, and fondly remembered, because it succeeded in creating a sense of emotional bonding or *communitas* within the *fukushiki* student body, but this sense of affinity and shared fate also attested to these children’s “special” status vis-à-vis their mainstream peers.

For safety reasons the event was held in a separate, non-carpeted building. To reach this building we had exit the main lodge and walk about five minutes down a path. Dusk was just settling over the mountain as we put on our shoes and headed outside. It was just beginning to grow dark as we entered the large octagon shaped activity hall with its high-beamed ceiling.

Some of the instructors had arrived a few minutes early to prepare the oversized, brush-metal candelabrum, which was sitting ready in the center of the hall. It held more than twenty large white candles, some at a height well above my head. The massive, multi-armed candleholder was secured at the base to two heavy blocks of wood to prevent it from tipping over. The children quickly

encircled this mammoth candleholder, but the instructors told them to step back and organize themselves according to their schools. Twelve-year-old Yoshi, who was the master of ceremonies for the event, was given a wireless microphone. He asked his peers to please sit down on the wood floor with their classmates.

Each student received a small white candle with a cardboard base to catch any dripping wax.⁹ A sixth grade student from each class was given a much larger candle. After all the students were seated on the floor and everyone was holding a candle, *Ichikawa-sensei* nodded to Yoshi, who took a step forward and announced the beginning of the candle service. A hush went over the students as the florescent ceiling lights were flipped off one by one and the hall was plunged into semi-darkness. There was a long moment full of whispering and then a door at the far end of the hall clicked open. A hooded figure dressed in a black cape stepped into the hall.

This silent apparition was illuminated only by a large burning candle that he held above his head with both hands. He advanced a few steps into the hall and then stood motionless with his feet spread apart and the candle positioned high above his head. He uttered no words and remained completely still for perhaps ten seconds.¹⁰

The single point of flickering light was just bright enough to throw dim shadows over the students who were seated closest to the mysterious figure. There was a hushed sense of tension building in hall. Some of the younger students were clearly on edge. I was sitting next to seven-year-old Kai, who kept whispering to himself, "It's over. It's finished. I won't do it."

The hooded figure began silently advancing toward the seated students. Eyes were riveted on the candle held high above his head. When the anonymous figure was about ten feet from the closest group of children he broke the silence with these solemn words, "I have come to deliver the burning fire of friendship [*yūjō no hi o todoki ni mairimashita*]."

With these words Yoshi, who was the only student standing, took a single step toward the hooded figure and held out his candle. "Please deliver the fire of friendship to us."

There was a long pause and then the anonymous figure's voice boomed back across the dim space, "Shall I pass this fire of friendship to Midorikawa Elementary School?"

The eight students from Midorikawa Elementary then stood up behind Yoshi and answered his query in chorus, "Please give us the fire of friendship."

"Shall I give it?" asked the figure to the darken room.

This time the Midorikawa students answered more firmly and in louder voices, "Please do give us the fire of friendship."

"It shall be done," retorted the hooded figure in an overtly serious tone. He advanced toward the Midorikawa students and lowered his burning candle slowly toward Yoshi, who raised his candle toward the single point of flickering light.

Once Yoshi had received the "fire of friendship" he passed the flame from his candle to the smaller candles of his seven classmates. The Midorikawa students remained standing and two instructors quickly arranged them into a tight circle with their candles held toward the middle of the ring. One circle of

children was illuminated by the flickering candle light, while six groups of students remained sitting on the floor in the semi-darkness.

On cue a sixth grade student from another school stood up and said, "Please delivery the fire of friendship to us." The ritual was repeated using exactly the same words until the hall was filled with a soft yellow light cast by fifty-five candles from seven circles of *fukushiki* children. The twenty-three instructors watched from the outer edge of the hall.

The hooded figure then told the students to slowly follow him to the center of the hall where the large candelabrum sat waiting. The students formed a loose circle around the candelabrum. The older students were invited to step up to the oversized candleholder and light one or two of the long white candles. The hooded figure lit the candles at the top, which were much too high for even the tallest sixth graders to reach.

The teachers formed an outer ring around the students. Everyone was facing toward candelabrum, which when lit bore a slight resemblance, in scale and proportion, to a Christmas tree. The hall was filled with soft light from many candles, large and small. Some of the smaller candles had already been reduced to half their original size. A female instructor motioned to Yoshi for the microphone and led the students in singing the Japanese version of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*: "Glory, Glory, Halleluiah. Glory, Glory, Hallelujah; *eikō are hareruya...*"

At some point during this song the hooded figure slipped away, disappearing into the shadows at the edge of the hall. After the singing was finished the hand-held candles were put out and the flames on the candelabrum

were also extinguished. One by one the overhead lights were flipped back on. As the candle smoke drifted slowly toward the high ceiling, the children began to murmur and move about, slipping out of the ritual space and falling back into normal time.

What are we to make of this pastiche of a candle service, which draws on symbols whose origins lie far beyond the borders of Japan? Was this an “authentic” ritual or was it just a pale Japanese imitation of something that once belonged to the realm of the sacred? If the candle service was a success then what did it accomplish for the *fukushiki* participants?

In his classic work on the origins of religion, Durkheim made a useful distinction between the sacred and the profane. For Durkheim the profane is ordinary, everyday time, whereas the sacred is an experiential reality in which the share bonds of community are heightened through participation in highly stylized events that are given a collective meaning. Durkheim’s insight was that ritual served to demark these two temporal realities. “[T]wo worlds exist that are heterogeneous and incommensurable (2001, 164).” Rituals not only keep these two incommensurable worlds separate but also result in a strengthening of the group’s collective beliefs, which ultimately can be reduced to a commitment to, and belief in, the group itself.

Durkheim argued that rituals are “the means by which collective beliefs and ideals are simultaneously generated, experienced, and affirmed as real by the community (Bell 1992, 20).” Turner, expanding on Durkheim, conceptualized rituals as dramaturgical devices for promoting social cohesion within a society (Turner and Turner 1992, 3). If we accept this view of ritual then the only

measure “authenticity” is to be found in the ability of the stylized actions to move the participants toward a heightened sense of emotional connectedness, a temporary state which Turner termed “*communitas*.”

Within the candle service there certainly was a shared sense of heightened emotional intensity. This intensity was crystallized in presence of the anonymous hooded figure who bore the fire of friendship to the children out of the darkness (cf. Turner and Turner 1978, 243). Through the repeated chanting of “*yūjō no hi*” [the fire of friendship] and through the action of slowly spreading the candle’s flame among the seven circles of children, the students’ attention was focused first on the individual classes and then on the large group of similar peers.

The seriousness and solemnity that pervaded the hall during the candle service argue that the *fukushiki* children experienced some sort of communion in the flames of the flickering candles that evening. Geertz’s assertion about the efficacy of a ceremony appeared to hold true for the *fukushiki* students that night. “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world (1973, 112).” By requesting the fire of friendship from the hooded figure and then passing the flame among their peers, the ties that bound these children together through mutual obligations became manifest in the common source of the fire. By envisioning themselves as a one coherent group connected by series of common experiences, the *fukushiki* students experienced the world for a brief instant as they would have liked to imagine it—as a friendly place filled with similar peers.

What went unmentioned is that the one common factor that defined their affinity at its most fundamental level was their mutual experience of being at the periphery of the educational meritocracy. This outsideness is what bound these children together as a single group. It was the *raison d'être* for the overnight excursion itself. Perhaps this peripherality, and the ever present threat of stigmatization, provided the impetus to envision and enact the world as "friendly place."

The instructors were well aware of the artifice of the candle service, but that awareness did not seem to diminish the efficacy of the ritual. When I asked about how they had decide on singing *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, no one could provide definitive answer. It was a famous, heart lifting song that had been used in previous years. "Was there some reason the song should be avoided?" I could not think of any, so the song was used again the following year.

Games & Community

Following the candle service the instructors organized a few games that could be played with a large group of students. The game that generated the most excitement and was played for the most rounds was a variation on rock-paper-scissors. This activity was easy for everyone to participate in as all the children already knew the patterned format and the game only required three simple words.

In the version we played that evening at the sound of a whistle everyone initiated a round of rock-paper-scissors with a nearby partner. The loser had to place his or her hands on the winner's hips becoming a caboose, while the

winner was transformed into a train engine. Each two-person train then went off in search of another game of rock-paper-scissors. With the losing train linking up at the rear, the winning train always doubled in length. As the trains grew in length the tension built.

This game put students who might otherwise have said very little or nothing to each other in verbal and physical contact. The verbal contact was negotiated through the tightly controlled dialogue of the game itself: *jan-ken-poi* [rock-paper-scissors]. The physical contact took the form of linking up at the hips to form a train. The trains then hopped around the hall until two engines challenged each other to another round. After three or four games most students had spoken to and hopped along with many students they did not previously know.

It was 8:20 p.m. when the activity center's florescent lights were flipped off, and we walked back up the hill to the lodge. With no moon in the night sky, it was dark in these low mountains that lay far beyond the reach of the urban lights. Accustomed to brightly illuminated city streets most students opted to stay close to the instructors' flashlights.

Bathing, Skinship & Affinity

Upon returning to the main lodge the students were told retrieve their bathing towels and pajamas from their rooms and proceed to the communal bath in the basement of the building. Bathing together reinforced the sense of interconnectedness and affinity that had just been spoken of, and enacted, at the candle service. Communal bathing brought a level of intimacy to the group that

was typically reserved for the family. In fact, for some of the youngest students this was probably one of their first times to bath with peers rather than being bathed by their parents. By slipping into the hot bath water together, students and teachers were temporarily divesting themselves not only of their clothing, but also of their social personas as pupils and instructors. By revealing what was usually concealed, the communal bathing worked to reinforce the trip's theme about the special ties that united them.

Although Takemori Vitality Plaza could sleep nearly two hundred guests, the lodge had only a single public bath that could accommodate no more than eight or ten people at one time. Therefore the bathing of the boys and the girls had to be staggered. Since the males outnumbered the females, it was decided that it would be more efficient if the men and boys bathed before the women and girls. A male teacher in his late twenties joked that the boys should go first because "men are quick [*otoko wa hayai kara*]."

The children and their instructors undressed together, placing their clothes in wicker baskets that slid into cubbyholes near the entrance to the bath. A few first and second graders needed help pulling their tee shirts over their heads.

We entered the tiled bathing area holding only a small towel used for washing. The bath was arranged in the typical Japanese fashion with a large central tub surrounded by eight faucets attached to wall at point near the floor. Plastic buckets and stools were stacked neatly near the sliding door. The children were told to carry a bucket and a stool over to a faucet where soap and shampoo was sitting ready.

One of the trip mottos that was frequently repeated was, “take responsibility and look after yourself,” so initially the instructors tried to adopt a hands-off approach to the bathing. One teacher stayed near the door to ensure that no one slipped, but the children were expected to wash themselves. It was soon apparent, however, that many of the younger students were not accustomed to washing themselves. The line of boys waiting impatiently for a place at one of the eight faucets soon grew long. A couple of still soapy boys tried to enter the bath and were sent back to the faucets for a second rinse, further delaying the group’s slow progress.

After about fifteen minutes less than half the thirty-six boys had finished bathing, so the instructors decided they needed to speed things along. The goal of “looking after yourself” was sacrificed to the need for efficiency. The teachers arranged two stools behind each of the eight faucets and had most of the remaining children take a seat. Warm water was splashed over the whole group and the soap and shampoo was placed within reach of either stool. Several instructors then moved among the stools quickly washing the boys down, rinsing them off, and escorting each child over to the bath for a quick dip. Some of the older boys mildly protested this car-wash approach to the bathing. Those who protested were allowed to wash themselves, but many of the lower grade children gladly submitted to being scrubbing down. It was not everyday that you had a chance to have one of your teacher scrub your back.¹¹

A spirit of comradeship and friendly bawdiness prevailed during the bathing. In about ten minutes time most of the remaining children were washed and rinsed. As instructors helped the younger children towel off after their baths,

we could hear (and even catch glimpses of) the girls milling about in the hallway. They were growing impatient for their turn in the bath. The double sliding doors to the changing room, were not tightly closed so the more boisterous girls could easily peer in on the naked boys and their teachers. There were even a few catcalls from the hallway demanding that the boys vacate the bath. "If you boys are so 'fast' what's taking so long?"

It was nearly 9:15 when the last of the boys slipped into their pajamas and the bath was relinquished to the girls and the female instructors. Bedtime had been scheduled for 9:30 p.m., but the time for lights out was extended a little to give the girls enough time for a more leisurely bath. The previous casualness about nudity did not work in the reverse. The doors to the changing-room were firmly secured behind the girls and the boys were told not to stand about in the hallway.

By a few minutes before 10:00 p.m. all the students were settled in their bunk beds and the lights were switched off. At 10:30 the teachers went to check on the students, most of whom had already drifted off to sleep. The more talkative children were told to put their heads down. While the students slept or chatted, the teacher gathered in a large tatami mat room for an informal meeting [*hanseikai*] to review the day and confirm the following day's schedule. This gathering also gave the twenty-three instructors a chance to get to know one another and renew old friendships. After thirty minutes or so the teachers broken into several smaller groups, dividing along gender lines. The instructors told stories and chatted with one another over with barley tea¹², rice crackers,

chocolates, pickled daikon and dried squid. I took leave of the group at just past 11:00 p.m., but a number of teachers stayed up socializing late into the night.

Public Speech, Stuttering & Obtrusiveness

The next morning I awoke at 6:30 a.m. to find that most of the instructors were already up and moving about. The late sleeping students were awoken a few minutes before 7:00. By half past seven the rooms and hallways had been swept, sheets had been taken to the laundry room and the blankets had all been very neatly folded and returned to the closets. A breakfast of grilled salted salmon, rice, soft boiled eggs and miso soup was served at 8:00 a.m.

At 8:45 the students brought their packs to the front hall where everyone was gathering for the final meeting. At this meeting two students from each class, who had not played a major part in the opening ceremony or at the candle service, said a few words about their stay. This meeting followed a pattern very similar to the final meeting held each day at school. The students reported on which event they thought was most memorable.

A few of the students with speech impediments struggled to make their words understandable to the large group of peers. Several students needed to repeat themselves two or three times before their meaning was clear. Since speech impediments and stuttering were not uncommon in the special needs classes, *fukushiki* students learned to be quite patient with their peers' speaking idiosyncrasies. When several members of a small class have a mild speech impediment the other members of the group tend to adjust to the difference, which is normalized within the group's daily routines. This is what occurred in

the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary. However, when such students found themselves surrounded only by smooth speaking peers their speech differences became much more obtrusive. That is, they became more of an impediment.¹³

Before departing from the lodge at just after 9:00 a.m. the students called a staff member to the front hall. As a sign of thanks the children sang a popular school song, "Good Day, Goodbye Bye Bye." A light rain began to fall as we hiked down the mountain to the waiting bus.

Passbooks & Passing

We were onboard the bus by 10:00 a.m., but we were not heading straight back to Tokyo. The morning and early afternoon were to be spent exploring a natural history museum dedicated to the habitat and history of the Arakawa River basin.

Here I must digress a little to explain about Japan's disability passbook system as this complicated (and facilitated) our visit to the museum. This incident at the museum points to the tension and ambiguity that surrounds the *fukushiki* student's bracketed identity, not visibly disabled and yet clearly different from their peers attending mainstream classes. The visibility or rather invisibility of the *fukushiki* students' impairments impacted on their trip to the Arakawa River Museum. This incident illustrates the temporary, liminal, in-between nature of the *fukushiki* status and also points to how the state attempts to manage the lives of disabled and borderline youths.

As with most public facilities in Japan, the prefectural museum we were to visit provides a discount for elementary school children, and the entrance fee is waived entirely for disabled persons. In order to obtain free entrance, however, the disabled individual must show their disability passbook [*shōgaisha techō*], which documents the specific disability and provides verification of level of impairment.

In Japan when the central government opts to provide a social welfare benefit to a special subgroup of citizens it usually does so by first issuing a passbook that confirm a special status upon the holder. For instance, in the wake of the World War II, bomb victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were issued Atomic Victim Health Passbooks, which certified the holder's right to medical supports and provided for a small social welfare payment.¹⁴

Individuals with physically disabilities may obtain a *shintai shōgaisha techō* [Physically Disabled Passbook], while youths with mental or emotional impairments may apply for a "Love Passbook" in Tokyo or a "Green Passbook" in Saitama Prefecture. The passbook provided to youths with cognitive or emotional differences goes by a number of euphemistic names that vary by area of residence.¹⁵ Unlike the other passbooks, the Love or Green Passbook is only issued to youths. After turning twenty years of age the holder may apply for a Mental Disability Social Welfare Insurance Passbook [*seishin shōgaisha hoken fukushi techō*].

All of these various passbooks provide the holder with access to tax deductions, discounts on public transportation, taxi coupons, reduced or free entrance to many facilities and in some cases a small monthly welfare allowance

is also available. The actual amount of the welfare payment depends on the specific diagnosis, the level of impairment and area of residence.¹⁶ Individuals with cognitive and emotional impairments are ranked on a three-tiered scale.

While these passbooks provide holders with access to an array of social benefits, these advantages are offset by the stigma that accompanies official disability status. In the case of the *fukushiki* students, parents had to weigh the social welfare and educational benefits against the potential stigmatization of their child. Caregivers struggled with this decision because applying for a passbook acknowledges that the child's developmental "delay" is not a temporary state of affairs and also provides physical representation of a disability that is mostly invisible.

The students in the *fukushiki* system are generally eligible for disability passbooks. However, at Midorikawa Elementary in 2001 only a few students had opted into the disability passbook system.

Putting Impairment on Display

In early August Ichikawa-sensei telephoned the Arakawa River Museum to inform the staff of our trip itinerary and to inquire about the price of admission. The regular adult admission was ¥1,000 (about U.S. \$10), but for elementary school students the fee was reduced to only ¥300.

Ichikawa-sensei explained that the students on this school trip had learning impairments and they were studying in special needs classes. Wasn't there a special discount for youths with impairments? Couldn't the entrance fee be waived for these students?

The museum staff member, who was a public servant, asked if the students held disability passbooks, in that case the entrance fee would be waived. Ichikawa-*sensei* was well aware that only a small minority of the *fukushiki* students had applied for a disability passbook. Even the families that had applied for the passbook would probably not wish to send the passbook along with their child to save a mere three hundred yen. At the museum it would be awkward if some students had to show passbooks and others did not. This would focused attention on the individual student's official status and put their disabilities on display. So Ichikawa-*sensei* answered truthfully but tactically, "Some of the students have the passbooks and others have not yet received them."

The museum staff requested a tally of those students who held the passbook. The passbook holders would receive free entrance and the other students would be charged ¥300. Ichikawa-*sensei* asked if the museum was actually going to demand that all of the passbook holders display their passbooks. Wasn't that a little troublesome?

The staff member checked with his superior and then said that a tally of the passbook holders would be sufficient. The students would not have to display their passbooks at the entrance gate. That was the answer that Ichikawa-*sensei* had been searching for. He told the museum that there would be fifty-five disabled students attending, and they all had passbooks. (Here he was bending the truth and contradicting his earlier statement.)

Not wishing to argue the point, the museum staff member accepted this reversal and made a note of the school trip on the museum calendar. Ichikawa-

sensei related the details of this conversation to the other *fukushiki* teachers at a teacher's meeting in late August. I asked him why he had reversed himself and insisted that all the students were passbook holders when he (and the museum) knew that they were not. Ichikawa-*sensei*'s answer revealed that he had spent considerable time thinking over this incident.

He argued that first of all, the *fukushiki* students should have easier access to social welfare benefits. It was humiliating and discriminatory [*sabetsuteki*] for public facilities to demand that elementary school children display their passbooks in order to receive a small discount. Why should they have to forever be displaying these passbooks that served as badge of their disability? The whole passbook system could be seen as a sort of officially sanctioned, institutionalized form of discrimination. Ichikawa-*sensei* seemed to view his role not only as the *fukushiki* students' instructor but also as their advocate. As their advocate he realized that a frontal attack on the passbook system was pointless and even counterproductive because he did not have the power or resources to alter the system. However, he could win small victories for his students (and their families) through little rear actions, like this one at the entrance gates to the Arakawa River Museum.

Passing & Covering

The *fukushiki* students do not fit neatly into the categories provided by Japan's disability passbook system. They are suspended somewhere between the clearly disabled students attending the protective schools and the "normal kids" in the mainstream classes. Since their impairments were not written on their

bodies, some of the children in the *fukushiki* track could almost pass as “normals” [*futsū no ko*] in Goffman’s sense of the term (1986, 5 & 138).

While no one likes to be teased or taunted, the *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa Elementary did not seem overly concerned, or at least not preoccupied, with passing themselves off as *futsū no ko*. They never referred to themselves as “disabled students,” but they did use the *fukushiki* label. Perhaps from their perspective there was little or no conflict between being a *fukushiki* student and being a *futsū no ko*. Especially for the transfer students it appeared that once they could see their *fukushiki* classmates as *futsū no ko* then they could accept the *fukushiki* identity for their own school careers.

Rather than “passing” in Goffmanian sense, “covering tactics” more aptly described the approach that the *fukushiki* students, their parents and teachers applied to many situations. In order to “pass as a normal” one needs to limit and control information so that others do not catch on, and no one’s eyes are turned toward fatal flaw that irrevocably separates the stigmatized perspective from that of the center. But the *fukushiki* students, teachers and even most of the caregivers did not expend much effort trying to hide information or disguise the student’s status. The players in the game generally acknowledged that the *fukushiki* students were “special” but then worked to play down the importance of, or deflect attention away from, their differences. Ichikawa-sensei wanted the museum to acknowledge the *fukushiki* student’s special status, but he did not want to have to put their passbooks on public display because that was seen as unnecessary and humiliating.

Within the *fukushiki* community speech impediments were less problematic than they were outside of it because peers did not generally draw attention to spoken flaws. In this case, and in the case of the absent passbooks, the obtrusiveness of the impairment was contained, rendered less apparent and partially erased by the covering activities of the participants.

Even the generic name that was given to the excursion, "The Overnight Study Trip," could be interpreted as a covering device of sorts as it deflected attention away from the *fukushiki* students by purposely failing to mention *who* was participating in the trip.

Caregivers, teachers and the *fukushiki* students themselves took a pragmatic approach to the double-edged issue of visibility. When necessary they would point to the special needs status or invoke the *fukushiki* label, but more often they sought to deemphasize the gap or the perceived differences between the special needs category and the mainstream students. In effect this approach sought to simultaneously acknowledge the *fukushiki* students' special status, while arguing for an expansion of the *futsū no ko* [regular kid] category to encompass the children participating in the *fukushiki* classes.

As our bus turned right and pulled into the parking lot adjacent to the Arakawa River Museum the pre-trip tug-of-war between Ichikawa-*sensei* and the public servant at the museum was on my mind. Would the children's disability status be called into question again?

The museum complex was an impressive sight. A massive wooden waterwheel in front of the main building was turning at a steady clip, lifting buckets of water fifteen or twenty meters into the sky. The students were told to

wait near the base of the waterwheel. I followed Ichikawa-*sensei* up to the ticket gate.

The clerk located our group's name on the day's schedule and then confirmed their status, "The group of children with handicaps, right?" Ichikawa-*sensei* gave a nod and fifty-five tickets were passed through the slot in the window without further comment. We purchased the instructors' tickets separately. With all the tickets in hand Ichikawa-*sensei* walked triumphantly back to where the children and instructors were waiting by the waterwheel.

For a couple of hours the children were free to explore the museum's exhibitions. We then ate a boxed lunch in the shade by a pond. At 1:30 p.m. our bus pulled up to the curb near the exit to the mini-water park, and the students settled in for the two-hour trip back to Tokyo. We sang a few songs but most of the children were fast within an hour.

Mother/Child Dyad: Amae Denied

This trip, which sought a limited independence within the structure of the group, was supposed to begin with the mother and child jointly preparing the travel pack, and to end with a triumphant return to one's waiting mother. Yet this happy narrative and celebratory return to Tokyo was not shared equally.

We were scheduled to arrive back at our departure point at 3:30 p.m., but the traffic moving toward the city was a little heavier than anticipated. It was a few minutes after 4:00 p.m. when our bus turned a corner and the apartment complex where we had gathered the previous morning came into view. There

was the same group of mothers, and younger siblings, waving enthusiastically as our bus pulled to a stop.

The sleeping children were awakened and everyone tumbled off the bus. Packs were distributed to their owners, the driver was thanked and goodbyes were said. Then the students were told to regroup according to their schools. Ichikawa-*sensei* asked the two most senior students (Naoki and Yoshi) to say a few words about the successful trip to the waiting mothers, but just then Iida-*sensei* realized that Hiroki was not with his classmates.

There was no possibility that he had been left behind. I had just seen him a moment ago, and the students had been counted twice as they got off the bus. We called Hiroki's name and looked around for him, but it was clear that he had slipped away ahead of his peers. The brief final meeting was held without Hiroki. Ichikawa-*sensei* asked the mothers to put the children to bed early, as the following day was a school day.

On the way back to the train station I realized that Hiroki was the only student from Midorikawa not to have a parent waiting to greet the bus. Did he slip away because he felt self-conscious about not having a mother awaiting his return? This was not the first time that Hiroki had gone missing. Three months earlier at the Sports Festival, the *fukushiki* students had been told to gather for a group photo at the end of the day's events. Hiroki had participated wholeheartedly in the competitions and performances, but then suddenly vanished without taking leave of his peers or teachers. On both occasions Hiroki was the only *fukushiki* student not to have a cheering mother on hand, although his father and older brother were in attendance at Sports Day.

The day after returning from the Study Trip, *Ichikawa-sensei* gently admonished Hiroki for disappearing without saying goodbye to his classmates or thanks to his teachers. Hiroki claimed that he thought the trip was finished.

The instructors were aware that Hiroki's parents were in the midst of a difficult divorce. Hiroki's father had even made a point of speaking with *Ichikawa-sensei*. He claimed that his wife was having a mental breakdown. The *fukushiki* instructors understood the difficulty of Hiroki's situation, and they tacitly allowed him to slip away from events where the other children's mothers were sure to be present.

During and immediately after Hiroki's parent's divorce, there was a Cheshire cat quality in his attendance at group events; if the other children's mothers drew too close, he was always in danger of melting away. Friendly and socially interactive by nature, Hiroki was caught between longing to be present for the festivities and wanting to be erased from sight. In Hiroki's case the mother-child dyad was broken or severely strained. With his mother in absence it was sometimes difficult for Hiroki to remain present with his peers.

In chapter five I move the analysis away from the school and toward the family. How are the lives and trajectories of the special needs children bound up with their families, particularly with their mothers? I focus my analysis on the narratives of six of the *fukushiki* mothers, each of whom spoke at length about her child's life history and the experience of raising a special needs child in urban Japan.

Notes

¹ All of the special needs students who participated in this annual joint excursion were classified as having either cognitive or emotional impairments. Children with physical impairments were grouped separately.

² While fieldtrips are common at Japanese elementary schools, overnight trips are usually restricted to upper level students in the fifth and sixth grades. The *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa Elementary had many opportunities to participate in fieldtrips. There was little or no pressure to stay up with the mainstream national curriculum so off-campus events could be regularly scheduled for *fukushiki* students in all grade levels. Even the first grade students participated in the Overnight Study Trip.

³ Public schools in Japan often issue detailed instructions on the type of gear to be used at school and on school trips. Precedent usually carries the day. A sudden switch to a six-compartment travel pack, for instance, would have caught both the parents and the pack makers by surprise. Public elementary schools in the Tokyo area often have a special relationship with a small store within the school district. These mom and pop stores stock items that comply with the specifications set by a particular school, such as physical education uniforms, school hats, swimming caps, earthquake and fire protection gear [*bōsai-zukin*], seat cushions, art supplies and indoor shoes [*uwabaki*]. My son's public elementary school has an established relationship with a small store that stocks items required at his school as well as recommended supplies that are in use at three daycare centers in our district. This store carries the specific type of packs required for school excursions. Tokyo is a city that offers a seemingly infinite array of consumer choices; these school stores provide a controlled interface between the elementary school and the marketplace making it relatively easy caregivers to "select" items that comply with the suggestions of the particular school.

⁴ While Momo was born and raised in Tokyo, her parents were both recent immigrants (or long-term residents) from Mainland China. It is not too surprising to find a foreign national in the *fukushiki* system, particularly in the Tokyo area where a majority of non-Japanese residents make their homes in Japan. By the early 1990s more than 1% of Japan's population was comprised of long-term foreign residents, particularly persons with ties to the Korean peninsula and the Chinese mainland (Sugimoto 1997, 186-7). In chapter five I discuss Momo's situation in more detail.

⁵ Usually in the *fukushiki* class, older students were paired with younger classmates for daily activities, such as the afternoon trip to the school kitchen or visits to the school library.

⁶ Some might argue that the constructedness of public performances are particularly visible in Japanese in part because of the clear distinctions that are maintained between more formal (more public) and less formal modes of discourse. When one addresses a group there are modes of speech and rhetorical patterns that mark this discursive modality as different from more causal (less constructed?) modes of interaction.

⁷ Ties between the *fukushiki* track students attending different elementary schools were reinforced by various collaborative activities. For example, in February of each year the *fukushiki* students attending Midorikawa Elementary joined with *fukushiki* peers from three surrounding public schools to practice and perform a joint theatrical production that was hosted at the local community center.

⁸ Independence or self-reliance [*jiritsu*] is written by combining the character for “self” [自] with the symbol for “to stand” [立]. Thus the literal meaning of independence is “to stand by oneself” or “to stand on one’s own feet.”

⁹ These candles reminded me of the small white candles that are used for the midnight mass on Christmas Eve at many Catholic churches. I wondered if this *kyandoru sabisu* wasn’t inspired by the candle services held in Christian churches. I asked about this at the party held for instructors after the children had been put to sleep. No one could recall the original source of inspiration for this event, but the teachers insisted that any hint of Christianity was purely coincidental. After I asked the teachers to speculate about the origins and symbolic meanings of the candle service several instructors became concerned that “candle service” might be too closely associated with Christian traditions. To allay these concerns the following year the event was re-christened “candle fire,” but the content remained unchanged.

¹⁰ As my eyes adjusted to the darkness and focused on the silent hooded figure holding a burning candle above his head, I couldn’t avoid making the associative link with the Ku Klux Klan. I tried to push this disturbing image out of my head, but the parallels were striking to me. The effect on Japanese elementary school students must have been considerably different. Still, the darkness, anonymity and silence that enshrouded the figure all combined to create a palpable sense of tension in the hall.

¹¹ I had to wonder how this episode would have been viewed in the United States where “no touch” policies have become the default operating procedure at so many schools. Such policies seem very alien in the Japanese educational context, where teachers and parents often cite the importance of *omoiyari* [empathetic understanding] and are quick to extend a hug to an upset child. Japan’s hot spring and public bathing culture also praises the merits of *hada to hada no fureai* [skinship relations] wherein friendships are cemented and confirmed by divesting oneself of outer trappings of everyday social life. U.S. attempts to ban all physical contact between teachers and students have not been universally embraced (no pun intended). In Europe there appears to be wider acceptance of appropriate touch policies. See, for instance, Barlow and Cullen-Powell’s essay on the uses of therapeutic touch in programs for special needs children in the U.K. (Barlow and Cullen-Powell 2005, 138).

¹² In past years alcohol had always been served at this “meeting,” but after several negative stories about public servants drinking on school trips appeared in the newspapers, the local board of education decided to enforce a ban on all alcohol at school functions. Several teachers complained mildly about the new policy.

¹³ Goffman argues that speech impediments are among the most stigmatized differences because with each utterance listeners are reminded of the speaker's failure and incompetence. Thus the speaker continually introduces a sense of unease and tension into the group (1986, 49). However, it seemed that within the *fukushiki* community, speech differences were pervasive enough to reach a point of naturalization. It was only when the student stepped outside this community that their speech impediment became more noticeable and problematic.

¹⁴ Weiner has written about the systematic denial of the atomic victim's status to the tens of thousands of resident Koreans, who were working in Nagasaki and Hiroshima at the time of the A-bomb attack. See *The Representation of Absence and the Absence of Representation: Korean Victims of the Atomic Bomb* (Weiner 1997, 79-107).

¹⁵ The specific name of the passbook for cognitive and emotional impairments is left up to the individual prefectural authorities.

¹⁶ For instance, in 2007 Tokyo residents who held an "Love Passbook" and were ranked level 1 (the most severe level of impairment) were eligible for a monthly stipend of ¥50,750, or roughly \$420 at an exchange rate of ¥120/U.S. dollar. Source: Tokyo Metropolitan Welfare Center for the Disabled [*tokyō-to shinshin shōgaisha fukushi sentā*], accessed 24 September 2007:
<http://www.fukushihoken.metro.tokyo.jp/shinsho/index.html>

Chapter 5

Asking Silence to Speak

If you just glance at him you wouldn't think that he had a disability. I mean there isn't anything particular about his face or anything. Sometimes when people don't realize he is disabled, it can cause problems so we decided to make a badge for him. His name is on the front and on the back it says, "I have an impairment, but if you explain things slowly, several times I can understand." ... There are those who think that there is no need to broadcast the fact that your child is disabled. For Kai we thought it was best to have this kind of badge.

- Nakahara Kumi (Kai's mother)

If we had sent Dai-kun to a special ed. school, he would have been situated... in an entirely different world, "the world of disabled children."

- Koiwa Mika (Daisuke's mother)

Is Something Awry?

In this chapter I explore how six women narrate the lives of their special needs children. Each of these women is the mother of one of the students studying in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary. By looking closely at how these women go about telling their stories of raising a "special needs" child in the suburbs north of Tokyo, I seek to unravel how commonsensical notions about developmental differences are both constructed and contested in contemporary Japan.

I consider macro-level social structures that govern the articulation of difference and micro-level politics through which these caregivers attempt to increase opportunities for their children while simultaneously aiming to limit stigmatization. At the macro-level the state is able to deploy, define and effectively control the key terms in this debate through its social welfare, medical

and educational bureaucracies, which are tightly integrated. Publicly subsidized, semi-mandatory post-natal health check-ups provide the initial interface between the doctor-state and the mother-child dyad. When a child is tagged as “*ijō ari*” [out of the ordinary] further interviews, testing and evaluations are carried out at local social welfare and “educational consultation” offices. The Japanese state thus has a very well developed strategy for identifying and screening out children with developmental differences; however, as these six narratives will show, the mothers have their own set of tactics for minimizing the stigma implicit in the “*ijō ari*” and “*shōgaiji*” [disabled] labels and delaying the segregation of their children.

At the micro-level of interpersonal politics, these narratives reveal conflict and ambiguity regarding the issue of visibility. Since these children’s differences are not clearly written on their bodies, caregivers must engage in an endless series of choices about if, when and how to draw attention to their children’s differences. Often the children’s mothers attempt to minimize, qualify and limit the significance of any differences between the *fukushiki* students and their mainstream peers, arguing that these are “just regular kids.” On the other hand, the invisibility the children’s differences, and the low profile of the *fukushiki* classes within the schools, is sometimes seen as disadvantageous. In order to be effective advocates for their children, caregivers must sometimes acknowledge and even draw attention to the *fukushiki* students’ developmental differences. And yet when caregivers emphasize these differences, they run the risk of their children being cast as *yosomono* [outsiders, aliens, irrelevant persons], people who can be legitimately overlooked. Thus the desirability of having access to

some special accommodations within the educational system must be weighted against the long-term cost of putting an invisible impairment on display.

Goffman makes an analytic distinction between *discredited* individuals, whose stigmatized attributes are readily visible, and *discreditable* individuals, “whose stigma is not observable or otherwise available (1986, 4).” *Discredited* individuals (and their caregivers) assume that the *discrediting* differences are self-evident and immediately perceivable to all, whereas the stigmatized attributes of *discreditable* persons only become apparent in some circumstances. Thus with the careful management of information there is a possibility of concealing the stigmatized attribute and “passing as normal” or at least minimizing the significance of the perceived difference.

In Goffman’s terms the *fukushiki* students are “discreditable individuals” because the ways they differ from their peers are generally not visible at first glance. In all of the narratives analyzed in this chapter, this “politics of visibility” impacts the choices that these women make on behalf of their impaired children. The visibility (or invisibility) of the stigmatized attribute may be a particularly salient factor in Japan where the mythology of homogeneity, which is narrative of differences erased and denied, continues to be a strong, authoritarian discourse (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 107; Yoshino 1998, 18-19; Fowler 1996, xiii; Valentine 1990).

Chapter Organization

Each woman constructs her narrative differently. I attempt to reveal and analyze some of the ambiguity and conflicts that arise within and between the six

narratives. Such an approach requires that we pay close attention to the turns of phrases employed and the direction in which each informant takes the interview. This level of detail necessitates that the chapter is somewhat longer than the other five chapters in this dissertation.

I therefore subdivide the material into three parts. Part one begins by examining the use of the “disabled youth” [*shōgaiji*] label in Japan. I then outline my relationships with the children’s mothers and discuss practical and ethical problems of doing ethnographic fieldwork on an emotionally sensitive topic such as special needs children. In part two (the main section), I provide a narrative summary and comparative analysis of each of the six narratives. In part three I reflect on the meaning of silence (as two participants declined, or rather avoided, the interview) and consider common themes that emerge in the six narratives. For readers who are interested in hearing the women’s voices more directly, I provide a complete transcription of each translated interview in appendices E through J.

Part One: Private & Public Worlds

The “Disabled” / “Healthy” Divide

What turns some attributes into “disabilities” and casts others as merely idiosyncratic differences? When impairments are not clearly written on the body, the struggle over defining someone as “disabled” or not is often waged largely within language itself. Bourdieu characterizes language as both a “battlefield” and a “structuring structure” for, as Sapir-Whorf also argued in the 1930s, it

provides us with the categories through which we frame and interpret the world (Webb et al. 2002, 95).¹ Individuals may attempt to challenge, reject or redefine the terms of the debate, but language exists apart from any one person or group.

The women who related the six narratives at the center of this chapter all had to contend with and negotiate a binary categorization scheme, supported by the state, that divides children into two mutually exclusive classes: *kenjōji* [healthy] and *shōgaiji* [disabled]. Many of the children who end up attending *fukushiki* classes fall on or near the grey borderline that separates these two ways of being in the world. It is the caregivers who must engage and negotiate with a social welfare and education apparatus that aims to separate children into the *kenjōji* and *shōgaiji* categories.

As a modern, highly rationalized nation, the Japanese state controls an extensive system of integrated bureaucracies, which both authorizes and censures the use of language in its schools and national media. The state bureaucracy attempts to control the “legitimate” use of language, and has virtual monopoly power in determining the official terms of the debate. This “legitimate language” bans certain terms from the discussion, while also authorizing and supporting the categories that can be invoked in official discourse with the bureaucracy. One of the basic binaries that the Japanese state is committed to, and invested in, is the common sensical distinction between healthy and impaired citizens.²

In the case of the *fukushiki* students, the *kenjōji/shōgaiji* binary is problematic in part because these children’s “impairments” are not inscribed on their bodies. Their “disabilities” only become visible when they step into the

social world and interact with peers, parents, teachers and other adult authorities. In most cases the *fukushiki* children were assumed to be physically “healthy” at birth, but at an early age they were marked by the medical, social welfare, and educational authorities as falling outside the parameters of normal development and were labeled as impaired.

Once a child has been tagged as “*ijō ari*” [un-usual, abnormal or amiss], the state social welfare bureaucracy steps in to track the child and encourages the caregivers (mothers) to participate in special programs for “impaired” children. In order to gain access to an array of educational and social welfare benefits, parents are encouraged to apply for disability passbooks [*shōgai techō*] that identify, name and rank their child’s specific impairment. Classifying a child as “impaired” has many implications. For instance, if a young child is tagged as “*ijō ari*” it becomes difficult or impossible to gain access to regular public daycare programs and caregivers are usually urged to place these children in segregated protective educational schools [*yōgo gakkō*].

While each of the six *fukushiki* mothers responded somewhat differently to the news that her child was developmentally different, a common theme that runs through all the interviews is the fear that the impaired child will be isolated from their age-grade peers and their social contacts will be limited to “the world of the disabled child.”

Tactical Mothers: Recasting Teachers as Allies

The interviews in this chapter were only possible because these six women and I had a mutual, ongoing relationship that was entangled with the

school lives of their special needs children. Prior to these private conversions I had met numerous times with all of these women at Midorikawa Elementary School, and I had interacted with some of the mothers on various fieldtrips and special events. For example, the *fukushiki* students visited the factory where the school's milk was bottled. The class took a trip to the Transportation Museum in Chiyoda-ku, and we spent a day at a natural history museum that had exhibitions on the flora and fauna of the Kantō Plain. On these outings a number of the mothers accompanied the class to help supervise the children.

The relationship between a parent and an elementary school teacher can be a delicate or even a tremulous one, as both adults wield considerable influence on the young child's life. The mothers of the *fukushiki* students were particularly aware of the central role the teachers played in their children's lives, especially the role of the veteran instructor, *Ichikawa-sensei*. The caregivers thus worked hard at forging a positive, even intimate, relationship with their children's instructors.

Usually in Japanese elementary schools the homeroom instructor stays with a class for two academic years. From the student's perspective, the homeroom teacher typically changes at the beginning of third and fifth grades. However, public elementary schools that offer a *fukushiki* track usually provide for just one multi-grade class per school. Therefore the teacher(s) and the students in the *fukushiki* classroom often stay together for many years. In fact, a number of the special needs students at Midorikawa Elementary remained under the tutelage of *Ichikawa-sensei* for the duration of elementary school.

The mothers of the *fukushiki* students made an effort to cultivate alliances with their children's teachers and also with one another. A number of the younger mothers were quite social with one another. On three different occasions, during the twenty-one month period of my field research, these women organized an evening out with the *fukushiki* teachers. All of the *fukushiki* mothers attended these three parties, and they made sure all three *fukushiki* teachers (and myself) were available on the evening of the party.

At Midorikawa Elementary off-campus, unofficial, social interaction between the instructors and the parents was highly unusual. In fact, these parties were unique to the *fukushiki* class. These informal gatherings were not organized by the school, but rather were instigated and organized solely by the *fukushiki* mothers.

On these evenings out there were two rules that were implicitly understood: (1) no children or husbands were to attend and (2) ample alcohol was to be consumed. The exclusion of the *fukushiki* students and the husbands from these parties served to bind these women together as a group of supportive peers and also to recast the relationship between the *fukushiki* teaching staff and the children's mothers.

Each of these three parties followed a similar pattern. We gathered at 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. at an inexpensive *izakaya* [Japanese pub, which often have private or semi-private rooms for small parties]. After eating and drinking for a couple of hours, the bill was divided and we exited the pub. Ichikawa-*sensei* and Fujita-*sensei* then excused themselves. Several of the women also returned home at this point, but a majority of the women proceeded to a second party. Iida-*sensei* (the

assistant teacher in her early thirties) and I joined the somewhat smaller group for a second round of drinking and singing, usually at a *karaoke* bar. This second party broke up around 11:30 p.m. just in time to catch one of the last trains home.³

The conversation at these drinking parties rarely touched on academic matters. Unencumbered by children or spouses and outside of the bounds of the school, the talk veered toward more intimate topics, such as stories of their exploits before they were married and gossip about their husbands. After enough alcohol had been consumed, several of the organizers would try to get the teachers and other mothers to reveal how they met their spouses and provide other details about their private lives.

These occasional parties could be viewed as offstage or backstage events. The backstage nature of the gathering encouraged everyone to be a little more at ease with one another when we met in other venues. These parties fostered a sense of shared fate and mutual reliance among the mothers and a sense of alliance between the mothers and the teachers.⁴ It seemed to me that these women were actively trying to re-script their children's teachers, who are public servants, as mutual allies and members of *their* inner circle.

Private Words & Public Discourse

The interviews at the center of this chapter, which were held toward the end of my research, would not have been possible if these women did not view me as somewhat of an insider and an ally. All six women agreed to be taped. They understood that I was writing a dissertation, yet in many ways these

conversations were private and confidential. They were based on a sense of mutual trust. A number of the informants prefaced parts of their narratives with, “just between the two of us [*koko dake no hanashi desu ga*]...” And yet it could not be “just between the two of us” because there was a tape recorder on the table, and they knew that their words, camouflaged only by a thin veil of pseudonyms, would eventually be turned into text—a text they could not control. Bakhtin argues for the primacy of *context* over *text*, so perhaps it is inevitable that I feel a slight unease at turning these words, shared in private, into a public text that is subjected to the cool light of the disinterested analyst (Bakhtin 1981, 84-5).⁵

At the same time, these women realized that this interview presented an unusual, even unique, opportunity to comment upon the social context and constraints within which they were trying to build meaningful, hopeful lives for their children and themselves. While this dissertation is the vehicle through which their private words are made public, it was the informants themselves, who chose to cast private, sometimes painful, experiences back in the public sphere.

Bourdieu writes that under the right set of conditions, such extended, open-ended exchanges hold the possibility of creating “the conditions for an extra-ordinary discourse, which might never have been spoken, but which was already there, merely awaiting the conditions of its actualization (Bourdieu and Accardo 1999, 614).” The frequency of both laughter and tears during the interviews, reminds me that the experiences conveyed were emotionally complex and taxing. In the transcription and commentary that follows I try to avoid objectivizing these women or doing analytic violence to the spirit of their

narratives, and yet inevitably there are times when my analytic framing does not mirror their own view of the situation. When I am aware that our views diverge, I attempt to point out and drawing attention to the places where my reading may differ from their own (see Appendix D: On Translation, Transcription & Interpretive Anthropology).

Ordering the Narratives

In part two I begin each of the six interviews with a short description of the child, whom I knew as a student in the *fukushiki* classroom. Then I proceed to a summary and analysis of the mother's narrative. Following standard practice in Japanese, I use the family name to refer to adult informants, and I refer to the children by their first names. Thus in this chapter "X-san" always refers to the mother, Ms. X. When I need to refer to the father (Mr. X) I use some modifier to indicate this shift.

The ordering of the narratives impacts on the subsequent analysis because juxtaposing any two narratives draws out contrasts between them. With six narratives there were many alternate ways to order the material. I considered organizing narratives according to several different criteria. For example, I could have used the children's subcategorization within the *fukushiki* system. That is, emotional impairment versus cognitive disability, but this seemed quite arbitrary as these official designations had little practical meaning within the *fukushiki* classroom. The narratives could have been grouped according to the students' grade levels at the time of the interview, but one of the unique features of the *fukushiki* system is that children of various age-grades study together. Ultimately

I decided to order the narratives according to the work status of the fathers, who are otherwise absent from the analysis. This seemed relevant because there are places in the narratives where the economic, symbolic and cultural assets available to the individual families appeared to impact on the ways that the women constructed their stories.

This white-collar, blue-collar divide is particularly visible in the first two narratives. The head of Koiwa family was employed as a mid-level executive at IBM, whereas the head of the Hibino family was working on a production line at a plastic parts factory and his wife, Junko, was employed part-time at a convenience store. This contrast holds for interviews three and four as the head of the Lin household was a computer software engineer and Kento's father was a carpenter. In interviews five and six the contrast is somewhat less sharp. Naoki Furukawa's father was a sales executive at an insurance company, whereas Kai Nakahara's father was employed at a clothing company that specialized in making uniforms.

Social class also had an impact on the families' perceptual field and on expectations for one's children. In the narratives it sometimes appeared that coming to terms with the developmental horizon of a special needs child was particularly difficult for the families with the most economic, cultural and social resources. The working class Hibino family could encourage Aya to consider a career as a hair stylist, but the considerably more affluent Koiwa family did not want to contemplate the career options that might be open to Daisuke.

The child's gender and the presence or absence of other siblings also entered into the telling of these six narratives. I have placed the stories of the two

female *fukushiki* students (Aya Hibino and Momo Lin) in sequence (interviews two and three) so that parallels and contrasts that are rooted in gender might be more apparent.

Part Two: Six Tales of Developmental Difference

Table 5.1: The Koiwa Dyad: Mother & Son

Child	KOIWA Daisuke (boy)
Age / Grade Level	7 years old / 1 st Grade
<i>Fukushiki</i> Subcategory	“emotional impairment” [<i>jōcho shōgai</i>]
Mother / Estimated Age	KOIWA Mika (housewife & PTA member) / ~35
Father’s Occupation	executive at IBM-Japan (computer company)
Siblings	sister: Mayumi (11 years old)
Disability Passbook	no

Daisuke at School

In the spring of 2003, Daisuke was still the youngest member of the *fukushiki* class and the only first grader in the group. He was quite a large child, strong and athletic. Daisuke was actually somewhat bigger than all three of his second-grade peers in the *fukushiki* class. In the interview his mother, Mika, noted with regret that “people often mistake my son for a third-grader, even though his cognitive development is probably only that of a three or four year old.” Daisuke’s physical size was at odds with his socio-cognitive development, and this sometimes made things difficult for his caregivers.

Daisuke’s developmental differences manifest themselves in several ways. At the age of seven he still had only a very limited use of language. His comprehension of basic spoken Japanese appeared to be adequate, but he rarely

initiated a conversation and his replies were usually limited to one, two or three word sentences. Also it was very difficult for Daisuke to stay seated at his desk for longer than fifteen or twenty minutes at a stretch. It was quite common for him to suddenly jump up and race over to the sliding glass doors at the front and back of the classroom. He would quickly unlock the door and slip outside.

The *fukushiki* classroom overlooked the school garden, where Daisuke loved to run between the rows of tomatoes, sweet potatoes and morning glories. Initially one of the instructors would chase after Dai-kun, but he was very fast and this chase soon became a game. Eventually Ichikawa-sensei decided that we should change tactics. When Daisuke escaped from the classroom we would call him back, but the instructors would no longer pursue him around the school grounds (unless he was distracting the mainstream first-graders studying just down the hall). Even when he was out in the garden Daisuke kept an eye on what was happening in the *fukushiki* classroom and would usually return within five or ten minutes. If he had been gone longer than usual, Ichikawa-sensei would sometimes have another student retrieve him from the schoolyard. This task typically fell to one of the fifth or sixth grade boys, Yoshi or Hiroki.

Koiwa-san reports that her son was diagnosed with “autistic tendencies” at three years of age. As far as she knew there was no autism on either side of the family so her son’s developmental difference came as a shock.

Conversation was difficult for Daisuke, but he was actually quite interested in his peers and engaged with his teachers. He used to sometimes turn to me and say, “*Mare-sensei—saru* [Instructor Maret—monkey!]” I could not decide if Daisuke meant, “You look like (act like) a monkey” or “Be a monkey”

or maybe more directly, “You are a monkey!” Perhaps this was Daisuke’s way of letting me know that he knew I was somehow different from the other teachers at Midorikawa and from most of the adults he encountered everyday. Did my curly brown hair remind him of a monkey?

Daisuke generally got along well with his *fukushiki* classmates, although the other, older autistic child in the class (Fumi) would occasionally lose patience with him and scream, “*Dame dame dame Dai-kun—dame* [No, no, no, Dai-kun. Stop it]!”

Interview with Koiwa Mika

Daisuke joined Midorikawa Elementary’s *fukushiki* class as a first grader in April of 2002. I had begun my research the previous summer (June, 2001), so Koiwa-san took my presence in her son’s classroom as a given. In fact, she was somewhat taken aback when I reminded her that I would soon be finishing my fieldwork. This underscores the fact that, although I had informed the students’ parents of my status as a doctoral student, they tended to see me as an assistant teacher and *forget* that I was also doing research.⁶

At the time of our interview Koiwa-san was a “freshman” mother among the veteran *fukushiki* caregivers, yet she was already having an impact on Midorikawa Elementary’s *fukushiki* community. She was among the more outspoken, energetic and self-assured caregivers. Koiwa-san attended most of the class outings and all of the special events at the school. She was instrumental in helping to organize the occasional parties with the *fukushiki* instructors, and she was an active member of the Parent Teachers Association.⁷ In fact, she told

me that she that she explicitly joined PTA in hopes of bringing an awareness of the *fukushiki* track students to Midorikawa Elementary's mainstream families.

Although I had known Koiwa-san for only eleven (rather than twenty one) months, I felt quite at ease with her. I think that to some degree she saw me as ally and perhaps as a co-conspirator in her struggle for greater awareness and integration of the *fukushiki* students with their mainstream peers at Midorikawa. At the *fukushiki* class parent-teacher meetings Koiwa-san would occasionally throw a knowing glance my way when we touched on a potentially sensitive issue, such as barriers to the *fukushiki* students accessing the After School Program. She was proactive and wanted to change things. At the close of the interview, she asked me if I knew procedures for requesting additional assistant teachers from the school administration.

The Koiwa family appeared to be considerably more affluent than a majority of the working, middle class families that were predominant in the Midorikawa school district. The Koiwas had the resources to relocate three times in the years preceding this interview. Their first move was away from the husband's natal home due to conflicts between Mika and her mother-in-law over how to raise Daisuke. The second move was promoted by friction with neighbors, who were upset about the noise Daisuke was making. The Koiwas moved a third time so that their son would be able to more easily commute to Midorikawa Elementary. (The public elementary school in their previous district did not offer a special needs track.) Koiwa-san's husband, who was a mid-level executive at IBM, had ample income to support Mika and their two children.

When Daisuke was first diagnosed as having “autistic tendencies,” the Koiwas sought out advice at a number of hospitals and clinics. They were able to afford private sessions of occupational and educational therapy for their young son. In the afternoon Koiwa-san would sometimes drop by the school in her black, late model Volvo to pick up Daisuke and his fifth grade sister, Mayumi. The other *fukushiki* parents never used an automobile to retrieve their children from school.⁸

For this interview Koiwa-san chose to meet me at Midorikawa Elementary. We met just after noon on a Monday in early March of 2003. I had procured the use one of the unused, empty classrooms located on the third floor of an older building on campus. The *fukushiki* classroom was located on the first floor of the same building. The two rooms adjacent to this classroom were unoccupied so, although we were meeting at the school, the setting was actually quite private. The entire third floor of this building was seldom used and unoccupied at the time of the interview so there was little chance of a student or teacher overhearing our conversation.

Koiwa-san was quite tall and held herself confidently. On the afternoon of the interview, she was dressed in dark pants and a white blouse, a professional sort of look. At the time Daisuke was just a few weeks shy of second grade.

In our conversation, which stretched to nearly three hours, Koiwa-san made a point of speaking very directly to the issue of impairment [*shōgai*]. On several occasions she said that she “didn’t hide anything” [*tsutsumi o kakusazu*] from anyone, and she did not want to have to cover up anything about her son’s disability. In her narrative she moved from a position of bewilderment and

denial (“at that time I must have been more focused on protecting myself than on protecting Daisuke”) to the role of an enlightened activist parent, who wanted to make the “correct” choices for her impaired son. For example, she told me that once they realized that Daisuke had a developmental impairment she sought out advice from educational and therapeutic experts. When Daisuke was still a preschooler the Koiwas briefly tried putting their son on Ritalin and another medication in the dopamine family, but these drugs did not appear to do much for him so they soon gave up on a medicated solution.⁹

When Koiwa-san invokes the phrase “didn’t hide anything,” it is difficult not to hear the echo of the inverse statement refracted in her words. That is, her assertion begs the question “Was there something to hide?” The issue of hiding something would not arise if there were not an implicit understanding that developmental impairments often evoke stigmatization. It seems that Koiwa-san was saying that while she knew that her family might have to deal with discrimination and stigmatization, she still was determined not to conceal anything about her son’s impairment.

Several times in the interview she declared that she was ready for a fight, and she would not withdraw just to make things more comfortable for the other parents, other children or even for her own son.

While at times this may be really hard on Dai-chan, he must deal with it [stigmatization] or he will never be able to join in the larger society. I realize that this approach may lead to some conflicts, but I am prepared to fight any necessary battles during my son’s remaining five years at Midorikawa Elementary [*momareru tokoro wa momarete koi*]...

Koiwa-san was very much aware of the stigma that often accompanies a developmental impairment. She outlined two basic approaches for coping with this stigma. She claimed that many parents try to avoid or limit stigmatization by insisting that their special needs child be placed in a mainstream classroom even though the academic work will be impossible for them [*benkyō wa ii kara*]. She rejected this approach and told me how she gradually came to acknowledge and accept Daisuke's developmental difference. But she was determined not to be passive about stigmatization.

Koiwa-san worried over the labels and associations that mainstream students attached to the students in the *fukushiki* track at Midorikawa Elementary. Specifically she contrasted the negative implications of terms like *hen* [strange/weird] and *baka* [idiot/fool] against the positive connotations of the terms like *omoshiroi* [interesting] and *tanoshii* [fun]. She wondered about how to encourage the mainstream students to see the special needs children in a positive light.

Her primary tactic for limiting stigmatization was to press the elementary school on two fronts: (1) She wanted greater visibility for the *fukushiki* program and repeatedly complained that the special needs class was not even mentioned at the all school informational meeting. (2) Koiwa-san also sought more contact between the *fukushiki* students and their mainstream peers. She argued that the special needs children could be integrated into a number of the less academic mainstream classes (art, music, shop, home economics, etc.) if the school would just provide a few additional assistant teachers.

Koiwa-san was the most political of the six *fukushiki* mothers interviewed. By “political” I mean that she actively attempted to intervene in the micro-politics of the school and in the ways that others labeled her son. She also attempted to preserve and increase the educational options and social opportunities that were available for Daisuke and the other *fukushiki* children by talking directly to school administrators and to parents at the PTA. She realized that there was a lot more at stake in schooling than simply the accumulation of academic knowledge or credentials.

Bourdieu argues that in France, the modern school system is the primary mechanism through which the values and relations that make up the wider social space are passed on from one generation to the next. He shows that while the rhetoric of modern education is a discourse of opportunities for individual self-improvement and economic advancement, the real work of schools is to reproduce and make “natural” the inequalities in social and economic relations that already exist. Koiwa-san was very sensitive about how the *fukushiki* students were being framed within the larger school community, and she questioned the range of educational opportunities that the system was providing to Daisuke and his classmates. She was determined to gain greater inclusion for her son and the other *fukushiki* students.¹⁰

Koiwa-san saw Japanese elementary school as the critical staging ground for developing social skills and social connections that would be essential in adult life. That is why it was so important for her that Daisuke was not sent to a segregated protective school. She wanted to ensure that her son’s socialization

and future opportunities were not restricted to the “world of the disabled child...”

I just want to try to expose Daisuke to mainstream society as much as possible. I want people to accept him the way he is. If we had put Dai-kun in a special ed. school, he would have been surrounded by children with really serious impairments. That would have situated him in an entirely different world, “the world of disabled children [*shōgai no aru ko no sekai*].” I didn’t want that. Of course, I know that Daisuke’s options are limited and when it comes time for junior high he may have to join the protective school. That’s why I want him to mix with regular kids [*futsū no ko*] as much as possible now. I want my son to be exposed to how regular kids think and respond, even if it is impossible for him to act or think in the same way.

Table 5.2: The Hibino Dyad: Mother & Daughter

Child (boy/girl)	HIBINO Aya (girl)
Age / Grade Level	11 years old / 6 th Grade
<i>Fukushiki</i> Subcategory	cognitive impairment
Mother / Estimated Age	HIBINO Junko (working in a convenience store) / ~40
Father’s Occupation	factory worker (plastic parts factory)
Siblings	sister: Tomoko (13 years old)
Disability Passbook	in process of applying

Aya at School

At the beginning of second grade Aya Hibino transferred into *fukushiki* track at Midorikawa Elementary after having “difficulties” in her mainstream first grade class at Daisan Primary. I met Aya when she was a fourth grader and saw her several times a week until just before she was about to start sixth grade. Aya was a warm child with a very short temper. The *fukushiki* instructors frequently cautioned her about the use of overly *kitsui* [biting, sharp-edged]

language. Aya's words and her tough-girl persona sometimes drove her first and second grade classmates to tears. Hibino-san, Aya's working class mother, acknowledged some responsibility for her daughter's quick tongue and for her temper. Her mother said (only half jokingly) that when the situation called for it, she did not hesitate to throw a punch herself.

Aya's sudden bursts of anger frequently had their source in her frustration with academic tasks. If she was having trouble with some assignment, Aya was quick to aggressively announce, "I don't get it, and I won't do it [*wakaranai—yaru mon ka*]." On some occasions when I tried to help her with math worksheets or Japanese character practice, she would rebuff me in not so subtle terms, "I said I don't want to do it. You're a nuisance. [*yaritakunai to itteru n da, urusai*]." When Aya wanted to show that she meant business, she would tear up the offending worksheet.

And yet there was a gentle, even tender child hiding inside, who usually was trying to stay just out of sight. For instance, one day Fujita-sensei was teaching brush stroke calligraphy. The instructor usually assigns a specific character to be practiced, and draws several examples of the target character. The students copy the character with brush and ink on rice paper. However, on this occasion Fujita-sensei decided to let the students choose their own word to practice. Kai, a second grade boy, settled on "garbage" [*gomi: ゴミ*], which he wrote out using katakana, the simplest of the three Japanese scripts. Fujita-sensei protested this choice, suggesting *hana* [*花: flower*] as a more suitable alternative, but Kai already had his brush on the paper and was enthusiastically executing

his “choice.” Yoshi, who was in the sixth grader at the time, opted for *shi* [死: death], which he rushed to write out several times before Fujita-sensei could rule against this selection. By that point Fujita-sensei was probably regretting his liberal decision regarding “student choice.” Yet when I glanced over at Aya, I was surprised to see that she was not joining in this minor rebellion. Instead she was diligently and meticulously writing out the character for “friend” [友]. A revealing choice, considering that she so often had trouble managing her friendships.

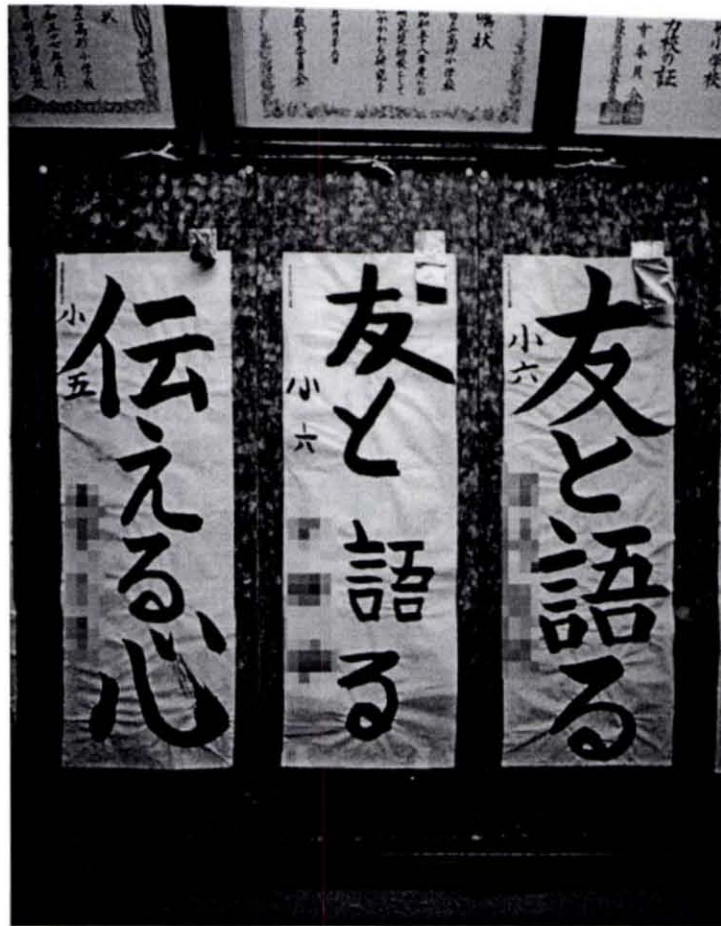


Figure 5.1: Brush Stroke Paintings Done by Fukushima Students at Midorikawa
From right to left: “Talk to Friends” (twice) & “Communicate from the heart”
(Photograph by & courtesy of: Ōhashi Hitoshi; altered by Morisue Makiko)

At one point in my fieldwork I returned to the United States for several weeks. On the September morning that I reappeared in the *fukushiki* classroom, I was surprised to see an excited Aya rushing up to give me a hug. I think she may have surprised herself a little as she momentarily slipped out of her tough-as-nails posture.

Interview with Hibino Junko

It was just past noon on a sunny Friday in early April of 2003 when I arrived at the station to meet Hibino-san. She was waiting for me on the other side of the ticket gate and threw a wave in my direction. Aya's mother was the only parent who opted to meet me for lunch at a restaurant, rather than in one of the classrooms at Midorikawa Elementary.

We talked for over two and a half hours at a small café that she had selected. When I went to pay the bill she protested mildly. This became a little joke between us, as she admits at the very end of our interview that she had teased her husband that morning telling him she "had a date." I told her if this was "a date" then she would have to allow me to pay the bill. This is indicative of the tone of our friendship, which was more playful by several degrees than my relationships with the other children's mothers. I admired Hibino-san's frankness and even audacity. I think that I presented her with an opportunity to work against some of the other axes in her life that cast her in the role of "mother," "wife" and "staff" at a convenience store.

At the time of Aya's birth, Junko and her husband were living together with the husband's mother and their first daughter, Tomoko. By two or three

years of age it was clear that Aya was developmentally delayed. Opinions in the Hibino household divided about how to proceed. Junko looked into the city's preschool program for developmentally delayed children (Aozora Gakuen), but her "old-fashioned" mother-in-law and "inflexible" husband insisted that in the world of public opinion "regular is best" [*futsū ga ichiban*]. They were opposed to tracking Aya into specialized educational program. Differences over how to raise Aya intensified until eventually the mother-in-law decided to move to a separate residence. On the surface this mirrors events in the Koiwa household. The stereotypic acrimony between a young Japanese wife and her husband's unyielding mother is a plot line that unfolds with predictable results in both families.¹¹

In both the Koiwa and Hibino households, intergenerational conflict came to crystallized around the *correct* (Koiwa-san's term) way to raise the developmentally delayed child.¹² In both cases this led to an irreparable split between the two generations and joint residence was ultimately terminated, although after a two-year separation the Hibinos decided to resume living with the mother-in-law.

While Koiwa-san and Hibino-san shared in a struggle with their respective mother in laws, on most other fronts these two women were operating from quite different social fields. Of the two households the Koiwas had access to considerably more capital—not just economic assets, but "capital" in Bordieu's sense of the term. That is, the differences rested not only material things, such as the Koiwas' Volvo (which also has symbolic value) but also immaterial assets such access to social networks (who can get the head of the Board of Education

on the phone), as well as the much more diffuse, implicit authority that comes from an academic degree and the status or privileges that are derived through affiliation with a prominent corporation, government office, or private institution (Bourdieu et al. 1990, 1). All these forms of capital can be tactically deployed and traded upon to gain advantage within specific social, economic, and cultural fields.

While the Hibinos were not poor, the family's socio-economic, cultural-educational and symbolic capital resources were more limited than some of the other *fukushiki* families. This impacted not only on the ways that Hibino-san maneuvers on Aya's behalf, but also on the habitus and the social horizon of everyone in the family. Hibino-san's word choice and phrasing reflect a working-class, blue-collar background, which she made no apologies for and did not attempt to conceal. Her comments sometimes reflected an almost brutal honesty, as when she told me that she "really hates it when people are two-faced or doubled-sided [*ura omote ga aru no wa kirai dakara*]." Did her working class background make her especially sensitive to the times when someone said one thing, but meant something else entirely?

At the time of our conversation Junko had been working semi-full time at her brother's convenience store for several years. Aya used to sometimes help out in the convenience store, but she is no longer interested in *that* sort of work. But what sort of future, might Aya be interested in aspiring toward?

At Japanese elementary schools (and even kindergartens) it is quite common for teachers to ask students to draw or paint a picture of their "future self." When Aya was a fifth grader she painted a picture of herself as a barber or

hairdresser and won a school prize for her artwork.¹³ Having never won such a prize she was very proud when it was announced that her picture would be displayed in the art gallery at City Hall. Hibino-san told me that she was surprised to learn that her daughter had drawn a picture of herself as a barber, but she thought this might be a sensible plan. Perhaps this shows that Aya shares her mother's practical view of the working world.

Hibino-san was very much aware of the social forces that might constrain her children's future options. She had a nuanced understanding of merits and demerits of participating in Japan's disability passbook system. Many of the *fukushiki* children's parents were reluctant to apply for a passbook. Hibino-san explains her reluctance by using the metaphor of the disability passbook as a (scarlet) letter that attaches itself to the child. She feared that the passbook would be a physical manifestation of the stigmatization that would follow her daughter throughout her life.

Does Aya have a disability passbook? Well, that was really a dilemma for us. When you think about your kid's future, you realize that the passbook is something that is going to stick with them throughout their lives [*isshō tsuite kuru wake*]. It's like there is a (scarlet) letter attached to these kids [*retteru o harawareru mitaina kanji*]. We were fully aware of that so we never applied for the passbook.

Here Hibino-san spoke very directly to the issue of stigmatization, an issue that was usually tactfully avoided. She was acutely aware that participation in the disability passbook system carries the cost of potential stigmatization. One tactic that Hibino-san used to mitigate this stigma was to delay participation in the passbook system for as long possible. But eventually (toward the end of fifth

grade) Hibino-san did end up opting into the system because without a passbook her daughter's educational options after junior high would be severely restricted. Hibino-san was aware that the passbook materializes and embodies what Foucault termed a "dividing practice" (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 7-8). The disability passbook splits the population into two mutually exclusive groups: *kenjōsha* [able-bodied] and *shōgaisha* [impaired]. Foucault argues the modern state uses its panoptic powers of observation, measurement and assessment to *normalize* and control the population by assigning individuals to various manageable categories of subjectification. The "power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it also individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another (Foucault 1977, 184)."

Hibino-san tried using various tactics to delay and deflect this normalizing process, which threatened to stigmatize her youngest daughter, yet she was practical, rather than dogmatic, in her approach. At first she placed Aya in a mainstream classroom, but when that did not go well, she soon transferred her daughter into the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa. Initially the Hibinos rejected both the "disabled" label and the disability passbook, but in the end the family decided it was in their daughter's interest to acquiesce and accept a passbook so that she could obtain educational and social welfare resources that are monopolized, controlled and rationed out by the state. Hibino-san realized that there are social costs implicit in this tactical move.

At the end of the interview Hibino-san spoke of her extreme dislike of *ura-omote* [front-back] people, who say one thing but mean another. The disability

passbook itself is a double-encoded talisman. While the passbook entitles the holder to an array of subsidized medical, educational and social services, it also simultaneously labels, ranks and divides those who possess it from the rest of the citizenry.

Aya's disability status also affected Hibino-san's interactions with her own peer group. Here Hibino-san explained how she tries to stay engaged with the mainstream mothers at Midorikawa Elementary so that they might not view her daughter as an outsider. Yet in the end, she wonders if her efforts to stay connected with mainstream parents really make any difference.

Aya may have to face a lot of that kind of thing [prejudice] so I try to drop by the school as often as possible. I know that Aya is trying her best so I have to try my best too. I make a point of talking to the mainstream mothers whenever I get the chance. I want to stop them from thinking of the *fukushiki* kids as outsiders [*yosomono to omowanai yō ni*]... Still, as a parent you do get tired of trying to explain about your child. Sometimes I feel that if I do or don't explain it all works out about the same. The people who are going to understand, do understand and those that don't never will...

Table 5.3: The Lin Dyad: Mother & Daughter

Child (boy / girl)	LIN Momo (girl)
Age / Grade Level	8 years old / 2 nd Grade
<i>Fukushiki</i> Subcategory	cognitive impairment
Mother / Estimated Age	LIN Mei (housewife) / early forties
Father's Occupation	computer software engineer
Siblings?	brother: Shuji (10 years old)
Disability Passbook	yes / ranking "B" (moderate)

Momo at School

When I first met Momo she was still a first grader. Unlike some of her peers, Momo had no autistic tendencies. Normally she was talkative and social, although she was shy around strangers. As long as nothing went wrong, Momo wore a smile on her face, and she was prone to giggling. If something did go wrong, Momo was quick to tears. Yet she completely lacked Aya's short temper, which always baffled her. At the daily morning meetings Momo would almost jump out of her seat as she beamed at her classmates and announced in very loud voice, "*genki desu* [I am fine today]!"

Momo enjoyed games and sports, but physical education was a challenge as her balance was less than perfect. This was most probably an aftereffect from the viral infection that caused an acute brain inflammation when she was two years old. Lin-san said that her daughter continued to take a low dose epilepsy drug daily to prevent seizures. At Midorikawa Elementary Momo never had a seizure, and she appeared to be a healthy, active and happy child.

One day during break time Momo and Kai, who were both second graders at the time, were playing together in the *fukushiki* classroom. They were tossing a soft rubber ball back and forth and laughing whenever one of them would drop the ball, which was most of the time. Momo threw the ball and it happened to land on my desk, knocking a notebook and my electric dictionary to the floor. Momo froze and looked over at me. I smiled back at her and said, "It's okay; no problem." But Ichikawa-sensei, who had seen the incident out of the corner of his eye, came over and said "Momo, how about apologizing?" Momo stared back at him, glanced over at me and then looked down at her feet. I could see that she

was sorry, and I wanted to insist that it really was “no problem,” but Ichikawa-sensei gave me a stern look, so I remained quiet. A brittle silence descended over the three of us that was finally broken by Momo’s stifled tears.

Unfortunately Ichikawa-sensei was not seeking tears. “Momo, that’s no good. Say you are sorry.” Momo was shattered. Her tears were flowing freely now. In fact, she had gotten herself so worked up that she could not catch her breath. She was weeping and struggling for air. By that point it was impossible for her to say much of anything. Still, Ichikawa-sensei would not let it pass. “Momo, you must say you are sorry. If you can’t apologize you’ll never be a big girl.”

Momo’s second grade classmate Kai intervened at this point, offering his own “*gomennasai* [sorry].” Ichikawa-sensei, who was still looking sternly at Momo, praised her classmate, “Kai is such a big kid. See how he says ‘sorry’ and ‘thank you’.” Of course that only made Momo weep all the more. At that point Daisuke, a first grader, decided to join. He came over and tried to catch Ichikawa-sensei’s eye as he offered his own “*gomennasai*.” Kai and Daisuke then joined forces and started happily repeating the missing phrase over and over as if to make up for Momo’s silence, “*gomennasai, gomennasai, gomennasai*.” Momo was beyond consoling. Ichikawa-sensei had Daisuke go over and get some tissues. Momo accepted the tissues and tried to catch her breath, but Ichikawa-sensei was not letting her off the hook. “Momo, see how kind Daisuke is. Now say ‘thank you’ for those tissues...” This effectively doubled Momo’s task for now she had to not only apologize to me, but also show appreciation to Daisuke.

After about ten minutes, Momo calmed herself down enough to tell me in a very soft voice “*gomennasai*.” I gave her a little hug and said, “*erai* [what a big girl].” However, that day in Momo’s *renrakuchō* [daily notebook] Ichikawa-sensei wrote a long note to the Lins requesting that they please stop treating their daughter like “a little princess,” who never has to say thank you or sorry. Momo’s mother accepted this mild scolding and reported at the next parent-teacher meeting that she was trying to have her daughter say “sorry” when appropriate.

It might seem as if Ichikawa-sensei was being overly harsh with Momo, but the incident highlights the clear differentiation of the teacher’s role from that of the parent. Doi argues that socio-cultural and linguistic forces tend to promote a high degree of emotional dependency [*amae*] within the mother / child relationship (Doi 1981, 28-30, 65). In contrast teachers are expected to introduce children to the requirements of the wider social world, particularly the need to successfully manage interpersonal relations within a group.

As Cummings (1980) and Lewis (1996, 89) argue, Japanese elementary schools tend to focus on the “whole child.” Teachers are expected to promote not only their students’ intellectual abilities but also, and perhaps more importantly, their social and emotional development. Thus Ichikawa-sensei can be seen to be drawing on a bond [*kizuna*] that he has established with Momo to try to insist that she begins to learn to see things from another person’s perspective. The first step is to be able to say “sorry” without hesitation. In Japan the articulation of both “thank you” and “sorry” is perceived to be a critical prerequisite for

successful social relations. Children (and adults) who avoid these two key terms are seen as immature [*osanaï*] and self-absorbed [*wagamama*].

Ichikawa-*sensei* censured Momo by saying that if she did not learned to say sorry she could never be “a big girl” [*o-nē-chan*]? Would he have told a second grade boy that he could never be “a big boy” [*o-nī-chan*]? Perhaps it is seen as especially important for girls (particularly girls who are developmentally delayed) to learn to clearly articulate “sorry.”

In these interviews many of the mothers complained about having to forever explain about their children’s impairments and to apologize for their children’s infractions.¹⁴ I was left wondering if the *fukushiki* students’ fathers also found this to be a common point of frustration or is the expectation of a ready-made apology a gendered experience?

Interview with Lin Mei

Lin-san met me at Midorikawa Elementary at noon on a cold, clear Monday in early February. She was a few minutes early so she decided to wait discreetly in the hallway just outside the *fukushiki* classroom. Momo knew that her mother was coming to school that day. Several times that morning Momo turned to me and said, “Today you are having a talk with my mom, right?” Did she want to let me know that she understood that it might be important if her mother was coming to school to talk with one of her teachers? Momo was quick to spy her mother’s silhouette through the opaque glass in the classroom’s sliding door. She tugged on my shirt, “Mama.” I slid the door open, and Momo exchanged smiles with her mother.

The two of us walked up two flights of stairs to the third floor, where I had arranged a desk and a couple of chairs in one of the unused classrooms. Lin-san was wearing a crystal pendant in the shape of a rabbit. When I mentioned pendant she said with a little laugh, “Year of the Rabbit,” and we discovered that we were born in the same year. Although she had come to Japan as an adult, Lin-san spoke excellent Japanese with only a very slight Chinese accent. The interview was held in a second language for Lin-san and for myself, yet the conversation flowed easily as our shared outsider-insider status provided us with a common bond.

Although we on friendly terms, this was the first time we had the time and space to share any substantial details about our lives beyond Midorikawa Elementary. She immediately began to tell me about how she met her future husband while teaching at a university in Shanghai. She was lecturing in Chinese literature, and he had a position in the department of computer science. That was in the late 1980s when China was beginning to permit more open travel. They decided to marry and move to Tokyo to further their academic studies. He came first and she followed the following spring.

Their journey across the Sea of Japan came with price: culture shock, to be sure, but more to the point, an immediate loss of status. The Lins experienced a double devaluation of their economic assets and combined social capital. Lin-san found herself washing dishes in an *izakaya* [pub] at night and learning to conjugate Japanese verbs by day. After a couple of difficult years, a small computer software firm hired Lin-san’s husband. With his salary and working

visa secured, she was able to withdraw from school and try her hand at a middle class life as a housewife in Tokyo.

Lin-san found herself pregnant and decided to return to Shanghai to be near her mother. When the child was born several weeks premature, the doctors in Shanghai encouraged the family to “let go of this one” [*tebanashite*]. Lin-san defiantly turned a deaf ear on her doctors’ advice, and after ten days in an incubator her son stabilized. Two years later Lin-san was pregnant again. This time the Lins had the economic and cultural resources to bear the child in Japan.

The pregnancy and birth went smoothly, but just before Momo’s second birthday disaster struck. One evening after a family outing to the sea, Momo said that she was sleepy. Lin-san noticed that her daughter had a slight fever so she put her to bed early. A few hours later Momo had her first seizure; there would be many more to come. She had to be rushed by ambulance to the hospital. The following afternoon the Lins learned that their daughter had been infected with a rare virus that caused an acute inflammation of her brain [*kyūsei nōshō*]. On the second day in the hospital Momo came up for air just once. She turned her head towards her mother and whispered, “*mama.*” She would not speak again for nearly two years. The virus erased everything.

Lin-san described these events as if her daughter had been born twice. The first time she was a quick study, achieving some degree of bilingualism by her second birthday. The second time, after her sudden illness, each word was a major struggle and a small victory. When Momo first awoke from her coma she had not only forgotten all her language, she did not even recognize her parents. Lin-san said that her daughter awoke as a completely “different person”

[*betsujin*], and she had to repeat her infancy all over again. Ironically the fates of her first and second child are inverted. Shuji, who the Chinese doctors had advised be “let go” was a good student and he surpassed many of his peers in size and strength. Momo, who had been so bright and quick with languages, was reborn as a very slow child. After ten days the hospital discharged Momo, although she was still bedridden. The doctors explained that they had no medicine that could help her. The rehabilitation clinic also warned the Lins in advance that their therapists focused exclusively on recovering physical strength. They could not help with a cognitive impairment.

The Lins were distraught, yet they did not despair. They decided to send their four-year-old son to live with his grandparents in Shanghai, and for the next 18 months they focused exclusively on their daughter’s recovery. Lin-san learnt the vocabulary of the Japanese social welfare system. She visited the city’s Child Consultation and Parental Support Offices and found out about the *Nobi-Nobi* Classroom for developmentally delayed toddlers. A year later she overruled her husband’s objections and signed their daughter up for the special needs preschool, Aozora Gakuen. By that point she said they just did not have any other options since *Nobi-Nobi* program was finished and the public daycare center that Shuji had attended refused to accept Momo.

They said that Momo couldn’t be admitted to the daycare program because for one thing she was still in diapers. I cried and cried when they told us that, and I thought so she really isn’t a ‘normal’ child [*yahari futsū jya nai*]. She can’t even get into the daycare center...

When it came time for elementary school, Lin-san already had found out all about the *fukushiki* option and had decided that Midorikawa Elementary was

the best place for her daughter. In the span of just a few years Lin-san mastered, not only the conjugation of Japanese verbs, but she had also become competent in navigating the Japanese social welfare and educational bureaucracies.

Compared with the other *fukushiki* mothers, Lin-san was much more generous with her assessment of the Japanese bureaucracy; she had praise for social welfare workers and other public servants. She commended the preschool teachers at Aozora Gakuen for trying to understand the difficulties that the parents faced in raising a disabled child. Lin-san told me several times that she was completely satisfied [*daimanzoku*] with the *fukushiki* class system, although she did not know what would happen to her daughter after compulsory education.

Unlike the other *fukushiki* mothers, Lin-san did not hesitate to apply for a disability passbook for her daughter. Momo received a “B” ranking (moderately disabled), and Lin-san accepted this without comment. She did not voice any concerns about the possible stigma that might arise from being officially categorized as “disabled.”

There are several ways to interpret Lin-san’s positive narrative of her experiences in Japan. We might speculate that since she is such a recent immigrant to Japan she might have been misreading the social field. Lacking sufficient cultural acumen, she may not have adequately understood the socio-economic implications of accepting a disability passbook for her daughter. As she became more culturally fluent would her perspective on the Japanese social welfare system inevitable become more jaded? Perhaps it will, and yet I found Lin-san to be insightful, resourceful and culturally astute. Her ability to adapt to

life in Japan and respond in innovative ways to unforeseen challenges was impressive. So why then might her narrative be more positive, or at least less sensitive to stigmatization issues, than that of the other *fukushiki* mothers?

Perhaps we should consider Lin-san's broader habitus, which reflects her experiences growing up in China, where many close relatives, including her mother and father continue to reside. When she praised the Japanese public welfare system and its empathetic workers, we could read her comments as a subtle critique of similar public sector workers in her homeland. Certainly her diverse experiences growing up in rapidly changing communist China must be refracted in her comments about life in Japan.

Also while Lin-san was very well adjusted to life in Tokyo, to some degree the Lins would always remain outsiders in Japan. Over a relatively short period of time (a little over ten years), the Lins achieved an impressive degree of economic success and linguistic and cultural fluency in Japan, and yet they could not reinvent themselves as Japanese. Even the name "Lin" immediately reveals their Chinese origins to Japanese nationals.¹⁵ Perhaps as non-Japanese living in Japan, the Lins were less preoccupied with, or desensitized toward, issues of stigmatization. The prospect of their daughter being marked as "different" was probably less threatening to the Lins, as they are already well acclimated to living with, and even prospering under, their "outsider" status.

Lin-san certainly recognized that there were times when individuals and groups might need to resist the unilateral proclamations of the Japanese governmental bureaucracy. In fact, several years after this interview, she participated in a series of meetings, organized by *fukushiki* mothers, to challenge

an educational initiative that would have weakened, or even possibly eliminated, the *fukushiki* class system.

At the end of the interview Lin-san touched on her concerns about Momo's future. At this point in the conversation the other *fukushiki* mothers spoke about the issues of access to secondary education (high school, where there is no *fukushiki* track available) and to the job market. However, Lin-san focused exclusively on whether or not her daughter would eventually be able to marry and establish a family of her own. Lin-san also considered the prospect of joint residence with her adult daughter. Lin-san's mother in Shanghai saw her granddaughter's unforeseen impairment as a blessing in disguise, for it ensured that the mother-child dyad would remain under one roof, rather than residing in distance cities.

It is scary to even think about what will happen when compulsory education is over... Will Momo ever be able to establish her own family?... When I start thinking that far into the future things can seem bleak. My mother says that if Momo stays with me then I will never get lonely, so it really is for the best... Of course, my daughter is still just a young child, but as a parent you can't help but think about these things.

Lin-san ended the interview by saying that if Momo did remain dependent into adulthood then at least they would always have each other. I was left wondering why Lin-san imagined only two future paths for Momo: (1) marriage and independence or (2) dependency and co-residence with her aging parents.

Lin-san did not entertain the third possibility that her daughter might be able to support herself and not have to rely on a future husband or her natal

family for economic sustenance. One might speculate that after several generations of officially gender-neutral economic policies on China, Lin-san might be inclined to encourage her daughter to pursue some kind of career path; however, on this point Lin-san seemed to have adopted the perspective of an aspiring middle-class Japanese housewife. That is, a good marriage to a salaried, white-collar husband should ideally provide the financial security and symbolic status necessary to allow the wife to remain outside of the job market.

Table 5.4: The Saito Dyad: Mother & Son

Child (boy / girl)	SAITO Kento (boy)
Age / Grade Level	8 years old / 3 ^d Grade
<i>Fukushiki</i> Subcategory	“emotional impairment” [<i>jōcho shōgai</i>]
Mother / Estimated Age	SAITO Yurika (housewife) / mid-thirties
Father’s Occupation	carpenter
Siblings	none
Disability Passbook	no

Kento at School

I interacted with Kento from first grade until the time when he entered the third grade. Academically Kento was more advanced than his two age-grade *fukushiki* peers (Momo and Kai). In some respects Kento was not far behind the mainstream students. While still in the first grade he mastered the simple addition and subtract of two digit numbers. At a time when Kai and Momo were still struggling with *hiragana* [the basic phonetic script] Kento could already read

and write many basic *kanji* [characters]. Kento's difficulties were mostly on the interpersonal and emotional fronts.

Although Kento was never officially diagnosed with autism or an autistic spectrum disorder, he had mild autistic tendencies. Making sense of and managing interpersonal relationships with peers was difficult for Kento. When he was a third grader his mother said that she thought her son did not really grasp the concepts of *kōhai* [junior classman] and *senpai* [upper classman], which structure a great many interactions at Japanese elementary schools and also have a significant impact on adult social networks. Kento seemed to have trouble deciding how to read people or gauge his relationship to others.

Also Kento did not appear to be overly concerned if others were misunderstanding him. He spoke very quickly and his annunciation was rather unclear. His words would bleed together as he raced to get to the end of his sentences. He was fond of making up short puns, but I must confess that I usually could not grasp the punch line. Kento did not seem to notice.

Kento had a strong need to establish fields of local coherence.¹⁶ One of his tactics was to try to control and limit the unexpected through detailed scheduling. He was adverse to fieldtrips because the normal schedule was not adhered to. Saito-san said that at times it appeared that her son was trying to manage everything by strictly following "the rules in a (cryptic) manual [*manyuaru-kun mitaina kanji*]" that only he understood.

As a first and second grader in the *fukushiki* class Kento's most frequent question was, "What's next [*tsugi wa*]?" He would use this query many times a day as he tried to determine what was heading his way. When he was a given an

assignment he usually could execute it quickly and accurately. Kento would almost always finish his work before his classmates, and the *fukushiki* teachers learned to be ready for his inevitable, “*tsugi wa*”?

Kento was also quick to tears. So much so that his mother worried that the mainstream students might tease her son, calling him a “crybaby [*nakimushi*].” Kento’s tears were of a very different quality than Momo’s dramatic weeping. Momo would cry when one of her classmates or teachers was upset with her, but Kento would suddenly burst into muffled tears for no clear reason. Or rather, the source of his distress was difficult for others to grasp. Perhaps Kento’s tears resulted from the frustration and confusion he experienced when events deviated from his imagined schedule.

Ichikawa-*sensei* believed that Kento needed practice at expressing his feelings. At a parent-teacher meetings he even suggested to Saito-san that we should look for opportunities to teach Kento how to better display and enact common emotions. Ichikawa-*sensei* was particularly concerned that Kento learn how to show “delight or enthusiasm” [*yorokobu koto*] and “anger or displeasure” [*okoru koto*]. For instance, did Kento feel happy or disappointed about coming in third place in a fifty-meter race on Sports Day? When Kai took Kento’s special bullet-train eraser, why didn’t Kento get mad? Ichikawa-*sensei* would say to Kento, “Go ahead and get angry [*kō iu toki wa okoru n da yo*]!” Still it remained difficult to guess at how Kento was experiencing and interpreting the world around him.

Interview with Saito Yurika

It was a sunny Thursday afternoon in late May of 2003 when Saito-san arrived at Midorikawa Elementary for this interview. With the rainy season still a few weeks away, most of the students and many of their teachers were enjoying the afternoon recess outside. Saito-san and I slipped upstairs into the dead silence of an empty third floor classroom. We were both perhaps a little tense about this interview for although we had known each other for nearly two years, we had never spoken privately. Saito-san usually adopted a reserved posture, speaking only when necessary at the joint parent-teachers meetings.

When I sat down to transcribe this interview I was struck by the high number of half-finished sentences that trail off into the uncertainty of “I suppose [*kana* and *kamo*]...” or “It seemed kind of like [*mitaina*]...” and “It sort of felt as though [*to iu kanji*]...” Perhaps Saito-san was censoring herself as she spoke or some of her thoughts were simply left stranded before the unspeakable.

Saito-san devoted a long section of her interview to a discussion of her dealings with the Board of Education and its Education Consultation Office. She was very unhappy with the ways that public officials controlled and monopolized information, and she felt that the parents of borderline children were often left outside of the information loop.

Now there is all this talk about special needs education being completely reorganized in a year or two. At least that is what some people are saying... I have no idea what is going to happen. We don't have any clear information, just rumors [*uwasa dake de*], so there is a lot of uncertainty and worry among us mothers.

Saito-san began the interview by describing how she gradually realized that her son seemed to be slow at picking up language. It was not as if Kento was speaking at all, but where were his nouns? As a toddler he could say *oishii* [yummy], but Kento never named any of the objects that are usually important within a two-year-old's perceptual horizon: no *yanyan-s* [kitty-cats], *wanwan-s* [puppy-dogs], and not even *mama*. When Saito-san stated, somewhat abstractly that, "You can't make a sentence without any nouns." I wondered if she might also be hinting that it was difficult for her to remain marooned in the land of unnamed. When Kento did start learning nouns, he began not "mama" but with "*Anpanman*," a television character.¹⁷ Still, to some extent his mother was able to placate herself with the refrain that "well, he is a 'boy'..."

This was a common sentiment, reflecting the widely held view in Japan that girls are "naturally" more skillful at expressing themselves verbally than young boys. Gender constructions encourage parents and children alike to see boys as boisterous and physically active, while girls are thought to be linguistically talented and "naturally" attentive to others [*omoiyari no aru*].

Saito-san said that she and her husband realized that their son was slow, but they did not make a big deal about it because they were quite laid-back and easy-going [*kekko uchi wa nonbiri shite ita*]. Semantically *nonbiri de* [at ease; in no rush] is paired with its binary opposite, *isshōkenmei ni* [with great effort]. Parents who want to get a head start in the education race need for their children to adopt an "*isshōkenmei ni*" posture. Saito-san said that she had no intention of becoming into an "education mama"—someone who pushes her child to exceed in preschool and beyond. Yet by Kento's fourth birthday the Saitos were having

second thoughts about their “*nonbiri*” attitude. Would Kento have developed more quickly if he were enrolled in kindergarten? Saito-san confessed, “some parents think it is best to start preschool around the age of two, but we waited until Kento had passed four.”

When the Saitos did try to sign their son up for a private kindergarten they were rebuffed, as Kento could not sit still for the interview. The kindergarten avoided naming the reason for turning Kento away, limiting their explanation to “it’s just that—[*chotto*]...” But the director of the kindergarten suggested that the Saitos pay a visit to the city’s Education Consultation Office. The education office assigned Kento a caseworker, who gave him “some kind of psychological test.” Predictably the public servant also suggested that Aozora Gakuen (the city’s preschool program for developmentally delayed children) would be the best place for their son.

Saito-san said that Kento enjoyed Aozora, fitting right in from the first day. But she grew nervous about the program when she realized that one of the Aozora Gakuen’s instructors was pushing the graduating children into the protective school system. Just before Kento was about to begin his second and final year at Aozora, the Saitos attempted to pull their son out of the segregated preschool program and enroll him in a regular public daycare center so that he would not be tagged for the protective elementary school. However, the daycare center refused to accept Kento citing lack of staff. That left the Saitos with only one other option—a private kindergarten, but they had already been refused at one school. Saito-san contacted several other kindergartens but found the

academic focus during the final year to be too demanding. In the end Kento remained at Aozora Gakuen until graduation.

Drawing on the advice of other mothers, Saito-san decided not to visit the special needs school. She refused (or forgot to remember) to attend the open school day at Tanba Protective School. All the women whose children participated in the program at Aozora Gakuen were strongly encouraged to observe some classes at the special education school, but rumor had it that if you attended these open school days your child would be tracked into protective school system. Saito-san decided it was best to avoid setting foot inside the protective elementary school.

In order to discourage caregivers from comparing schools, the Board of Education tries to control and manage access to specific information about particular schools. One of the Board's strategies was to stipulate that parents could only observe classes within their local school district. That is, parents were told they could only visit a single public elementary school. I was surprised to learn that Saito-san outmaneuver the Board of Education by using a false address so that she could tag along with some other women who were observing a *fukushiki* class at an elementary school in the next district. After observing classes at two public schools, Saito-san decided that the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary was the best option for Kento.

Saito-san said that she was sure that her son was eligible for a disability passbook, but she declined to apply for one explaining that her husband "didn't want to take it that far." The Saitos realized that Kento was developmentally delayed, but they did not want their son to be certified by the state as a "disabled

minor.” Since students attending the protective schools are required to apply for a passbook, the Saitos’ “failure” to apply for a passbook, and their refusal to even observe classes at the protective school, could be seen as tactics aimed at ensuring that Kento would not be sent into the special education school system.

Kento’s developmental lag was less severe than that of his peers in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary. While his speech was somewhat delayed and he had a few autistic tendencies, Kento was quite good at math and his reading skills were not far behind his grade level. The Saitos even flirted with the idea of placing their son in a regular track class, but decided against this for two reasons. Over the long-term they felt that Kento probably would not be able to keep up academically, and if he fell far behind he might easily become a target of bullying. The possibility that Kento might be teased or bullied in a mainstream classroom, informed the Saitos’ decision to send their son to the *fukushiki* class. Saito-san said that they wanted to avoid a situation where classmates might label Kento as a “crybaby” or brand him with some other hurtful names.

In order to gain admission into the *fukushiki* system, parents must have their children tested at the Education Consultation Office. For this evaluation children are separated from their caregivers so the actual testing procedures are a mystery to most parents. Saito-san believed that the Education Consultation Office gave Kento some kind of IQ [*chinō*] test, but she was unsure of the content or of the specific results. After testing Kento, the Board handed down a verdict of “mild impairment” [*keido*].

The Board recommended that Kento join Midorikawa’s *fukushiki* class. Several months after entering the *fukushiki* track someone from the Board of

Education came to Midorikawa Elementary and retested Kento and his first grade classmates. Saito-san said that once again the parents were not given any specific information on the content or the outcome of this second round of testing. She decided to press Ichikawa-*sensei* for her son's test results, but Ichikawa-*sensei* said that he did not know the details because the test was administered directly by the Board. When Saito-san subsequently visited the Education Consultation Office on another matter, she said that she intended to request her son's test results; however, once she found herself inside the Consultation Office she became flustered and forgot her well-prepared questions about the testing.

This minor episode illustrates how the state's authority is derived, in part, from small everyday practices. The Board compels caregivers to speak to its representatives on its own terms, from within the Board's Offices. In order to request assistance or seek information the caregiver must pay a visit the local Educational Consultation Center; the state's representatives never come to you. Saito-san, who is usually non-confrontational, was determined to obtain her son's test results, but once she was actually within the government office she found herself distracted by procedures and protocols that were not of her making.

The Board of Education sets the rules of the game and attempts to maintain a monopoly on specific information about its schools, teachers, programs, and testing procedures. This puts parents at a disadvantage in their dealings with the state's educational bureaucracy. Parents were encouraged by caseworkers and education officials to obtain disability passbooks for their

children, and these public servants sometimes did not make it clear that the passbook was not required for the *fukushiki* track.

Fukushiki parents often felt at a disadvantage when dealing with the educational bureaucracy. In my interviews I was struck by the number of caregivers who referred to the Board's recommendations as "verdicts [*hanketsu*]." In most cases through the end of compulsory education, parents in Japan actually have the final say about which educational track their child will participate in, but structurally the Board is often in a stronger position to make its recommendations appear binding. Saito-san was adamant that the parents of borderline children often failed to understand their options and found it difficult to negotiate with the educational bureaucracy.

While Saito-san preferred not to make waves and was content to usually go unnoticed, when it came time to for Kento to enter elementary school she made a series of tactical moves (avoiding the open school day at the protective school, surreptitious visiting several *fukushiki* classrooms, finding reasons not to apply for a disability passbook) that ensured her son would be allowed to enter the *fukushiki* track at Midorikawa Elementary. Although she was not one of the more vocal *fukushiki* parents, Saito-san proved to be a tenacious and tactical player in her muted struggle with Japanese educational authorities. Perhaps this indicates that within the micro-politics of everyday life in Japan, the most effective, successful players are not necessarily the most loquacious.

Table 5.5: The Furukawa Dyad: Mother & Son

Child (boy / girl)	FURUKAWA Naoki (boy)
Age / Grade Level	12 years old / 6 th Grade
<i>Fukushiki</i> Subcategory	cognitive impairment
Mother / Estimated Age	FURUKAWA Keiko (housewife) / early forties
Father's Occupation	working in the insurance industry
Siblings	sister: Erika (6 years old) brother: Rintarō (4 years old)
Disability Passbook	yes (applied in fifth grade) / ranking "A" (mild)

Naoki at School

When I first met Naoki he was a tall, thin, and slightly awkward eleven year-old boy. He initially struck me as a shy, serious, kindhearted child of few words. Naoki could get upset, but, unlike Aya, who immediately let you know how she felt, he found it difficult to communicate his feelings. Naoki was usually smiling, yet his smile betrayed a sense of insecurity rather than alluding to an inner confidence. Naoki would often avoid your eyes, and when he did make eye contact he tended to hold the gaze for a moment too long, leaving a slightly uneasy tension in the air.

At the time of this interview, Naoki was the most senior member of the *fukushiki* class. As the only sixth grade student, Naoki was chosen to be the *fukushiki* class leader by default. This seniority did give Naoki a considerable degree of clout and authority. Even his fifth grade classmates appeared to look up to Naoki and deferred to him on many class decisions. However, before joining the *fukushiki* class, Naoki had frequently been the target of bullying at the hands of his mainstream, age-grade peers. Furukawa-san said that she finally

decided to transfer her son into the *fukushiki* track at the beginning of the fifth grade in part to avoid further bullying.

Even within the *fukushiki* class Naoki sometimes had trouble managing interpersonal relations, particular with his fifth grade classmate Fumi, who had a crush on him that she did not know how to express. Fumi would sometimes try to hug Naoki, and this led to a considerable amount of conflict between the two.

One afternoon Fumi said to Naoki, "Look how cute I am [*kawaii deshō*]," and then she tried to put her arms around Naoki's neck.¹⁸ Naoki responded by immediately kicking her in the shins. Fumi collapsed to the floor in tears, and Iida-sensei strongly rebuked Naoki, telling him, "You do not hit girls [*onna no ko desu kara te o dasanai de!*]" Iida-sensei's reprimand is constructed along gender lines. The fact that Fumi is "a girl" is given as the reason why hitting is unacceptable. Naoki was told to explain himself, but he remained defiantly silent. Iida-sensei then took him to the unused classroom for a private chat. After some time Naoki was able to relate what had transpired prior to his kick, and later in the day Iida-sensei had Fumi apologize to Naoki.

In the later grades of elementary school the *fukushiki* students became increasingly interested in the opposite sex. Just like their mainstream peers, they sometimes engaged in cat and mouse games, in which a hit or a slight could be used to communicate (and to disguise) sexual curiosity. However, the *fukushiki* students at times had trouble expressing themselves in a socially acceptable manner, so this cat and mouse discourse was prone to go awry. On one occasion Iida-sensei privately reprimanded Naoki after he (intentionally?) brushed against her breasts. In the *fukushiki* classroom dawning sexuality and passing

infatuations were also complicated by the differences in ages between students, as well as the limited number of classmates.

Naoki was the most senior member of the *fukushiki* class, so the teachers expected him to assume the role of *senpai* [an upper classman], who sets a good example for his junior classmates. On one occasion Naoki and the fourth grade Hiroki were walking home from school together. (They frequently played together after school.) Hiroki saw some mainstream boys playing a game of kick-the-rock, and he tried to join in the fun. The children, however, would not let Hiroki into their game; instead they began taunting him. Apparently at the first sign of trouble, Naoki withdrew and said nothing even when the mainstream boys hit Hiroki with some dog feces. Hiroki ran home crying. After learning of this incident the following day, Ichikawa-sensei had a long talk with Naoki about the meaning of being a *senpai*.



Figure 5.2: Midorikawa Instructor has a 'Talk' with a *Fukushiki* Student
(Photograph by author)

In Japanese elementary schools many positions of prestige and special responsibility are reserved for the *senpai* students (the fifth and sixth graders). When something goes wrong, the *senpai* are frequently held responsible even if the fault lies primarily with the actions of the younger classmates. The older students are supposed to be setting a good example for their juniors, so the *senpai* are sometimes seen as indirectly responsible for the failings of juniors. This is a pattern that often continues into adulthood, for *senpai* are seen as having certain privileges, and a degree of moral authority, over younger members in the organization (Bestor 1989, 220).

Interview with Furukawa Keiko

While Saito-san spoke at length about her frustration with the educational bureaucracy, Furukawa-san focused on her struggle with the medical establishment over how Naoki was labeled as a toddler. In both accounts these two women took issue with access and control over information that they saw as critical to their children's futures. Furukawa-san discussed her sense of guilt and regret regarding various events that cast her oldest son as "not normal," and she described her own internal struggle with coming to acknowledge that Naoki had an impairment. She also touched upon how Naoki's disability impacted the status of the extended family. Her sense of shared stigmatization and regret may have been intensified by the upper middle class position of the Furukawa household.

This interview was in held in mid-March of 2002, just one week before Naoki was to graduate from elementary school. We met in the early afternoon at Midorikawa Elementary and talked in the seldom-used lunchroom. Furukawa-san brought her youngest son, four-year old Rintarō, along with her, but he stayed in the *fukushiki* classroom playing with *Iida-sensei* and several other students who had remained after school.

Furukawa-san is an articulate woman, who looks you straight in the eye when she talks and gestures with her hands as she speaks. I never had the opportunity to meet her husband, who was a busy insurance executive. She described him as “typical salary man.” Naoki, who was twelve at the time of this interview, was the oldest of the three children. His younger sister Erika was just starting first grade and Rintarō was still in preschool.

As a toddler Naoki was slow learning to speak, but Furukawa-san said that she was not too worried about it at the time because of the gendered expectation that “boys are slow with language.” Then at two and half Naoki contracted a bad case of the measles. It was a serious case because he did not have his immunization shot. Furukawa-san continued to experience guilt about not having immunized her firstborn son earlier. She said that when Naoki caught the measles she was just about to get him immunized, but at that point it was too late... The measles caused a high fever (39° C) that continued unbroken for two or three days. The doctor said that there was no need to worry, but “it couldn’t have been good to just let his fever go on and on like that...”

Furukawa-san thought that Naoki’s hearing was slightly impaired by the measles. The doctors were not too concerned about this mild hearing

impairment, which eventually did clear up, but they were worried about her son's limited language and autistic tendencies. Furukawa-san said that at some point after his second birthday, Naoki suddenly became shy with strangers and wanted to stay very close to her. He also began to fixate on certain objects: his favorite pajamas, coins and even ten thousand yen notes.

When Naoki turned three the Furukawas decided that their son needed more interaction with his peers so they put his name down on a waiting list for the local public daycare center. In order to enter the daycare program Naoki had to have a medical check-up, so Furukawa-san took him to see a doctor. Although Naoki was speaking a little by this point, he would not say a word to the doctor or the nurse. The doctor complained in a hushed voice to the nurse that, "If the child is not talking at three, that's just not right." According to Furukawa-san, the doctor made this comment in a tone of voice that was clearly intended to be overheard.

If the doctor refused to write "*ijō nashi*" [developing normally] on her son's health card then Naoki would most probably not be able to join the regular daycare program, and he might face a future of segregated education in the protective schools. Realizing that the doctor's assessment was pivotal, Furukawa-san challenged the doctor directly. "Do you mean that my son can't join the regular daycare program?" The doctor hesitated, but finally said that he was not intending on that. He wrote the required "*ijō nashi*" on Naoki's health card, but added in tiny characters below "with autistic tendencies [*jihei keikō ari*]." At least Furukawa-san thought that was what the doctor wrote on her son's health file. She could not be entirely sure because she only had a chance to glance

at the card and the characters, enclosed in parentheses, were written in very tiny script. Furukawa-san grasped the importance of the doctor's parenthetical remarks, half-whispered and yet articulated in a manner that was intended to be overheard, and then inscribed in a tiny characters at the bottom of his health card.

Often the most critical remarks are the ones enclosed in parentheses, scribbled in the margins in a script that is almost, but not quite, unreadable. This doctor and the testing experts at the Educational Consultation Office attempted to cloak their activities in a veil of near inscrutability. Caregivers expressed frustration with this air of inscrutability and complained about control of, and access to, educational records and medical files. The state creates the files' categories and format (in part so that information can be unified and easily shared among schools and across the national healthcare system). Doctors and schools are in control of the individual files. Hospitals and clinics share the information they collect with the appropriate government bureaucracies as requested. Furukawa-san, however, said that she could only hope to steal a glance at the state's documentation of her son's development. Ten years later she was still left wondering what exactly was written on his card.¹⁹

Three-year-old Naoki was allowed to enter the regular public daycare program, but Furukawa-san said things did not always go smoothly. He did not like to lie down for a nap, and Naoki refused to wear any pajamas other than his favorite pair. His mother complained about the pressure of group-life [*shūdan seikatsu*] at the daycare center. In fact, she decided to send her two younger children to a private kindergarten, which she felt was less regimented.

Furukawa-san said that Naoki could not tolerate milk, but the daycare center insisted that all of the children learn to drink milk. Sometimes when Furukawa-san arrived at the daycare center to collect her son, she found Naoki sitting at a low table with one of his teachers, who was still trying to get him to drink his milk.

Even when I showed up [at the daycare center] they wouldn't let Naoki go home until he finished his milk. The teachers would be saying, "Try, try. You can do it [*ganbatte ganbatte datte*]." They were really pushing children who couldn't drink milk to somehow drink it.

Furukawa-san faulted herself for Naoki's difficult experiences at the daycare center. "Maybe things would have been better for Naoki if I had only explained things in more detail to his teachers..." This sense of regret permeates Furukawa-san's narrative.

When it came time for elementary school the Furukawas decided to put Naoki in a mainstream classroom. Furukawa-san said that she knew her son was behind on the developmental charts, but she wanted to believe that he might catch up. "I know it sounds odd to say that he might 'return to normal,' but I wanted to think that there would be some point when he got back within the normal range."

Naoki entered a mainstream first grade class at Midorikawa Elementary, but he found it difficult to establish friendships because of his lagging language skills and his tendency to withdraw within himself. Unfortunately Naoki soon became a target of teasing. Peers would hide his chopstick box so that he could not eat lunch, and on several occasions Naoki walked home from school barefoot

because some classmates hid his outdoor shoes. (Students wear special slip on, indoor shoes [*uwabaki*] while at school.)

Furukawa-san said that “just between the two of us” his first and second grade teacher was pretty useless. He did not insist that the other students stop teasing her son. Naoki’s third and fourth grade teacher was much more proactive about this teasing, but the pattern was firmly established by that point. Naoki was also falling behind academically. By the fourth grade he admitted to his mother that he did not understand much of what they were doing at school. In the fall of that year Naoki’s teacher gently suggested to Furukawa-san that she might consider transferring her son into the *fukushiki* classroom.

The decision to transfer Naoki into the *fukushiki* class was difficult for the Furukawas. Naoki’s mother said that she talked it over with her own parents, and at the end of the day, “I had to throw vanity and shame to the wind, not giving a second thought to my family’s reputation. The important thing was to think only of what was best for our son.” Once Furukawa-san admitted that Naoki was impaired, “vanity” was no longer an option. Thus the family participated directly in Naoki’s stigma. Goffman refers to this as a “courtesy stigma,” which spreads out in waves from the stigmatized individual (1986, 30-31). The first wave always hits the family and caregivers the hardest (Birenbaum 1970, 196).

At the time of this interview, just before Naoki’s elementary school graduation, it was already decided that he would be attending the *fukushiki* class at Yonemura Junior High. Furukawa-san was generally pleased with Naoki’s experience in the *fukushiki* system, but she worried about what would happen to

her son after junior high. Furukawa-san complained that there was no middle ground between the regular high schools, which require passing a competitive entrance exam, and the protective school for those with moderate to severe impairments. She did not like the prospect of sending Naoki to the “protective” high school, but she saw this as her son’s only real option. Naoki would not be able to pass the mainstream high school entrance exams, and he would not be ready to enter the job market at fifteen years of age.

Furukawa-san said that she was regretting in advance that when Naoki applied for a job he would have to write on his resume that he attended a special education high school. She realized that this would be a source of stigmatization and an impediment to her son’s economic security. Furukawa-san felt that a big part of the problem was the name “*yōgo*” itself, which has strongly negative connotations.²⁰ She thought that if the name could just be somehow erased things might be a little better.

The problem with *yōgo* is that when you go to look for a job you have to write on your resume that you attended a “protective school.” If you do that people will probably say unkind things like, “You’re one of those *special ed.* kids, aren’t you [*omae wa yōgo da ne*].” If you send your child to a protective school there will always be some people who tease and bully him or her... I wish they would just do away with the name “*yōgo*” [protective] school. If the name was eliminated I think that might help a little...

The Furukawas were probably particularly sensitive to issues of stigmatization and labeling because Naoki fell on the borderline between the mainstream and the *fukushiki* classes and also because of the family’s secure upper-middle class position. This sensitivity was also heightened by Naoki’s negative experiences as a member of a mainstream class. Furukawa-san ended

the interview by musing about how to deal proactively with future stigmatization, which she saw as inevitable.

Table 5.6: The Nakahara Dyad: Mother & Son

Child (boy / girl)	NAKAHARA Kai (boy)
Age / Grade Level	8 years old / 3 ^d Grade
<i>Fukushiki</i> Subcategory	cognitive impairment
Mother / Estimated Age	NAKAHARA Kumi (housewife) / early thirties
Father's Occupation	working in clothing company
Siblings	none
Disability Passbook	yes / ranking "B" (moderate)

Kai at School

I saw Kai regularly from the first grade until the beginning of the third grade. He was a good natured, happy child with a significant cognitive impairment. Kai was slow and awkward with spoken Japanese and verbal instructions sometimes confused him. However, if you showed Kai what to do, he could usually grasp the task. In the first and second grades Kai struggled with writing, as his fine motor skills were not well developed. The *fukushiki* teachers spent a lot time trying to get Kai to hold a pencil properly between his thumb and index finger.²¹ He did finally master it, and by the start of third grade he could write most of the kana letters and a few basic characters.

Kai was awkward at sports, but loved to jump on the indoor trampoline and to play tag. In physical education class the students occasionally played kickball. When it was Kai's turn to bat, he would run at the ball. Sometimes he

could kick it quite far, but it was never easy to coax Kai to run towards first base. He would invariably take off in some other direction, laughing as his teammates and the teachers frantically tried to herd him over to first base. Kai understood the rules of game, but he opted to play the game by his own tenets that were designed to maximize laughter and commotion. He did not care the least about the score, a fact that sometimes irritated the upper class boys.

Kai did not have any autistic tendencies. He was usually interactive, smiling and trying to engage his peers. In class he would often turn his chair to face his classmates, rather than facing toward the front of the room. The *fukushiki* teachers would frequently say, "Kai, eyes over here!"

Kai had a good sense of humor and as his vocabulary increased he became interested in telling jokes. For instance during the morning meeting, rather than reporting on how he was feeling that day, Kai began to come up with ironic answers like, "I am still asleep." In the middle of second grade Kai started mimicking much of what Ichikawa-*sensei* was saying in class. This soon became quite distracting for the other students, yet Ichikawa-*sensei* usually let Kai continue because it seemed that this mimicking was helping Kai's language skills. His speaking abilities did improve noticeably that year.

Kai also loved to sing. He memorized many commercial jingles and popular songs, which he would happily hum to himself in class. When something struck him as funny, Kai would crumple to the ground, temporarily immobilized by the giggles. And there was a little shuffle in Kai's gait as if he did not want his feet to leave the safety of the floor. He often tilted his head to the left

and bobbed slightly. It seemed to me that Kai was moving to some internal rhythm that only he could hear.

Interview with Nakahara Kumi

Among the *fukushiki* families, the Nakaharas engaged in the most direct confrontation with the Board of Education. The Board pushed strongly for Kai to attend a protective elementary school, but the Nakaharas openly rejected this “recommendation.” The ensuing struggle played out over several months. Nakahara-san was highly suspicious of the true intentions of the Educational Consultation and Parental Support offices, which she felt were created primarily to segregate children with impairments from their peers. At the end of the interview Nakahara-san drew some connections between the discourse on homogeneity in Japan, the experiences of the disabled, and the perceived danger of *yosomono* [outsider] status.

Both Nakahara-san and her husband were serious athletes, which probably made Kai’s lack of interest in competitive sports somewhat more of an issue. Nakahara-san frequently took part in five and ten-kilometer races, and Kai’s father was a member of a corporate, triathlon team.²² When Kai was a second grader he did participate in a three-kilometer father-son race, although Nakahara-san said that her son did much more walking than running. Many of the *fukushiki* parents noted with regret that their children had little sense of competition either in academics or in sports.

The *fukushiki* students probably showed little interest in competition because for the most part they could not compete effectively with their age-grade

peers. They were not running in any actual or metaphorical races. This non-competitive posture confirmed the “special” status of these youths, and marked them as outsiders within Japan’s meritocracy.

Nakahara-san, who was fit and moderately tall, held herself with an athlete’s confidence. She always had something constructive to add to the discussion at the parent-teacher meetings, but she was not as assertive as Koiwa-san or Hibino-san. For this interview she met me at Midorikawa Elementary on a Tuesday afternoon in mid-May of 2003. I noticed her approaching through the classroom window and went to greet her at the side entrance to the school building, where she quickly changed into a new pair of indoor sneakers. I tried to match her seemingly effortless stride as she lightly bounded up the three flights of stairs to the waiting, empty classroom.

Kai was Nakahara-san’s first and only child. The Nakaharas realized that their son’s development was delayed when he failed to stand-up by his first birthday. Fortunately at about 16 months, Kai quite suddenly started walking. Yet when Kai’s second birthday came and passed he still was not talking at all, and his comprehension appeared limited. At the suggestion of the public Health Office, Nakahara-san began taking her son to the city’s *Nobi-Nobi* program for developmentally delayed toddlers. At three, Kai had a few words, but he still was not saying “mama” or “papa.”

The Parental Support Office suggested that the Nakaharas set up an appointment at a local hospital that specialized in evaluating developmentally delayed children; however, the doctors there could only say that Kai fell outside the normal development charts. Actually the doctor used the negation of a

transliterated English term “normal” [*nōmaru dewa nai*] to describe her son’s development. Nakahara-san said that she was left guessing about the exact diagnosis.²³ She interpreted his comment to mean that her son had a mental impairment. The doctor was purposely vague with his diagnosis. This is far from uncommon, particularly in the case of a developmental impairment; *fukushiki* caregivers frequently reported being confused about what the doctors’ words meant.

When Kai turned four the Nakaharas began sending their son to Aozora Gakuen. They were quite happy with this preschool program for developmentally delayed children, but after two years in a segregated environment they decide it would be best for Kai to interact with some non-impaired children [*kenjōji*] for his final year of preschool. Like the Saitos, the Nakaharas attempted to transfer their son into the city’s mainstream public daycare program, but they also were rebuffed by the daycare center. None of the *fukushiki* families were able to transfer their children from the Aozora program for developmentally delayed toddlers into regular public daycare.

Nakahara-san would not be dissuaded. She inquired about private kindergartens and was able to find one that would accept Kai for the final year of preschool. Nakahara-san claimed that this experience in a mainstream kindergarten program was a great help to her son. There was one little girl who took a particular interest in looking after Kai. Interestingly this is the precise situation that the Saitos said they were trying to avoid. They did not want some other child having to look after their son at preschool. But Nakahara-san said that since all of the children at Aozora Gakuen had some kind of impairment,

few of these children really interacted with one another. She accepted that her son could not participate as a social equal with the other children at the private kindergarten (primarily because his linguistic ability was quite limited), but she still saw a socialization advantage in mixing with his “healthy” mainstream peers.

Nakahara-san said that she and her husband had made a decision not to conceal or play down Kai’s cognitive impairment. They even made a badge for him to wear when he ventured far from home that said, “I have an impairment...” Among the *fukushiki* families at Midorikawa, the Nakaharas were the most straight forward about acknowledging their son’s impairment.

In our son’s case if you just glance at him you wouldn’t think that he had a disability. I mean there isn’t anything particular about his face or anything. Sometimes when people don’t realize he is disabled, it can cause problems so we decided to make a badge for him. His name is on the front and on the back it says, “I have an impairment, but if you explain things slowly, several times I can understand.” Of course, not all the *fukushiki* mothers are of one mind about the badge. There are probably some mothers who would prefer not to have people think that their child is disabled. There are those who think that there is no need to broadcast the fact that your child is disabled. For Kai we thought it was best to have this kind of badge...

With elementary school just around the corner, and the Nakaharas were dead set against Kai attending Tanba, the special education primary school. At the protective school Kai would once again be in a completely segregated environment and they wanted to avoid that. Also Nakahara-san claimed that all the Aozora Gakuen mothers knew that the teachers at Tanba “just let those kids run wild.”

When Kai was four, the Nakaharas applied for a disability passbook for their son. Nakahara-san said that they only applied for a disability passbook because she had been told that the passbook was required for attendance at Aozora Gakuen. Actually while the city strongly “encouraged” parents to apply for a passbook, it was possible to attend the Aozora program without first obtaining a passbook. In fact, most children at Aozora did not have disability passbooks. Families were given conflicting information regarding the passbook “requirement.”

In any case, Kai held a passbook so the Nakaharas feared that he might be streamed into the protective school system, particularly since his impairment had been ranked as “moderate” [*chūdo*] rather than “mild” [*keido*]. The Nakaharas realized that the Board of Education might use the “*chūdo*” label as a justification for recommending that their son be sent to the special education school.

The Nakaharas were suspicious of the Education Consultation Office, and by extension the Board of Education, because they feared that the educational authorities were planning to segregate Kai from his peers. In fact, Nakahara-san describes the Education Consultation Office, which is supposed to help parents understand their children’s educational options, as a front office for probing [*saguri*] and documenting [*jōhō atsume*] children so that a case could be made for a segregated education. “The Education Consultation Office said they were trying to help our son by determining what degree of impairment he was faced with, but really that was just an excuse for probing him.”

When Kai was six years old the Nakaharas decide to observe the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa; however, in order to do so they were supposed to secure

permission from the Board of Education. Rather than going through the Board, Nakahara-san's husband directly telephoned the principal at Midorikawa Elementary, who was a childhood friend. The principal invited the Nakaharas to visit the *fukushiki* class, and Ichikawa-sensei subsequently encouraged them to send their son to Midorikawa Elementary. However, this exchange happened unbeknownst to the Board of Education, which several months later predictably recommended that Kai be sent to Tanba Protective School.

Nakahara-san was well prepared for a fight with the Board, and she told the Board directly that until the end of compulsory education the mother has the right to determine which program is best for her child. Nakahara-san was technically correct, but the Board of Education has to sign off on the parent's plan because it is the Board that sends out the official letters informing families which public school their children should report to for the new school year. Thus it is dangerous to engage in a direct confrontation with the local Board of Education. These official school notices are usually issued in November, but in Kai's case the Board neglected, or refused, to send a notification letter to the Nakaharas. The not-arriving-letter was part of the Board's strategy to convince the Nakahara family to agree to send their son to the special education school. However, Nakahara-san refused to bend and finally, in late January, the Board had little choice but to issue a letter "approving" of Kai entering the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary.

While all of the *fukushiki* parents expressed considerable skepticism about the Board of Education's intentions, this was the clearest case of direct confrontation between a parent and the Japanese educational authorities. In this

conflict the disability passbook worked to the disadvantage of the Nakahara family because the passbook served as certified *proof* that their son was “moderately impaired” (Rank B).

Even if parents do not opt into the passbook system, by the time a developmentally delayed child reaches elementary school age, the state has extensive documentation at its disposal that can be invoked to argue strongly for a placement in a “protective” school or some other program. This documentation of the child’s development is collected at regular medical check-ups, at public daycare centers, at the Educational Consultation and Parental Support Offices, as well as at publicly subsidized programs for developmentally delayed toddlers.

Foucault argues most powerfully in *The Birth of the Prison*, that unidirectional, one-sided, pervasive observation and information collection is always an aggressive act (Foucault 1977, 202). The *fukushiki* parents intuitively sensed this. Many of the caregivers did not simply stand by helplessly before the state’s panoptic power. Parents had their own array of tactics, improvised for the occasion. The Nakaharas partially avoided the Board’s panoptic eyes by calling upon the husband’s personal social network to gain permission to visit the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary. Unbeknownst to the Board, Nakahara-san made a personal alliance of sorts with Ichikawa-sensei, creating a potentially influential, semi-independent ally before she had to meet with the Board. Also all of the mothers of children attending Aozora Gakuen readily shared information and rumors, in an attempt to partially offset the state’s monopoly of official channels of information.

The *fukushiki* mothers felt that their developmentally delayed children were in danger of being segregated and isolated from their mainstream peers. Nakahara-san invoked the state's discourse of "a homogenous Japanese populace" to try to explain why those who are marked as "different" become easily targets for bullying and discrimination.

I wish that the students at Midorikawa Elementary could come to realize that not everyone is the same. There are different types of children out there. In Japan—well there are the Ainu—but otherwise everyone is pretty much the same race. So there is a strong feeling that everyone is, or should be, the same... People tend to become uncomfortable when a child seems to be a little different. If you deviate from the norm, you're considered "weird" [*heikin kara zureru to hen mitaina tokoro ga aru*]. Those kids that are seen as a little different often become a target of bullying.

Nakahara-san claimed that although children and adults vary widely in specific abilities and personality traits, there is a strong authoritarian discourse in Japan that says everyone is, or *should be*, more or less the same.²⁴ She was making these observations to a white, male American researcher. Was Nakahara-san emphasizing ethnicity because she was speaking with a non-Asian? In any case, she recognized that the strong discourse on homogeneity (which she did not directly challenge or problematize) worked to the disadvantage of her son and other special needs children. Clearly some informants realized that the narrative of homogeneous nation, which has been strongly supported by the Japanese educational authorities, frequently has negative repercussions for those who are marked as "different."²⁵

Toward the end of the interview Nakahara-san said that her third grade son was quite isolated. She claimed that Kai did not have a single, real friend

(beyond his classmates in the *fukushiki* track). Kai's limited linguistic abilities made forming friendships difficult. His mother wondered if the bonds of friendship would always remain just outside of his grasp. Yet Nakahara-san did not just passively accept this state of affairs. Realizing the importance of social networks and the danger of social isolation, she looked for opportunities where Kai could interact with mainstream students at Midorikawa Elementary and with peers in the wider community.

One of her tactics was to enroll her son in various after school activities (gymnastics on Thursdays and a rhythmic music class several times a week). Nakahara-san said that if she did not sign Kai up for such classes he would be spending all his after-school time with her, which would be disadvantageous to him over the long-term. Even if Kai could not establish lasting friendships with the mainstream kids, she hoped that the regular track students at Midorikawa Elementary would at least remember her son.

If they happen to pass Kai walking along the street some years after graduation I think they will probably remember him, and if they do remember him that will defuse a lot of potential troubles.

Nakahara-san saw outsider [*yosomono*] status and social isolation as the most pressing threat to Kai's future. She responded tactically, looking for opportunities to link her son with a wider group of peers. Although Kai might not have been able to establish true friendships with his mainstream, age-grade peers, his mother still saw an advantage for her son if his peers would just remember him. Even if Kai was remembered as the "slow kid" or the "odd kid," it was still better than not being remembered at all. Nakahara-san seems to be saying that if you are categorized as a *yosomono*, then there was a real danger of

being overlooked entirely and disappearing from the social horizon. Above all else she wanted her son to avoid that fate.

Part Three: Strategies & Tactics

A Tactical Silence?

While six of the *fukushiki* mothers accepted my request for an interview, two declined. Or rather, two of the mothers deflected the scheduling of the interview until it seemed to me they must be uncomfortable with the prospect of providing a life history. Perhaps they were unsure of my intentions or uneasy with being recorded.²⁶ It is also possible that these two women were simply particularly busy and they could not find time in their schedules to give an extended life history to an American researcher; however, I think this explanation, while within the realm of the possible, does not give the informants due credit.

When social scientists incorporate interviews into their research design, the subsequent analysis usually focuses exclusively on the discourse that emerges from “cooperative” informants. But I want to pause a moment and consider the silence from the two women who, for whatever reason, resisted (or simply failed to respond to) my overtures for a dialogue.

Silence speaks its own language. Caregivers recognize that silence can often say a great deal. Something significant is unfolding when a parent asks a child, “How was your day?” and the child responds with, “—.” Surely the child’s silence conveys something important here. Perhaps, “Why are you asking me

that again?” Or maybe, “What a stupid question!” Or even, “I’m not going to keep playing the *child* to your *parent*.” The meaning of a non-response is highly contextual (and historically inter-tangled with previous conversations), but in this case the child’s resistance comes through loud and clear.

Lebra has proposed that the cultural significance of silence in Japanese communication may be analyzed according to four dimensions: *truthfulness*, *social discretion*, *embarrassment* and *defiance* (1987, 343). It is possible that “embarrassment” or the desire to preserve a degree of “social discretion” might have contributed to these two informants’ avoidance of the interview, yet I think that their silence also spoke of at least some degree of “defiance” and could be characterized as a form of tactical resistance.

They may have wished to avoid revisiting the events that led them to suspect that there was something amiss with their young child’s development. Or perhaps, in spite of my reassurances of anonymity, they were they unsure of how, and to what ends, I might use their words. It is also possible that they were rejecting my implicit framing of their child as “developmentally impaired.” Or maybe they just did not relish the thought of having to play the role of “good mother” to my “earnest researcher.”²⁷

By chance both of the women who declined, or rather tactically delayed, the proposed interview were mothers of sixth grader students: Omata Yoshi, a boy and Yamashita Fumi, a girl. At the time Yoshi and Fumi were just a couple months shy of their elementary school graduation. They were both planning to attend the *fukushiki* track at Yonemura Junior High School.

Omata Yoshi

Yoshi transferred into the *fukushiki* classroom in the third grade after spending two years in mainstream classes. Among the *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa, Yoshi was probably the most academically successful. In fact, Ichikawa-sensei frequently praised Yoshi by referring to him with the tongue and cheek nickname of *monoshiri-san*, "Mr. Know-it-All." When the other *fukushiki* students were unsure of an answer, they deferred to Yoshi. At the beginning of the sixth grade, Yoshi was chosen as the *fukushiki* class leader.

Yoshi was somewhat overweight, perhaps ten or twelve kilograms heavier than the 'ideal' weight for a boy of his age and height. During the school lunch Ichikawa-sensei would sometimes discourage him from taking a second or third helping of a high calorie item, and all the instructors encouraged Yoshi to go outside and get some exercise. To my eyes Yoshi seemed quite comfortable with himself and confident among his *fukushiki* peers; however, Ichikawa-sensei said that Yoshi had been teased by his mainstream classmates and had no confidence in himself when he transferred over to the *fukushiki* track at the start of third grade.

I never had the chance to meet Yoshi's father, as he did not attend any events at Midorikawa Elementary. The *fukushiki* instructors said that Yoshi's father intentionally avoided Midorikawa because he was opposed to his son studying in the *fukushiki* class. Apparently it was Yoshi's mother, who overruled her husband's objections, and made the decision to transfer Yoshi out of his mainstream classroom and into the *fukushiki* track.

During the second year of my fieldwork, I sought parental permission to videotape some of the *fukushiki* classes. All of the parents were quick to grant this permission, except for the Omata family. Yoshi's mother eventually explained to me that her husband did not want a video record of their son as a member of the *fukushiki* class.²⁸ This would seem to indicate that there was considerable discord within the Omata family about Yoshi's participation in the *fukushiki* track.

Six or seven months before Yoshi was to graduate, his mother had an emotional crisis or nervous breakdown. She apparently was suffering from some type of paranoia and was briefly hospitalized.²⁹ Just before this hospitalization she attended a parent-teacher meeting and acted quite odd, speaking in excited tones about being watched. She was convinced that someone was hiding outside their condominium and spying on her family. While Yoshi was not present at this meeting, he was aware that his mother was having some sort of crisis. During this period Yoshi often delayed going home from school. He would linger in the schoolyard or stop off at Hiroki's house. By the time of his graduation, Yoshi's mother appeared to have regained control of her life; she at least was no longer speaking openly of being watched.

Since Omata-san believed that her household was, or had been, the object of unwanted prying eyes, it is understandable that she might opt to avoid an interview focused on her son's life history. Her husband's aversion to Midorikawa Elementary and his rejection of the *fukushiki* label was probably also a factor. Perhaps by rejecting my overtures for an interview, the Omata family was simultaneously rejecting the special needs categorization of their son and the perceived rumormongering and unwanted attention of their neighbors.

Yamashita Fumi

Yamashita-san was a woman of few words. Unless she was directly addressed, she remained silent during the parent-teacher meetings. She appeared to maintain a quiet, deferential posture toward the *fukushiki* teaching staff and toward the other mothers. As a toddler, her daughter, Fumi, was diagnosed with autism. During the period of my research Fumi was the only child in the *fukushiki* classroom to have been clearly diagnosed with autism, as opposed to having “autistic tendencies [*jihei keikō ari*].” Even in the sixth grade her linguistic abilities and social skills were still quite limited.

Fumi would frequently repeat phrases that were elliptical and difficult (for me) to interpret. When we first met, Fumi was in the habit of suddenly declaring in a loud voice, “*werukamu ni iku* [I am going to welcome].” At the time her meaning eluded me entirely, but I later learned that “Welcome” was the name of a local supermarket chain. Perhaps Fumi meant something like, “I would rather be shopping at Welcome than sitting here in this classroom.”

Fumi was emotionally close to, and relied upon, Ichikawa-sensei; however, she expressed her affection for him ironically by calling him derogatory names such as “*baka!*” [Idiot] and “*debu!*” [Fatso]. Fumi sometimes used an extremely high-pitched voice. Perhaps this was an attempt to take an ironic posture toward verbal discourse, which was often problematic for her. When she was upset with someone or displeased with something she would sometimes suddenly stand up, bounce her chair on the floor or even throw her desk over.

On the other hand, Fumi was artistically gifted. During the course of my fieldwork she won two drawing competitions and had a picture selected for

public display in the Tokyo subway system.³⁰ Fumi also had an amazingly musical ear. After hearing a tune only a few times she could play it from memory on the piano. Fumi never simply reproduced the same tune; she always included some musical embellishments of her own. While she was musically inclined, she found it impossible to sing on key and in time with other students during music class or in the school assembly.

Although she was no savant, Fumi did have an uncanny ability to remember dates and other small details. She made a point of finding out the birthday of anyone she came in regular contact with, and she seemed to be able to memorize these dates with little effort. Fumi could tell you the date, the day of the week and the weather at the time of virtually any event relating to her family or to the *fukushiki* class for the past several years. I was a bit skeptical of this ability, but when I checked a few of her dates against the calendar, Fumi was always correct.

When Fumi's mother proved to be unavailable for an interview, I assumed that, being a person of few words, she did not relish the idea of spending an hour or two answering my questions about Fumi's life history. However, in the course of my interviews with the other children's mothers, I inadvertently learned that there was another possible explanation.

Ichikawa-*sensei* and Yamashita-san had had a small altercation just a few weeks before I began scheduling interviews. Apparently Ichikawa-*sensei* had discretely spoken to Yamashita-san and told her that he felt Fumi was not receiving adequate support or attention at home. He appealed to Fumi's mother to look for more ways to be supportive of her daughter.³¹ Fumi's mother was

apparently deeply offended by Ichikawa-*sensei*'s assessment of the situation at her home. In fact, Yamashita-san had complained about this episode to several of the other mothers.

Ichikawa-*sensei* was the veteran *fukushiki* instructor, who had welcomed me into his classroom. He was the one who had appealed to the principal of Midorikawa Elementary and to the children's parents to allow an American researcher into their special needs classroom. It is entirely possible that Yamashita-san was disinclined to participate in an interview with "the American researcher" because she viewed me as an overly close ally of Ichikawa-*sensei*, with whom she was in a silent dispute. It would have been uncomfortable for her if our conversation had touched upon this quarrel with her daughter's elementary school teacher. Perhaps her avoidance of the interview hints at the tactical deployment of silence, a non-response as a response.

Social science seeks out data and discourses for analysis and commentary. This posture may lead researchers to overlook, disregard, or even willfully ignore, silences. While silence is not necessarily overdetermined, the non-reply can certainly be deployed as a tactical defense. In *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) James Scott argues persuasively that disempowered group often resort to subtle tactics and subterfuge (rather than direct confrontation) in order to thwart ideologies that are perceived to be disadvantageous or threatening. In everyday life we sometimes choose tactical avoidance, rather than articulating an argument, in order to avoid a perceived threat or an inconvenient encounter. In fact, the ambiguity of silence accounts for a large measure of its practical utility as a tactic of resistance.

Therefore I would urge researchers to be attentive to and engage the places in a discourse where informants fall silent.³² Inquiries into silence can never be definitive or entirely unambiguous, but gaps in the discourse may point toward social tensions that are just beneath the surface.

Conclusions: No Middle Ground

In this chapter I explored how six women talked about the difficulties (and rewards) of raising a special needs child in Japan. While their individual stories were quite distinct, three themes resonated in all six narratives: (1) These women were well aware that the state bureaucracy deploys a series of well-coordinated strategies to differentiate healthy children [*kenjōji*] from those with impairments [*shōgaiji*]. This either / or equation was the source of considerable frustration for these caregivers and their families, especially since their children's "differences" only became visible through social interaction. (2) While each woman responded somewhat differently to the state apparatus for managing "impaired youth," they all engaged in a variety of tactics aimed at securing a degree of inclusion and mitigating (or at least delaying) stigmatization. (3) There was considerable ambiguity over issues of visibility. At times some caregivers did push for great recognition of their children's developmental differences, but more often these women played down the significance of their children's differences and argued for a broader interpretation of "regular kid" status. This is where the pull of the centering discourse of assumed homogeneity most clearly impacted the politics of peripheral personhood. For the most part, caregivers saw it as disadvantageous to emphasize the special needs of their

children. The more effective advocacy strategy was usually to cite connections with, and argue from great inclusion within, mainstream education and socio-economic life.

However, the Japanese state allocates considerable resources to the project of identifying youths who fall outside the “normal” range on developmental charts; several state bureaucracies work in a coordinated manner to manage this “special” population. Information gathered at semi-mandatory post-natal medical check-ups is shared with the social welfare bureaucracy so that, among other things, eligibility for daycare can be determined. Children identified with significant developmental differences and their mothers are strongly “encouraged” to attend special classes for “delayed” toddlers, such as the *Nobi-Nobi Classroom*. In urban areas these children are typically tracked into special preschools exclusively for children with impairments. Participation in these special programs usually eliminates the possibility of later enrolling in mainstream public daycare.³³ The Office of Educational Consultation later tests children, who have been tagged as “special,” so that the Board of Education can make a “recommendation” about which school or educational track the child should be sent to for primary school. The state also tries to encourage, entice and coerce caregivers of special needs children to participate in the disability passbook system, which affixes a name on the child’s disability and ranks their degree of impairment.

Thus the Japanese state has a very well articulated strategy for identifying and tracking children with special needs. Both the state and the parents have a vested interest in securing care and education for children/ citizens, but when

opinions are divided, the state bureaucracies can draw upon extensive documentation, expertise and authority to advance their view of how to proceed. In all of the women's narratives there were examples of how the state bureaucracies attempted to monopolize information by, for example, controlling medical files, mystifying the educational evaluation process, concealing the test results, and delaying official documents required for entrance to a specific program. The state educational bureaucracy also tried to control the rules of the game by, for instance, dictating when and who was allowed to observe classes at which schools. The state has monopoly control of both "legitimate" documents and sites of official authority. When any of the caregivers had a request or a dispute with the state educational authorities, it was the mother who had to visit the state's offices. This control twice over, of consecrated sites and legitimate texts (official documents), gives the state considerable latitude to implement its strategy of labeling, tracking and segregating "impaired" child/citizens.

Yet the mothers engaged in creative tactics to secure some degree of inclusion for their children and to deflect, or at least delay, segregation and stigma. They all voiced a fear that if their children were segregated in a protective school, they would be considered *yosomono* [outsiders] and thus be effectively cut-off from interacting with their mainstream peers. While the state educational bureaucracy attempts to stream "impaired" children into its system of special educational schools [*yōgo gakkō*], these six mothers all resisted.

The *fukushiki* system is a middle ground between the complete segregation of the protective school and regular, mainstream classes in a public primary or junior high school. By gaining access for their children to the *fukushiki* class at

Midorikawa Elementary, these women temporarily forestalled educational (and social) segregation. While the *fukushiki* class is separate from the mainstream track, the *fukushiki* students are still able to attend their local public primary school, and they are all at least nominal members of a mainstream class.

Four of the six families delayed, resisted or rejected participation in the state's disability passbook system. The Nakaharas felt that they were tricked into applying for a passbook. Only the Lins accepted a passbook for their daughter without questioning the state's ulterior motives. Since the passbook is required at special educational schools, failing to apply for a passbook is good indication that the family may try to avoid the protective school system. The primary motivation cited for avoiding the protective school was social stigmatization and isolation from one's age-grade peers in the local community. Some of the *fukushiki* mothers argued that time spent in the protective schools would have been pointless or even counterproductive as academic expectations were set so low.

One of the six women (Furukawa-san) resisted the labeling of her child as "impaired." When a medical doctor was about to affix the "*ijō ari*" [something array] label to her three-year-old son's medical file, she protested and the doctor retreated, limiting his assessment to parenthetical remarks. This "victory" allowed Naoki to join a mainstream daycare program, and he was initially placed in the mainstream classes at Midorikawa Elementary.

Koiwa-san and Nakahara-san adopted a different tactical position, accepting the "disabled" label, but arguing for greater inclusion. Fearing that the state educational authorities were preparing to place Kai in a "protective"

elementary school, Nakahara-san pulled her son out of the segregated, public preschool and placed him in a private mainstream kindergarten. When the Board of Education still “recommended” that Kai be sent to a protective elementary school, Nakahara-san successfully challenged the Board’s authority to implement this recommendation. Note that the Nakaharas’ success in resisting the Board of Education rested in no small measure on the family’s social network, which included the principal of Midorikawa Elementary. In effect the Nakaharas’ were able to turn the state bureaucracy back upon itself, pitting a school principal and veteran special needs teacher against the Board of Education. Koiwa-san, on the other hand, joined the PTA and pushed for greater visibility of the *fukushiki* program within the Midorikawa community and better integration with the mainstream classes.

Saito-san, Hibino-san and Furukawa-san acknowledged that their children had development delays, but they resisted or were ambivalent about these differences being permanently inscribed as “impairments” by the state. Saito-san openly rejected the disability passbook for Kento claiming her husband did not want to take things “that far.” Hibino-san realized that her fifth grade daughter’s future educational options were going to be restricted if she did not opt into the passbook system, yet she agonized over accepting the state’s scarlet “letter.” Hibino-san understood that once she acquiesced to the state’s “verdict,” the disabled identity was going to follow her daughter throughout her life. This sense of permanence and irreversibility caused many parents to hesitate before seeking special accommodations for their children. Furukawa-san worried about

the long-term stigma and the economic repercussions that would result from her son attending a protective high school.

Public schools are charged with the task of instilling student-citizens with a sense of participation in a national narrative of common identity. At the same time these institutions create, monitor and manage socio-academic differences, while keeping a watchful eye out for signs of social deviance. Since the Meiji period, public schools in Japan have promoted a standard dialect and taught authoritarian narrative of a homogeneous Japanese citizenry. This useful mythology of a unique and seamless population has also been consistently promoted in the national media, so the perspective has become deeply absorbed into the fabric of the Japanese citizenry. Is it then surprising that when the state hails a child as “impaired” and attempts to inscribe this identity over that of the homogeneous citizen (through a system of segregated schools and disability passbooks), parents respond with tactics that are designed to resist and delay this marginalized, outsider [*yosomono*] status? These six narratives demonstrate that while the state bureaucracies have a well integrated strategy for managing and containing deviance, individuals with special needs and their families are able to respond tactically as they push for a more inclusive framing of what it means to be a Japanese citizen.

Notes

¹ For a provocative re-reading of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in light of the discursive theory of Bakhtin/Voloshinov see *Dialogue at the Margins: Whorf, Bakhtin, and Linguistic Relativity* (Schultz 1990, 20-39).

² See Knauff (1996, 185) and Myles (2004, 97) for two examples of how common sensical, black and white binaries attempt to naturalize distinctions, disguising the ideological roots that underpin such discourse.

³ I was living in the western suburbs of Tokyo at the time, which was quite a distance from Midorikawa Elementary. If I left the party at 11:30 pm, I could reach my apartment just after 1:00 am, by which point most of the train lines in Tokyo have stopped operating.

⁴ Toward the end of my fieldwork I considered audio-recording one of these drinking parties so that I could preserve a detailed transcript of this back-stage talk, but in the end I decided against this for two reasons. First it seemed unethical, or perhaps more to the point, socially inept. There was a tacit agreement between the mothers and the teachers that for this one evening we would step away from our daytime social roles. If I were to have insisted on “playing the researcher” during these parties I would have been violating this unspoken agreement. Also I had found that little of the talk at these informal gatherings was directed toward the school or their children. It seemed as though a primary objective of these evenings out on the town, away from the school, was to try to interact as adults with diverse interests that included, but extended beyond, the special needs children. Since concerns for the welfare of the special needs children dominated, and to some extent constrained, these women’s daily lives, this occasional evening out on the town, away from their typical roles was a necessary reprieve.

⁵ In 1937-'38 Mikhail Bakhtin penned a long essay on time and the nature of spoken discourse, *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*. In this essay Bakhtin argued that the meaning of discourse is always highly contextual because an utterance is spoken at a particular moment in a specific era, at a particular location, with one or more interlocutors, who share a unique history and that therefore the dialogic inferences that arises will be particular and unique to that context (Bakhtin 1981).

⁶ It is also quite plausible that Koiwa-san was somewhat disappointed to hear that I would soon be ending my research at Midorikawa Elementary for this would reduce the number of “teachers” in the *fukushiki* class from four to three.

⁷ In Japan the PTA functions in a largely supportive role for the school administration. That is, the PTA usually brings the agenda and concerns of the administrators and teachers to the parents, rather than vice versa. At public (as well as most private) elementary schools in Japan, parents (i.e. mothers) are typically expected to serve on the PTA for at least one of the six years their children are in elementary school. The PTA assignment requires a significant commitment of time and energy as well as considerable social skills. The meeting schedule can be arduous and specific tasks are assigned to each

member. In my experience, service on the elementary school PTA was often perceived to be a necessary, if somewhat unwanted, burden on the mothers. At my son's two elementary schools in Tokyo (one private and the other public) considerable ill will was focused at those few mothers who avoided PTA duty by tactically missing the mandatory spring PTA meeting at which the next year's representatives are decided. However, it is often difficult or impossible for working women in Japan to fulfill their *required* PTA assignment as the monthly, or even weekly, meetings are often slated for the afternoon hours.

⁸ In Tokyo, due to the severely limited parking space, most elementary schools prohibit caregivers from dropping off or picking up their children. As a member of the PTA, Koiwa-san may have had special parking privileges for this school year.

⁹ There were several students in the *fukushiki* class, who would probably have been diagnosed with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in the USA. Daisuke, who had difficulty staying in his seat, was certainly was one of these students. However the use of Ritalin for "ADHD" children is not nearly as commonplace in Japan as it is in the United States. Among the *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa Elementary, the Koiwas were the only family to experiment with Ritalin, and they soon abandoned all drug therapy.

¹⁰ I should note that in both *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977/1990) and *Homo Academicus* (1984/1988), Bourdieu's thesis is restricted to an analysis of the French educational system.

¹¹ In Japan this narrative of intergenerational conflict has historical roots in traditional living arrangements wherein daughter-in-laws were expected to take up residence in their husband's natal households and to eventually provide care for his aging parents. Even in contemporary Japan, this residence pattern, while no longer dominate in urban areas, is still quite common. This ideal also continues to be reflected in the Japanese family registration system [*koseki*], wherein upon marriage the woman is officially absorbed into the husband's family household, and for administrative purposes is removed from her own natal family registry.

¹² Note that the pattern of generational conflict that emerges in both of these women's narratives very closely mirrors the generational strife that was also portrayed in the fictional *Hikari to Tomoni* television series analyzed in chapter two.

¹³ She wrote, "I want to be a barber" [*tokoyasan in naritai*] at the bottom of the picture, but I think she probably meant something closer to the English "hair stylist." When I asked her about this Aya said, "a person who cuts someone's hair [*mā kami o kiru hito da yo*]."

¹⁴ In the *Hikari to Tomoni* television series Sachiko also spends a great deal of time apologizing for her autistic son, Hikaru.

¹⁵ The name "Lin" is a pseudonym that I have superimposed to conceal the family's identity; however, the actual surname was just as revealing of Chinese origins.

¹⁶ For an insider's view of an autistic person's need to establish "local coherence" see Nazeer 2006, 50-1 & 214-5.

¹⁷ *Anpanman* is an extremely popular cartoon hero in Japan. Young children are particularly fond of this character, who is cute and funny, rather than dashing or daring. Takashi Yanase created *Anpanman* in 1968. The series has been broadcasted on the NTV network for more than three decades (Bandai 2005, 3).

¹⁸ Fumi liked to imagine herself as a princess. In the fourth grade she drew her "future self" as a bride [*o-yome-san*]; in her fifth grade drawing she depicted herself as a fashion model. While Fumi was autistic, she was keenly aware of the ways in which gender distinctions were articulated in Japanese media and pop culture.

¹⁹ Of course, patients in Japan have a legal right to review their medical files, but through a series of administrative strategies and discursive practices, doctors and state authorities are able to maintain effective control of this data.

²⁰ The term "*yōgo* [protective]" is commonly used not only for special education schools but also as a prefix for nursing homes for the elderly. In both contexts the implication is that the residents or students need protection, as they cannot look after themselves. Thus a loss of autonomy is implicit in the *yōgo* terminology.

²¹ In early elementary school learning to hold a pencil in the "correct" manner [*tadashii mochikata*] is seen as very important. There is a well-established and well-articulated *kata* [correct form] for holding a pencil. If a child is unable to hold a pencil "correctly," this is seen as an early indication that something may be amiss in the child's development. See Appendix K: *Kata* for Pencil-Holding in Japanese Elementary Schools.

²² Large and even medium size corporations in Japan frequently sponsor a variety of semi-professional athletic teams, which are "staffed" by the members of the corporation. Thus corporations will often actively recruit potential employees with outstanding athletic ability in a particular sport.

²³ Japanese is particularly open to incorporating foreign terms into its lexicon. Thousands of English terms have been transliterated and are in common use, although phonetic shifts make most these terms unrecognizable to English speakers. In Japan governmental officials, medical doctors, and other "experts" are particularly fond of using transliterated terminology [*gairaigo*] to "clarify," that is, to obfuscate, their meaning.

²⁴ I use "authoritarian discourse" in the Bakhtinian sense of a discourse that may not be "internally persuasive" and yet, since it emanates from a source of uncontested authority, is very difficult to openly challenge. Any direct challenge to such a discourse entails the risk of severe sanctions.

²⁵ Nakahara-san does not attempt to deconstruct the mythological aspect of this talk about "a homogeneous Japan," yet any discourse about something as abstract and constructed as "a national identity" is bound by its narrative frame to enter into a mythical realm. Talk of "a pioneer spirit" or "a long tradition of rugged individualism" in America is equally constructed and has a similarly mythical dimension.

²⁶ Five of these interviews were recorded on cassette tapes, and one meeting was videotaped with a digital video camera mounted on a tripod.

²⁷ In Japan there is a strong discursive trajectory that lays blame for any shortcomings in a child at the mother's feet. As several of mothers mentioned, their child's developmental delays were sometimes misconstrued as a problem of poor *shitsuke* [upbringing].

²⁸ We did reach a compromise solution. I could film, but would exclude Yoshi from the frame. I usually restricted my filming of the *fukushiki* class to those times when Yoshi was absent, either sick or taking part in some activity with his mainstream peers.

²⁹ A term like "nervous breakdown" is highly constructed and tied up with twentieth century pop psychology about emotional health. The psychosocial categories we use to describe mental conditions are very fluid and open to reinterpretation. As Gergen argues, "prior to this century, one could not meaningfully experience a nervous breakdown, an inferiority complex, an identity crisis, an authoritarian personality tendency, chronic depression, occupational burnout, or seasonal affective disorder" (Gergen 1996, 132). In any case, Yoshi's mother was briefly hospitalized for an emotional crisis that sprung from a paranoid fixation on the idea that her family was being watched.

³⁰ The Tokyo Metro holds an annual art competition for elementary students. The winner's artwork is put on display in subway stations throughout the Tokyo area.

³¹ Reportedly Ichikawa-sensei complained that Fumi's mother was not adequately focused on, or not sufficiently involved with, her daughter at home, "*Fumi-chan ni te-wo kakenasasugi.*" One of the *fukushiki* mothers described Ichikawa-sensei's negative assessment as a euphemistic accusation of "wanton neglect [*hottarakashi jōtai*]."

³² Like dreams, spoken discourse may also be overdetermined. That is, discourse (and silence) often has multiple levels of meaning that can simultaneously encompass contradictory sentiments. See Merleau-Ponty's eloquent argument for the sociological relevance of Freudian theory regarding the multiplicity of meaning (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 24-5; Freud 1889/1999, 117).

³³ In some cases public daycare centers in Japan will accept a child with a disability. At the daycare center in Tokyo where we sent our son, there was one girl with Down syndrome; however, over a three-year period she was the only impaired child who was allowed to attend the mainstream daycare program. Staffing levels at the preschools often play a large role in determining the eligibility of disabled children for the mainstream program. At the time of this research, the default position in urban Japan was to track children with special needs into segregated, half-day preschool programs that require the involvement of both the child and the parent (the mother). This made it very difficult for mothers with developmentally delayed children to continue working outside the home.

Chapter 6

The Tyranny of Normalcy?

Introduction

English language, ethnographic studies of Japanese public schooling have neglected to consider, or chosen to ignore, students with special needs; however, the *fukushiki* system and the protective schools merit analytic attention because these separate classes and segregated schools operate in tangent with their mainstream counterparts. Also the number of students tracked into specialized classrooms in Japan has been increasing. During a period when Japan's overall student population was beginning to decline, the number of *fukushiki* classrooms reached almost 25,000 (in 2006), nearly doubling over the course of a single decade (Appendix A, Table 4).

The absolute size of Japan's special education system is perhaps less critical than the particular manner in which this systems tags children as "special" and then attempts to guide and construct the lives of this special group of students. As there are no gifted programs within Japan's public elementary and junior high schools, tracking is only applied to youths with disabilities or special needs.

In this final chapter I will show how at the level of discourse, and of practice, the "special needs" child provides insights into Japanese schemas for personhood and offers a commentary on the rights and obligations of citizens in contemporary Japan. I return to my broader questions and consider what the *fukushiki* system provides and accomplishes from four particular positions: first (1) that of the individual child, (2) the child's family, (3) the school community

and finally (4) the level of nation. The meaning of the *fukushiki* label, as well as the opportunities and risks that are entailed in the *fukushiki* system itself, differ according to one's positioned perspective.

"Kids' Culture" & Intersubjectivity

In the mid-1950s, Hallowell suggested that ethnographers should try to integrate historically situated, cultural research with a concern for how individuals actually experience themselves in the life world. "[T]he organism and its milieu must be considered together, [as] a single creature (1955, 88)." He argued that in our cultural descriptions and interpretations, anthropologists should try to consider what is most significant from the point of view of the individual in his or her life world. Building on Hallowell, Ortner writes that "[e]thnography... has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing (1995,173)." There is, however, an ontological limit built into our attempts at achieving intersubjective understanding and generating truly situated knowledge. To what degree can one individual penetrate and share in, the experience of another's life world? This remains an open question not only for anthropology, but also for humanity itself. And yet anthropology's attempt to take the experience of another's life world seriously is, I would argue, the discipline's hallmark and its greatest strength.

For nearly two years I spent several days a week with the students in Midorikawa Elementary's *fukushiki* class; however, I do not claim that I ultimately was able to grasp what it was like to *be* a *fukushiki* student. Before

arriving in the *fukushiki* classroom I had thought that it might be possible to share in the students' subjective experiences to some extent. After all, as a first and second grader I too had been slow to grasp the rhythm, the purpose and the logic of the formal school day; I could remember what it felt like to pretend at understanding the activity my peers were engaged in. Yet time passes, positions shift and so too understanding. As adults, to what degree can we really remember and re-experience what it felt like to be elementary school students ourselves? Are these the memories of a child or new narratives spun unknowingly by our adult-selves?

Goode, who carried out long-term fieldwork with alingual, deaf and blind children, argues that for the most part social scientific studies of children fail to penetrate their world (1994, 165). He reminds us that the relationship between children and adults is asymmetrical, not only because of authority issues, but also because adults are (at some level) former children, but children are yet-to-be-adults (ibid, 188). This creates an absolute positional gap between the adult researcher and the children in the study. Studies that fail to recognize this gap or do not make a concerted effort to take *kids' culture* seriously (as a distinct way of being in the world) end up reaching conclusions that are entirely adultcentric. Goode argues that before we can begin making any progress at understanding children's worlds, "[k]id-adult interaction needs to be reconceptualized as cross-cultural contact (ibid, 187)."

I also felt the difficulty of trying to grasp the subjective experience of the children in the *fukushiki* class. In a sense there were two cultural divides to negotiate: one between my American upbringing and the socio-cultural space of

a Japanese elementary school and another between my adult-self and an imperfectly remembered childhood persona.

My attempts to bridge these dual divides were only partially successful. During my fieldwork I was acutely aware that the *fukushiki* children had their own habitus that was incredibly difficult for me to peer into or experience. In some sense there was an absolute distance between the *fukushiki* students and myself, and yet we also shared in a bond, as I was reminded on a recent visit to Midorikawa Elementary School.¹ We had spent hundreds of hours together, sharing lunches, kickball games, fieldtrips, sports festivals, as well as the annual inter-school theater production, and the over night study trips. We shared laughter and tears, broken pencils, crumpled papers and spilt milk. To some extent, these joint experiences bonded us together, yet I do not claim that such a bond could be equated with intersubjective *communitas*.

For a couple of years our lives intersected in the *fukushiki* classroom. During that time I tried my utmost to see the world from the children's point of view, yet even when I partially succeeded, I realized that the school day was only one aspect of their lives. I could not follow the *fukushiki* students home to see who they played with in their neighborhoods or watch their interactions with siblings or parents. I did come to know something of their off-campus lives, but what I learned came to me mostly second hand through their mothers. Thus despite a concerted effort, I was always somewhat in doubt of my ability to truly grasp how they were experiencing their habitus in and out of the special needs classroom.

Limited Peer Networks & The Child's Habitus

It was clear that *fukushiki* students' peer networks were more circumscribed than those of their mainstream counterparts. The comparatively large size of the kindergarten and elementary school classes in Japan necessitates competence in cooperative group work and consensus building. These larger classes also encourage students to rely on one another for help, thus fostering the creation of horizontal ties with one's age-grade peers. Many scholars of Japanese education have documented the positive benefits of this pedagogical strategy (Benjamin 1997, 55-58; Lewis 1995, 84-85). Tobin, Wu and Davidson argue that single child families in Japan tend to see larger classes as beneficial because they provide opportunities for children to learn about and "experience the pleasures and responsibilities of life in a group and thus to become, in Japanese terms, fully human (1989, 71)."

However, if for a variety of reasons, a child is ostracized, ignored or cannot otherwise find success working within a self-regulated, peer group, then school life is likely to be particularly difficult (Sato 2004, 7). The cooperative peer group is the fundamental social relationship that Japanese elementary school students must learn to negotiate. I would argue that failure to be incorporated into the structure of a cooperative peer group in elementary school severely restricts a child's access to "kids' culture" itself.² Let me be clear on this point. I am not arguing that impaired or developmentally delayed children in Japan are automatically rejected by their peers. In fact, I observed several mainstream elementary classrooms with developmentally delayed students, who appeared to be well integrated into their classes. However, if a child cannot get along with or

is consistently ignored or rejected by his or her peers, then the social and psychological repercussions seemed to be particularly significant in Japan.

At Midorikawa Elementary some of the students who transferred into the *fukushiki* class did so primarily because they were having social problems with their mainstream peers. One of the important functions of the *fukushiki* system was to provide such students with a second chance at securing a degree of academic success and social affirmation by studying with a much smaller a group of similar peers.

On this level the program at Midorikawa was a success. Teachers and parents reported that the students who transferred into the *fukushiki* class gained confidence and appeared to have improved self-esteem after joining the *fukushiki* track. In my interviews, several caregivers said that prior to the transfer, their child was withdrawn, depressed, or angry. The *fukushiki* classroom offered these students a chance to experience a level of social and academic success that had evaded them in their mainstream classes. Naoki and Yoshi had both been repeatedly teased and ostracized in the mainstream system, yet in *fukushiki* track they were elected as class leaders, and the younger students even looked to them for guidance. For such students the move into the *fukushiki* system was a positive experience. Note, however, that Aya, who transferred at the beginning of the second grade, was rather ambivalent about her move out of the mainstream classroom. In fact, her mother reported that Aya initially attempted to conceal her membership in the *fukushiki* class from her neighborhood friends, who attended another school.

I believe that Aya's initial ambivalence about her move into the *fukushiki* track and the other transfer students' reported gains in self-confidence after joining the special needs classroom, can be traced to the same source. The central issue for Aya and her *fukushiki* peers was the degree to which they were able to participate in—or the extent to which they might be excluded from—the socio-cultural habitus of their peers (i.e. kids' culture). For the *fukushiki* students that I came to know, the *fukushiki* classroom allowed for greater participation in kids' culture because the special needs students were able to establish reciprocal, interdependent relationships among and across age-grades. The drawback was that this very positive benefit was accomplished by narrowing the students' social network to supposedly similar classmates.

The low student to teacher ratio in the *fukushiki* track also allowed for academic content to be tailored to the specific needs and abilities of the individual students. This was clearly advantageous to students who could not grasp the content of their mainstream classes.

The range of ages among the *fukushiki* classmates seemed to be mostly beneficial to the students. The multi-age classroom provided role models for the younger students and pushed the older students into positions of responsibility and authority that would probably have been out of reach in a large, mainstream classroom.

However these concrete benefits came at some costs. Moving into the *fukushiki* system was simultaneously a movement away from one's age grade peers. Traphagan has argued that interdependency in Japan often takes on a horizontal character, as people tend to rely on neighbors and friends from the

same age grade (2000, 180). For most Japanese elementary school students, age grade affiliations are a critical source of identity and friendship. Peer ties from elementary school often continue to be important sources of support and social networking well into adulthood. Placing a child in a *fukushiki* classroom dramatically reduces the student's interaction with age grade peers. As a result, the age-grade was much less central to the school identities of the special needs students than their mainstream counterparts at Midorikawa Elementary. This tended to limit the *fukushiki* students' social network at school. Even during recess, the special needs students usually played with one another, rather than mixing with similar age students from the mainstream classes.

Claiming the *fukushiki* Identity as Their Own

Although there were frequent disputes among the *fukushiki* classmates, I observed nothing that could be construed as teasing within the special needs class. With the limited number of students and the high teacher to student ratio within the special needs classroom, opportunities for teasing were limited. Yet as we saw in chapter one, the *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa Elementary School were not immune to being teased by their mainstream counterparts.³

In the large mainstream classes, the monitoring and regulation of peers is often deferred onto the class itself. Thus the possibility of being teased or excluded by one's age-grade peers is a contingency of mainstream Japanese schooling. In M. White's ethnography of Japanese elementary schools, she reports that the children most at risk of being bullied or teased were those who were seen as "different" (1987, 46). In the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa

Elementary, the older students appeared quite sensitive about how they might be portrayed by their mainstream peers. Yoshi's awareness of the potential for teasing, probably motivated him to organize his *fukushiki* classmates against Ichikawa-sensei's plan to replace the generic name of their class with the proposed "Buddies' Class" [*nakayoshi gakkyū*] alternative. In Yoshi's view, being dubbed a "buddy" held the potential for ridicule from mainstream peers.

As Holland and Leander argue, identity is simultaneously a personal and social affair,

A person or group is "offered" or "afforded" a social position when a powerful body, such as a governmental agency proposes a particular sort of subject, a "felon," say, or a "sexual harasser," or an "at-risk" student and calls on an individual to occupy the position (2004, 127).

When Japan's educational bureaucracy established the *fukushiki* system, state authorities were also inventing a new sub-class of students. At Midorikawa Elementary the special needs students did not simply passively accept this school identity. They gradually came to claim the *fukushiki* designation as their own and instilled this tag with positive nuances of their own design. To some extent this may have been a defense against competing discourses in which they were cast as "odd" [*hen*] or rendered mostly invisible to their mainstream peers. Seizer argues that, "one way to stave off and combat excessive social vulnerability is to take the power of language, and particularly the power of naming, into one's own hands (2005, 283)."

By rejecting their teacher's plan for a new improved name and insisting on preserving the generic *fukushiki* label, the special needs students were laying claim to a social category, created by the state, and recasting this identity as their

own. In many ways participation in the *fukushiki* track encouraged the formation of reciprocal ties with *fukushiki* classmates and enabled the special needs students to more fully participate in “kids’ culture.” That was something that was worth identifying with and defending.

Mother & Child: Co-constructing Identity at Normalcy’s Edge

In his writings on *culture as biography*, David Plath invokes the term “convoy” and plays upon the image of a troop of significant others moving together through time (Plath 1980, 224-6). Plath argues that the seemingly individuated project of selfhood and self-interpretation is deeply entangled with the lives and trajectories of others; narratives of self are co-constructed, relational and in state of perpetual reinterpretation. Plath’s metaphor helps convey the sense that selfhood is an unfinished project with relational, cultural, linguistic and historical-temporal dimensions, all of which are always in flux.

In the convoy of significant others, the linkage between the mother and the child is one of the most *significant* relationships. This is particularly true in contemporary Japan where the discourse on *amae* [dependency] within the mother/child dyad is emphasized as a cultural ideal (Peak 1991, 190).⁴ Hendry writes that the psychological ties between mother and child are perceived to be so close that women in Japan often will avoid complimenting their children in public because “it would almost be like praising herself if a mother praised her child (1986, 106).” M. White argues that “*the central human relationship in Japanese culture is between mother and child* (1987, 21; emphasis in the original).”

The identities of mothers and children in Japan are also linked by discourse emanating from *seken* [the social world that includes relatives, neighbors, teachers, colleagues and generalized others]. As we saw in the *Hikari to Tomoni* television narrative, *seken* often evaluates the mother in terms of her children's disposition and accomplishments. Thus giving birth to a child with significant developmental differences can reflect negatively on the mother and place a strain on her previous social network. In a private interview Furukawa-san confessed that she had "to throw vanity and shame to the wind" in order to come to grips with her son's impairment. Here she was acknowledging that her social position and her identity as a competent, successful mother were both threatened by her son's developmental difference.

In some ways the invisibility or opacity of the *fukushiki* students' impairments made things more difficult for their families. When a child is born with a physical disability, the child's difference is readily apparent from infancy; parents learn to adjust their expectations and make plans in light of the child's impairment. However, developmental delays often are not detected until the age of two or later, and the subsequent diagnosis is frequently elusive. (Few of the *fukushiki* students had firm medicalized diagnoses.) This places a long-term question mark over the child's developmental path and makes planning more difficult for the caregivers.

While acknowledging that Naoki's development was delayed, Furukawa-san kept hoping against hope that her son just might "return to normal [*futsū ni modoru*]." When he failed to "return," Furukawa-san had to undergo a journey of her own, reworking her self-image as a caregiver, an advocate and a mother.

When a child has a significant developmental delay, a cognitive impairment, speech impediment or learning disability, establishing mutual relationships with age-grade peers can be difficult, and these interactions tend to become less frequent and more circumscribed as the child moves toward adolescence. I found that in the school community at Midorikawa Elementary, when a child's peer network was restricted, the peer network of the child's mother was also impacted.⁵ Similarly, in the *Hikari to Tomoni* mini-series, Sachiko became depressed not only because her autistic son was hard to reach and difficult to control, but also because his developmental differences effectively cut her off from the network of young mothers living in her upscale condominium complex. Hikaru-kun's autism became the source of Sachiko's social isolation. Even Sachiko's mother-in-law broke off relations, refusing to visit until her grandson was "cured."

A number of the *fukushiki* mothers complained about being isolated and rendered near invisible within the Midorikawa school community. Koiwa-san was particularly upset that the school administration remained silent about the *fukushiki* class at school-wide, parent-teacher meetings and at other public events, such as the Sports Festival. This muteness on the part of the school administration regarding the special needs class made it difficult for the *fukushiki* mothers to advocate for their children, or even to breach the topic of special needs, within the context of the broader school community. In private interviews many of the *fukushiki* mothers revealed a sense of frustration about their perceived peripherality within Midorikawa Elementary School. On the other

hand, their sense of shared exclusion bound these women tightly together as mutually supportive peers.

In the fictional television mini-series, and in the lived experiences of the *fukushiki* mothers, there was a narrowing of the mothers' peer group, which in some ways mirrored their special needs children's limited peer networks. But the internal networks that existed within, and emanated out from, *fukushiki* class increased in intimacy and importance. The mothers and the teachers of the *fukushiki* students were more involved in one another's lives than would have been possible in a typical class with a single instructor and thirty-five students. At Midorikawa Elementary the off-campus drinking parties, conceived of and arranged by *fukushiki* mothers, were unique to the *fukushiki* class.⁶ While the *fukushiki* mothers were somewhat isolated from the larger school community, the network of peer relations that they fostered with one another (and with the *fukushiki* teachers) served as a source of shared information and mutual support. This sense of common purpose and shared identity seemed to be as true for the primary caregivers as it was for the *fukushiki* students themselves.

In many ways the eight *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa Elementary were quite peripheral to the primary mission of the school, which was necessarily focused on the education of the more than one thousand mainstream children who attended. The *fukushiki* mothers expressed both ambivalence and some frustration about their children's peripheral status. It was annoying to be ignored or rendered invisible at the all-school events, but there were also times when it was seen as advantageous to go relatively unnoticed. Among the mothers there was a tension between the desire to foster ties with mainstream peers, and the

desire to protect their special needs children from potential teasing and stigmatization. Caregivers who had transferred their children into the *fukushiki* track from the mainstream system were sometimes relieved to see only limited contact with age-grade peers because this contact had at times been problematic for their children. (A few of the transferees—Naoki, Yoshi, and Hiroki—had been socially isolated and teased in their mainstream classes.) On the other hand, mothers of children who entered the *fukushiki* track from the beginning of first grade tended to push for a greater degree of integration with mainstream students.

The *fukushiki* families were thus not of one mind on the implementation of special needs education or the “disabled” designation itself. To many caregivers the *fukushiki* class was seen a vehicle for level appropriate instruction and a way to protect their special needs children from social stresses and academic demands of the mainstream classes while still being able to attend a mainstream, public school. But for a minority of caregivers (most of whom were fathers) the *fukushiki* designation was a sign of stigma and failure.⁷

Nakamura-san had to battle with the Office of Educational Consultation and override the strong objections of the Board of Education in order to secure a place for her son in the *fukushiki* classroom. She was very supportive of the *fukushiki* system, which allowed Kai to attend a local public school. But Yoshi’s father openly rejected the *fukushiki* designation and asked that his son not be photographed as a member of the *fukushiki* class.

The Nakahara family seemed to have come to terms with the “disabled” designation. In order to ensure that their cognitively impaired son would not be

misunderstood by outsiders, Nakahara-san even made a badge for Kai that succinctly explained his disability. At one of the parent-teacher meetings Kai's mother decided to show this badge to the other *fukushiki* parents, but none of the other caregivers wanted to announce their children's mostly invisible disabilities quite so loudly. Later Nakahara-san herself appeared to have second thoughts about this badge, which she had yet to use. Thus there was no firm consensus among the mothers about how to best advocate for *fukushiki* students or how deal with the visibility/invisibility of their children's disabilities. As a group these women took a flexible, pragmatic, situational and tactical approach to the issue of their children's differences.

All of the *fukushiki* caregivers expressed strongly negative views of the segregated, protective school system. Parents were aware that the protective schools offered many more opportunities for individual tutoring, but they felt that this benefit did not begin to compensate for the negative repercussions of being segregated. Attending a protective school eliminated the possibility of performing normalcy, both for the child and for the family. Children who attended a protective school were effectively cut off from neighborhood peer networks. Yet as long as the child continued to attend the local public school, a semblance of normalcy could be maintained as the impaired child's schedule was still integrated with those of their other siblings and mainstream peers.

In fact, we could view the *fukushiki* system as an avenue for moderately impaired children to enact or perform normalcy by attending mainstream public schools. The success of this performance had long-term consequences not only

for their own social trajectories, but also for the identities and the social networks of their primary caregivers, that is for their mothers.

Schools: Peer Relations & Normalcy

In early July, just prior to the six-week summer vacation, there was a confidential teachers meeting at which instructors discussed any “problem” students in their mainstream classes. School administrators, *fukushiki* teachers, and several outside specialists, made preliminary recommendations regarding transfers into the special needs track. Since the Midorikawa’s student population exceeded 1,000 students, there were always a number of borderline and impaired students participating in mainstream classes.

Kiyoshi Nagata, a shy, amiable, somewhat overweight boy, was one such student. He had a significant learning disability as well as problems with fine motor skills.⁸ When I began my fieldwork at Midorikawa Elementary, Kiyoshi was a third grader in a mainstream classroom. On several occasions the teaching staff and administration discussed the possibility of moving Kiyoshi into the *fukushiki* classroom.

Kiyoshi had very limited verbal abilities, but he was a tenacious student who was not disruptive. He also had a diligent, proactive mother, who coordinated closely with his mainstream teachers and tutored her son every evening. I spent a number of days in Kiyoshi’s third grade class at Midorikawa. There were several girls in this class who took it upon themselves to assist Kiyoshi, making sure that he was turned to the correct page and helping to correct his assignments. With this peer support network Kiyoshi was able to

struggle along in the mainstream system all the way through the end of fifth grade. Finally his mother decided that her son would be better served in the *fukushiki* track for his final year of elementary school. Kiyoshi's mother said that peer relations were the critical factor that convinced her to transfer her son into the special needs classroom.⁹ While a number of his classmates were very supportive for much of elementary school, eventually the gap in ability and social development proved too great, and Kiyoshi was increasingly left to himself.

The deciding factor for Kiyoshi's mother was not academics, but rather peer relationships. At the confidential teachers' meeting, in which transfers into the special needs class were considered, instructors also discussed peer relations at length. If a student was struggling or acting out, but his or her classmates were still acknowledging and including the student within the structure of the class, then a transfer recommendation was highly unlikely. The key word was *mitometeru-koto* [acknowledgement], and the key relationships were among peers, rather than between the instructor and the individual student. Note that, at least in the early grades of elementary school, empathetic classmates often assist academically weak students. If, however, the class consensus tags a peer as odd [*hen*] then it becomes increasingly difficult, even for previously supportive classmates, to rally to the isolated student's aid.

Transferring into a *fukushiki* track physically (and psychologically) separates a child from their cohort of age-grade peers. Since age-grade affiliations and *senpai/kōhai* distinctions are emphasized in Japanese elementary schools, administrators, teachers and parents all tend to view the *fukushiki* option

as a measure of last resort—an escape pod reserved primarily for those students who cannot be smoothly integrated with their age-grade classmates.

The *fukushiki* track is primarily a social (rather than a targeted educational) intervention. In Midorikawa's *fukushiki* class there was a lot of time and effort spent on fostering positive peer interactions within the structure of junior/senior relations. Elder classmates were expected to assume positions of responsibility within the class and to act as role models for their younger classmates.

The Props of Normalcy

The *fukushiki* instructors did not attempt to mirror the curriculum that was being taught in the mainstream classes. They could choose among a wide variety of texts and teaching materials approved for grades one through six. The actual content of particular lessons was left entirely to the discretion of the *fukushiki* teaching staff. Unlike the mainstream classes, there was no nationally mandated curriculum that had to be taught within a given time frame.

And yet at Midorikawa Elementary, each *fukushiki* student was issued a complete set of age-grade appropriate texts, the very same books that were being used in the mainstream classes. In the *fukushiki* class these textbooks generally remained unopened. The books stayed neatly stacked in each child's wooden cubby at the back of the room. Ichikawa-sensei explained that while he had little intention of using these texts, he requested that a full set be issued to each *fukushiki* student so that they would be familiar with these books when they visited their age-grade peers in the mainstream classes. These textbooks thus

served as props of normalcy, testifying to the *fukushiki* students' affiliation with their mainstream age-grade peers.

Ichikawa-*sensei* made clear that these texts were not kept on hand in order to teach content. Rather they were present so that the students, and their teachers, could maintain a "facade of normalcy" to an outside public. The mainstream books could be pointed to as evidence of the students' age-grade status. The efficacy of these texts was not measured in terms of content mastered, but rather was confirmed in the status affiliation inferred by mere possession.

This concern with creating a facade of normalcy, extended into the structure of the *fukushiki* day itself. Students were, for instance, coached on how to run a class meeting that mimic the meetings being held in the mainstream classes. Steps were meticulously broken down into manageable pieces that could be practiced and mastered through repetition. Normalcy was something that could be performed for one's classmates and critiqued by one's teachers. Thus there was a "*kata* of normalcy" that could be enacted and performed with varying degrees of success. When Fumi used the "wrong" tone of voice, Aya struck the "incorrect" emotional tenor, Hiroki pushed instead of using words or Momo "forgot" to say sorry, the *fukushiki* instructors would gently coax the students to try running through the scene again. Within the confines of structured classroom activities, normalcy could often be approximated with sufficient practice and repetition.

A Special Track, but not “Specialized” Instruction

The *fukushiki* class was not designed to provide therapeutic interventions for specific types of impairment. For instance, many of the *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa Elementary had mild to moderate speech impediments, which often were a contributing factor to the students’ social isolation from their mainstream peers; however, speech therapy was not part of the special needs curriculum. The *fukushiki* instructors did correct the students’ sentence structure, particularly during the morning and afternoon meetings. At these more formal moments of the day, the instructors would insist, for instance, that students use full sentences ending with the polite *desu* and *masu* forms—rather than the informal *da* and *u* endings used in discourse with one’s intimates and peers.¹⁰ However, a speech therapist was not available to the class and the instructors had little or no specialized training in this area.

At the time of my fieldwork there were no special teaching qualifications required for instructors assigned to the *fukushiki* track. Ichikawa-sensei was an innovative, charismatic instructor, who held both regular and special education teaching credentials;¹¹ however, Fujita-sensei and Iida-sensei had no special needs training prior to being assigned to the special needs track. This highlights the fact that the *fukushiki* system does not aim to provide specially tailored educational and/or therapeutic services to students with disabilities or learning differences. The teaching staff at Midorikawa Elementary was dedicated and innovative, but they did not attempt to design a unique educational program for each student based on the particulars of their specific impairments.¹²

I had the good fortune to observe and work with Ichikawa-*sensei*, who was a particularly well-respected and creative instructor with decades of practical experience teaching special needs students. In fact, he enjoyed such a favorable reputation among the special needs community that the Koiwa family relocated to the Midorikawa school district so that their son could study under his instruction. However, in a recent discussion (summer 2007), Ichikawa-*sensei* was quite critical of staffing procedures for the *fukushiki* track.

When an instructor is assigned to the *fukushiki* system, he or she is usually paired with a veteran teacher for at least one year. This seemed like a practical approach, but Ichikawa-*sensei* said that over the years, school administrators had often used the *fukushiki* track as a “dumping ground” for instructors who had trouble managing the larger, mainstream classes. There was no way for me to confirm or disprove this assertion, but it is conceivable that a disproportionate percentage of problematic instructors may end up being assigned to lead the smaller *fukushiki* classes. At Midorikawa Elementary, however, it seemed to me (and to the parents) that the *fukushiki* students were generally well served by their dedicated teachers.

School as Nation: Homogeneity & The Special Needs Child

From the point of view of the educational bureaucracy the *fukushiki* track provides special support to students with impairments, while helping to ensure uniform standards and preserving social harmony within the mainstream classrooms. The *fukushiki* classroom also represents, and serves as a way to contain, marginality for both students and teachers in Japan.

By establishing a procedure to provide assistance to, and to isolate, marginalized students in “special” classrooms, the *fukushiki* system preserves the appearance of homogeneity within the mainstream classroom. To some extent the supposed homogeneity of the Japanese student population can be seen as an achievement of discursive practices, organization and exclusion.¹³ One function of the protective schools and the *fukushiki* classes is to defend this narrative of homogeneity and to police normalcy among Japanese youth. These types of processes within the public education system parallel the many ways in which the mythology of homogeneity is generated, structured, maintained, and practiced in contemporary Japan.

Weiner argues that the pervasive, overarching discourse of homogeneity in Japan has been fostered and deployed by the state in a systematic (and largely successful) attempt to exclude the historical experiences of minority groups. He writes that, “In defining the Japanese nation as a collective personality, characterized by uniformity and homogeneity, the family state was itself conceived as a reflection of the inherited qualities and capacities of its people (1997, 8).” Youths with developmental differences and invisible impairments pose a potential threat to this smooth narrative of uniformed capacity, collective personality and shared belonging in the metaphorical family-nation.

If disabled and special needs students were fully integrated into mainstream classrooms, the myth of homogeneity would certainly be harder to maintain. Thus one function of the *fukushiki* system is to perpetuate the fiction of a homogeneous population by creating a separate, low profile classroom for students with special needs within the public schools. The dual tales of

homogeneity and harmony are advanced and reconfirmed through this process of subtle exclusion.

In the mid-1980s bullying at school [*ijime mondai*] suddenly emerged as a serious social ill in Japan, and subsequently there was a marked expansion of the *fukushiki* system. The widely discussed bullying issue may well have contributed to educational bureaucracy's decision to significantly increase the number of *fukushiki* classrooms starting in the early 1990s.

"Bullying" is actually an inadequate and somewhat misleading gloss for *ijime*. In Japanese context, *ijime* does not simply mean bullying. Rather, the term implies:

[A] collective act by a group of pupils to humiliate, disgrace, or torment a targeted pupil psychologically, verbally, or physically... In *ijime*, a majority brings ignominy upon a minority of one; a strong group gains satisfaction from the anguish of a pupil in a weak and disadvantaged position; and a large number of spectator pupils acquiesce in such harassment for fear of being chosen as targets themselves (Sugimoto 2003, 137).

In the 1980s the Japanese press covered a string of suicides by junior high and even elementary school age students. These self-inflicted deaths were attributed to prolonged social isolation and severe ridicule from peers at school (Yoneyama 1999, 10). These stories caused social outrage in Japan over the next generation's supposed lack of humanity (Smith 1998, 21 & 63). At the time there was a sense that the *ijime* problem was out of control and something was terrible wrong at school. As a result the educational bureaucracy came under considerable criticism and was forced to take some proactive measures.¹⁴

Note that concern over the *ijime* issue peaked in the mid-1980s. The Ministry of Education documented a record 155,000 cases of *ijime* in 1985, which was depicted in the press as a startlingly high figure (Sugimoto 2003, 137).¹⁵ Just a few years later there was a major push to rapidly expand the number of *fukushiki* classrooms (see Appendix A, Table 4). By providing an alternative, separate track for learning impaired or developmentally delayed students, who were viewed as potential targets of bullying, the state was also implementing a preventative measure against the possibility *ijime* at school, while simultaneously preserving the dominant narrative of a homogeneous student population.

A One-Way Ticket

When a student was transferred out of a *tsūjō* [regular] classroom into a *fukushiki* class, it was always a one-way ticket. I could not document a single case in which a *fukushiki* student later was able to rejoin the mainstream system. Also at Midorikawa Elementary it appeared difficult for *fukushiki* students to sustain active friendships with peers in the mainstream classes. To some extent Hiroki attempted to preserve ties to previous classmates, but as we saw in chapter 5, his efforts were often not successful.

The mutual exclusivity of the two tracks and the unidirectionality of travel between the two systems (into—but never out of—the *fukushiki* classroom), gave the parents of borderline special needs children reason to pause before opting to send their children into a *fukushiki* classroom.

Narrowing Options

For students who were struggling academically or were socially isolated from their age-grade peers, there were immediate, tangible benefits to be gained from transferring over to the *fukushiki* track; however, the switch into the special needs system also had long-term, negative repercussions for these students' educational and socio-economic horizons. Caregivers of borderline children sometimes expressed ambivalence about the special needs track. This probably reflects a belief that opting into the system implies a significant narrowing of their child's future educational, social and economic options.

In theory the *fukushiki* track provides a middle ground between the segregated, protective schools and the regular, mainstream classes; however, this is only a temporary "solution" for borderline students. At the end of junior high, mainstream students must face competitive entrance exams that determine high school placement. At this critical point the *fukushiki* option evaporates.¹⁶ In my interviews all of the *fukushiki* mothers voiced concerns about what would become of their special needs children upon graduation from junior high school. In effect the *fukushiki* track only offers a temporary haven for these children. Any remaining ambiguity about the special needs student's status is resolved at the close of compulsory education.

At this point in mid-adolescence *fukushiki* graduates have few options other than joining a protective school or joining the workforce.¹⁷ Some families with sufficient resources may seek to place their special needs children in private trade schools [*senmon gakkō*], where they can spend a year or two learning skills that may be helpful in the job market. However, among the *fukushiki* graduates

from Midorikawa Elementary, the more common path was to opt into the protective educational system for high school. In order for students with special needs to obtain a publicly financed, high school education, entering a protective school is usually the only option.

Identities Inscribed—Ambiguity Resolved

The *fukushiki* system allows for some degree of ambiguity about the nature and degree of the child’s impairment, but the protective school system does not. Possession of a disabilities passbook is a prerequisite for entry into Japan’s protective school system. The disability passbook not only provides the holder with access to a number of subsidized social services and welfare benefits, but it also codifies, labels and ranks the individual’s specific disability. The passbook thus serves as a material representation of the individual’s impairment, which is given an official status, a ranking and a sense of permanence.

Social Development & Labeling in Japan

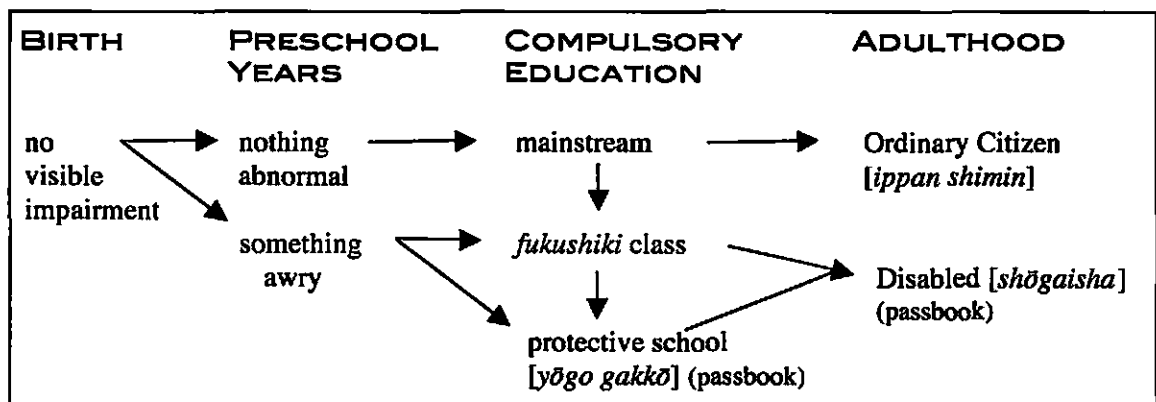


Figure 6.1: Labeling, Educational Tracks & Citizenship

Obtaining a passbook provides the holder with material benefits such as increased educational options, social services, job training and placement opportunities, and even small monetary payments. Thus as students with impairments reach adolescence, most families eventually decide to opt into the passbook system.

Yet the disability passbook inscribes the individual's impairment in the public record, as well as in the passbook itself, thus objectifying the particular "disability" and turning an attribute into a form of subjectification. This places the "disabled individual" in a peripheral position within the national discourse on citizenship. In fact, the term *shōgaisha* [disabled person] is semantically contrasted with *ippan shimin* [ordinary citizen]. In effect, the disability passbook calls into question the individual's autonomy, and affixes a permanent asterisk on the citizenship of its holder (Long 2005, 215).

In her study of deaf identities, Nakamura found that in spite of the potential for stigmatization, virtually all deaf and hearing impaired persons in Japan applied for disability passbooks. Individuals opted into the social welfare system in order to secure material benefits provided by the state bureaucracy (2006, 19). Nakamura argues that this was not simply passive compliance with government directives, but rather represented a tactical, pragmatic, participatory approach to the social welfare system (2001, 295).

I also found that families with special needs children were pragmatic, resourceful and creative in negotiating with Japan's educational and social welfare bureaucracies. Most *fukushiki* caregivers chose to defer applying for the disability passbook in order to postpone officially registering their child as

“disabled.” By networking with one another, mothers came to realize that their special needs children could attend local mainstream schools as members of the *fukushiki* track, without having to first secure a passbook. Only when educational options narrowed at the end of junior high school did the passbooks begin to seem more advantageous.

From the perspective of the state, the *fukushiki* classes often serve to delay entry of developmentally delayed individuals into the welfare system; however, at the arrival of adolescence most families with special needs children decide to opt into the passbook system. The Japanese social welfare bureaucracy also makes use of both positive incentives (social welfare benefits) and negative sanctions (restricted access to secondary education) in order to encourage participation in the passbook system. To secure welfare benefits disabled individuals must “volunteer” to participate in the state’s classificatory passbook system, which attempts to co-opt differences for its own purposes. While individuals are able to obtain social welfare benefits by joining the passbook system, the state also gains a degree of bureaucratic control over the lives of these individuals who are marked as different, thus rendering the “disabled population” both less of a threat and potentially more useful.¹⁸

Many of the children’s mothers spoke of the passbook as a form of stigmatization, which marked their child as somehow less than a full-fledged member of society or not quite “socially complete” (Bourdieu’s 1984, 478). This perceived marginalization was a pervasive theme in my interviews with primary caregivers.

At the Margins of Japanese Selfhood

In anthropological debates about personhood there is at times a celebratory tone in some analysts' commentaries on Japanese theories intersubjective selfhood (e.g. Kondo 1990, 22). Japanese socialization practices and the discourse on personhood in Japan both emphasize the interdependent, sociocentric, relational aspects of selfhood. This discourse helps to reveal the ironies and contradictions within Western models of supposedly individuated, "independent," egocentric persons (Rosaldo 1984, 147). Yet ultimately these two contrasting discourses are co-created and sustained through a series of mutually confirming contrasts with one another (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990, 197).¹⁹

For some western scholars the so-called "sociocentric self" may be an appealing discourse, but for groups in Japan who are marginalized and marked as different, the rhetorical emphasis on a socially embedded selfhood may be experienced as something closer to the *tyranny of normalcy*. Those who fall too far from the expected norm can find it difficult to exert claims of full participation in social life with their peers, and thus the sense of a socially embedded, mutually constructed selfhood may be less than fully realized.

The special needs students at Midorikawa Elementary appeared to have established a sense of shared, mutual identity through their joint participation in the *fukushiki* class. This was a major benefit of the *fukushiki* system, particularly for those youths who had been socially isolated in their mainstream classes. At the same time, these special needs students were encouraged to be aware of social norms and when possible to enact approximations of normalcy at school. There was an effort to show the *fukushiki* students how to deemphasize, smooth

over and manage the more obtrusive aspects of their impairments. Since the student's disabilities were not written on their bodies, these performances of normalcy were sometimes quite successful, sometimes less so.

The *fukushiki* category itself can be viewed as an avenue for temporarily deferring the stigmatization that is associated with official "disabled" status in Japan. However, eventually the lease on the *fukushiki* identity expires. At that point the students' disabilities were typically inscribed in their passbooks and their developmental differences were given a permanent status within the state's social welfare apparatus. The material benefits afforded by the passbook had to be weighted against the social stigmatization that was implicit in the new status.

In the twenty-first century our lives are all touched by complex entanglements with governmental, corporate, educational and financial bureaucracies. We can only be partially aware of the subtle ways that the trajectories of our lives, our socio-economic horizons, our peer groups, our moral and political sensibilities and even our sense of self are profoundly impacted by enmeshment with others in these extended networks. Sometimes these entanglements are enabling, providing unforeseen opportunities, while at other times the effects are more ambiguous or even limiting.

The small *fukushiki* classes that are quietly nestled away within Japan's mainstream public schools usually go entirely unnoticed. Yet these classes are increasingly providing a limited number of borderline, impaired and marginalized students with a second, temporary lease on their school lives. For the caregivers, and the students themselves, the long-term question is, "What happens when this lease expires at the end of compulsory education?" This

question mark, posed at the end of the *fukushiki* system, provides borderline students and their families with a strong incentive to remain within the mainstream educational system. It is also a reflection of the deep ambivalence that hangs over the special need status itself.

Dividing Practices & Trajectories

Public schools are institutions that are charged with the role of implementing the state's *dividing practices* for the citizenry. Foucault argues that such dividing practices are crucial modes through which persons are made into subjects (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 7-8). When a school system creates a new class of students, it also creates a new type of subjectivity. The *fukushiki* students at Midorikawa Elementary participated in a common identity apart from their mainstream peers, and instructors encouraged this self-identification as *fukushiki* students.

On some level educational systems inevitably participate in the production of minorities and majorities. Schools make distinctions clear not only (or primarily) through what is written in social studies textbooks, but more importantly through the ways that students are sub-divided and differentiated from one another everyday in the classroom at school.²⁰ There may sometimes be very good pedagogical reasons to differentiate among elementary school students, but distinctions are soon internalized and are also refracted in the ways that the larger society interprets and defines youths who are marked as "special."

I am not arguing that tracking is always "bad" or that separate instruction is inherently discriminatory. The students who joined the *fukushiki* track at

Midorikawa gained positive social and educational benefits by participating in the *fukushiki* system; however, there was also a social cost associated with leaving their mainstream peers. Furthermore the stigma that accrued from participation in a non-mainstream educational track, increased as the child moved closer toward adolescence and adulthood. This is hardly surprising given the importance of academic ranking and pedigree at the later stages of Japan's educational meritocracy.

Anthropology, Education & The Politics of Identity

This study has made no attempt to evaluate or compare the effectiveness of special needs education in Japan and the United States. Such questions were outside of my problematic, yet during in my fieldwork when I discussed my research topic with Japanese educators, the response was usually "Japan is far behind in special needs education." I suppose the implication was that the United States was far ahead. I reject this linear, modernist view that sees Japan as inevitably following along a path first blazed by other developed nations. There is very little reason to think that Japan would want to mimic US educational trends. Educators in Japan do borrow from the special needs discourse in the United States, but the Japanese Ministry of Education appears to have no intention of creating a multitude of special tracks within Japanese public schools. (Indeed this proliferation of special and gifted tracks appears to be quite particular to the US educational system.) While there has been an increase in the number of *fukushiki* classrooms, the reasons for this modest expansion appear to be primarily internal to Japan.

Elementary schools are places where we not only learn to read, write and play the xylophone, but also, explore our peer group, establish alliances, acquire preferences and discover a sense of ourselves apart from our immediate families. As Durkheim argued long ago, systems of public education were designed to foster common identity and promote cohesion within the nation (Durkheim 1956, 31-32). Public schools are thus institutions with an explicit mandate to “produce citizens.” How these *narratives of belonging* are spun and how students respond to, and make use of, these stories within their lives remain important questions today. Ethnographic studies of education can contribute to our understanding of these identity-making processes by focusing attention on the multitude of ways in which majorities and minorities are produced and made pertinent everyday at school.

At Midorikawa Elementary, one ironic effect of tracking a small group of students with special needs into the *fukushiki* classroom, was that this seemed to reinforce the rhetoric of a homogeneous student-citizenry in Japan. Koiwa-san and Nakahara-san both expressed frustration with the degree to which the *fukushiki* students were rendered peripheral by the narrative of homogeneity that is promoted within Japanese public schools. This suggests that there are strong parallels that can be drawn between the *fukushiki* students and the experiences of other minority populations in Japan. For caregivers, who were usually accustomed to thinking of themselves as members of the majority discourse, it was sometimes difficult to accept the minority status of their special needs children (see Appendix I: Interview with Keiko Furukawa).

In a recent study of Brazilian children of Japanese ancestors [*nikkeijin*], who were attending a public elementary school in Japan, Takato argues "the dominant notion of Japaneseness constrained the lives of people at the local school and their sense of identity (2004, 325)." At the same time, the increasingly cosmopolitan membership of many urban elementary schools in Japan offers opportunities for students and teachers to transcend ethnic identity politics and explore new notions of individual and collective identity. Takato's hopeful conclusion is based on his observation that schools "are one of a few public places where local residents and newcomers engage in regular, sustained interaction (ibid, 326)." Yet, as we have seen, at Midorikawa Elementary, it would be difficult to characterize the contact between the mainstream students and the members of the *fukushiki* class as either regular or sustained.

I will conclude with the observation that the dominant notion of a homogeneous citizenry works not only to constrain the lives of ethnic and cultural minorities in Japan, but also peripheralizes (at times even erasing) groups of ethnic Japanese, who find themselves falling too far from the expected norm. In this study youths with special needs and their families found themselves at the outer periphery of Midorikawa Elementary's school community. Yet caregivers seldom expressed a desire for more or better *omoiyari* [empathy]; rather families with special needs children were usually seeking a more inclusive interpretation of what it means to be a Japanese citizen.

As the effects of globalization unevenly ripple across the planet, urban public schools in Japan are finding that they need to accommodate an increasingly diverse student body.²¹ If this trend continues and intensifies, some

cracks could begin to appear in the smooth narrative of a homogeneous population. What might such a disruption in the dominant discourse on Japanese identity mean for students with special needs?

Two of the *fukushiki* mothers speculated that increasing diversity in the urban population could produce benefits for their special needs children. These women borrowed from the discourses on identity and ethnicity in Japan to try to make sense of their special needs children's peripheral status. On an ideological and practical level, these caregivers saw a natural alliance between ethnic minorities and youths with special needs. They felt that if more inclusive metaphors for resident-citizens gained legitimacy, this might also produce increasing opportunities for disabled and special needs youths to interact with their mainstream counterparts.

Yet would a shift in the dominant metaphors for Japaneseness actually produce more opportunities for meaningful interaction between mainstream and special needs youths within Japan's public schools? This is an open question. While elementary schools do certainly have considerable power to bring potentially diverse students together, contact alone does not necessarily produce reciprocal ties. We should also remember that some of the *fukushiki* families did not desire greater contact or better integration between the mainstream and special needs students.

As we approach the second decade of the twenty first century, battles over belonging, and the right to claim a stake in the public sphere, are intensifying on many fronts. These identity conflicts are ultimately political, yet anthropologists certainly have much to contribute by documenting the macro and micro-level

processes through which subjectivities emerge and by exploring the creative ways that individuals attempt to claim authorship over their lives.

In the case of the *fukushiki* youths, questions of competence were entangled with the desire to be defined as a complete persons and the related struggle to claim the rights of full citizenship in contemporary Japan.

Notes

¹ In April of 2007 I returned to Midorikawa Elementary to attend the graduation ceremony of Momo, Kento, Kai and Shoko. Of the original *fukushiki* teaching staff, only Ichikawa-*sensei* remained. Before the formal ceremony in the gymnasium, the graduating students and their teachers gathered one final time in the *fukushiki* classroom. As soon as I stepped into the classroom Momo came bounding over and without any hesitation, she threw her arms around my waist exclaiming, “*Mare-sensei, kitan da*” [Mr. Maret, you came]! Turning to face her I said simply, “Of course, I came to see you graduate.” The boys were somewhat more self conscious in their greetings, yet in spite of this slight awkwardness on both our parts, the bond we had shared was still there just waiting to be renewed.

² In his study of deaf and blind children, Goode makes the point “participation in kids’ culture is not guaranteed to all who are young. Neither is it barred from those with many years and much experience (1994, 172).”

³ During the period of my fieldwork, teasing did not seem to be a particularly intense problem at Midorikawa Elementary; however, Ichikawa-*sensei* said that teasing of the special needs students had at times been more of an issue. He maintained that there was an increase in the bullying of *fukushiki* students when one or more of the regular track classes was experiencing protracted internal turmoil [*gakkyū hōkai*]. That is, when there was a lot of friction among mainstream classmates, this social tension sometimes spilled over onto the special needs students. In the interviews a number of the *fukushiki* mothers reported repeated problems with teasing, but this was mostly prior to the transfer into the special needs track.

⁴ The psychosocial aspects of *amae* are usually emphasized, but there is also political-economic dimension in the *amae* ideology that is too often glossed over. The cultural ideal of psychological interdependence between mothers and their children (particularly between a mother and her sons) can quickly morph into an argument that “good mothers” should be always available to tend to the needs of young children. In contemporary Japan the *amae* canon is often deployed to support such arguments, which restrict the professional and public lives of women with young children.

⁵ A similar dynamic might be observable in non-Japanese socio-educational contexts as well, but this question exceeds the limits of my ethnographic data.

⁶ As far as I could determine, parents and teachers in the mainstream classes at Midorikawa Elementary never participated in similar parties. That level of intimacy may have appeared inappropriate to the mainstream teachers and the parents alike. At my son’s public elementary school (in western Tokyo) there were few opportunities for the teachers and parents to mix informally; however, at the preschool level (daycare center), where the ranking of students was not yet an issue, informal, off-campus gatherings did occasionally occur.

⁷ It is also possible that some mothers, who had reservations about the *fukushiki* system, projected these reservations onto their husbands, who were mostly absent from the day-to-day workings of the school.

⁸ In the third grade Kiyoshi still was still struggling with holding a pencil with one hand. See Appendix K: *Kata* for Pencil-Holding in Japanese Elementary Schools.

⁹ Nagata-san said that she reluctantly decided to move Kiyoshi into the *fukushiki* track when she realized that the increasing gap in ability was isolating her son from his mainstream, age-grade classmates.

¹⁰ When elementary age children in Japan speak among themselves the more formal *desu* and *masu* endings are generally avoided. These more polite sentence endings (and the related, but much more complex, sentence patterns of honorific speech: *keigo*) are part of adultcentric discourse patterns that show deference while implicitly acknowledging social status and seniority. One way that Japanese children enact their membership in “kids’ culture” is by avoiding these polite endings and other adultcentric speaking strategies when speaking with each other. For a detailed analysis of this shift between formal & informal speech in a Japanese elementary classroom see: Anderson 1995, 196-224.

This point was driven home to me when we relocated from Hawai‘i to Tokyo so that I could begin this research. At the time our son was four years old. He was already fluent in Japanese, but he had learned to speak by interacting almost exclusively with adults (most notably his mother). Thus our son’s speech patterns were quite adultcentric. He soon began setting about correcting this “problem.” After a few weeks of attending daycare he suddenly stopped referring to himself as *watashi* (the formal, polite version of “I”) and switched over to *boku* (the informal pronoun for “I” that is preferred by young boys). At some level our four-year-old son must have grasped that in order to fully participate in “kids’ culture” in Japan he needed to adopt the discourse strategies of his peers, rather than those of his parents and teachers. The informal-polite, deferential-honorific aspects of Japanese, force interlocutors to enact their peer affinities and/or declare social distance with virtually every sentence uttered.

¹¹ Ichikawa-*sensei* admitted that he had decided to major in special education primarily because of the competitive advantage this might give him in securing a position as a public school teacher in Japan. In the mid-1970s, when he was a college student, special needs education was just beginning to attract the interest of educational policy makers and there were still very few teachers with training in special education. Note that in Japan the competition to become a public school teacher remains quite intense.

¹² I do not mean to imply that individualized educational plans (IEPs) would necessarily have improved student outcomes. The low student to teacher ratio and the flexible curriculum generally allowed for lesson content to be adjusted to the students’ abilities. Also teachers, students and caregivers did jointly discuss specific goals for each student several times a year. These goals usually were focused on attitudes and postures, such as “being attentive to junior classmates” or “keeping my personal belongings in order.”

¹³ Former Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro's infamous *faux pas* about the average U.S. intelligence quotient (IQ) being depressed by the presence of (non-white) minorities in America both projects heterogeneity outward away from Japan and reflects the dominant narrative of homogeneity within the Japanese student population (Creighton 1997a, 223-224; Sugimoto 1997, 170).

¹⁴ The Ministry of Education's "Relaxed Education" [*yutori kyōiku*] initiative, which was intended to reduce pressure within compulsory education, was partially a response to the issue of bullying. This initiative aimed to reduce pressure at school by lessening homework and de-emphasizing rote memory tasks. Compulsory education students were also given more free time as the number of school days, and total hours in class, were reduced somewhat. Prior to this initiative public school students attend classes for a half-day two Saturdays a month, but with *yutori kyōiku* all students received a two-day weekend. The initiative, which was implemented in the spring of 2002, came under immediate attack in the Japanese press for lowering educational standards. The following year (2003) Japan's test scores results fell on comparative international tests (most notably on the IEA: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement Test) with South Korea and Hong Kong surpassing Japan in the math and science sections. In 2005 the Ministry of Education called for an internal comprehensive review of the *yutori* initiative, and in the fall of 2007 the Ministry admitted problems with the *yutori* plan and called for an increase in number of class hours. Thus it appears that the *yutori* initiative has been largely abandoned.

¹⁵ While I do not wish to minimize either the seriousness or the perceived seriousness of the *ijime* issue, we should remember that there were well over seven million elementary school students and nearly four million junior high school students at the time of these statistics. At the reported peak of the *ijime* crisis there were "only" one or two officially reported cases per year for each elementary or junior high school in Japan (Tsuneyoshi 2001, 101).

¹⁶ Although compulsory education only runs through the end of ninth grade in Japan, almost 100% of mainstream junior high graduates continue on to high school. The Ministry of Education reported a continuance rate of 97.6% in 2005. Note that no separate statistics were available for junior high school graduates of the *fukushiki* track. Statistical data accessed from the Ministry of Education's website on 1 November 2007: www.mext.go.jp/english/statist/06060808/pdf/012.pdf.

¹⁷ Upon graduating from junior high school, Hiroki somewhat reluctantly settled on a job working as an apprentice cook in a ramen noodle shop.

¹⁸ In the 1990s the Japanese government established a quota system that requires larger firms to hire a small percentage of disability passbook holders (1.8% of the workforce). Although most of these positions are for lower skilled jobs, this system does create an additional incentive for disabled citizens to consider participation in the disability passbook system. The employment quota system also simultaneously transforms passbook holders into a potential source of relatively cheap labor for Japanese industry. See "Employment Quota System for Disabled Persons" at the Ministry of Health, Labour

and Welfare's official website, accessed 5 August 2007:
<http://www.mhlw.go.jp/english/index.html>.

¹⁹ Theories of a sociocentric, embedded selfhood are by no means unique to Japan. Certainly within Asia there is a wide spread Buddhist notion that human beings (indeed all beings) are fundamental interconnected and contingent (Ozawa-de Silva 2007, 433). An individuated "self" does not arise spontaneously, nor can we ever be entirely self-sufficient or self-sustaining. At the same time, one subjectivity can never completely penetrate into the lived experience of another. Social constructionists (such as G.H. Mead) and social linguists (such as Bakhtin) have long argued that the notion of an emergent, interdependent, mutually constructed selfhood holds equally true for Americans, Russians and for Japanese. Thus the supposed conflict between notions of egocentric individuality and socio-centric interdependence is primarily a difference in emphasis within these discourses.

²⁰ Nakamura provides a negative confirmation of this assertion. Since the 1980s deaf children in Japan have been increasingly mainstreamed. At the same time their self-identification as "deaf" has dramatically decreased. The gradual erasure of the stigma surrounding deafness allowed for the integration of deaf and hard of hearing children into mainstream classrooms, and as the children's peer networks shifted so too did their identities as members of deaf/Deaf culture. (2001, 296) That is, to a large extent the sense of belonging to a separate deaf/Deaf culture was something that was learned at school.

²¹ At the small public school that my son attended in Tokyo, in addition to ethnic Japanese, there were children from Brazil, China, Korea, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, the United States, Thailand and Iceland. These children were long-term, or even permanent, residents in Japan.

Appendix A
Japanese Special Education - Statistical Data

Table A.1: Special Educational Schools in Japan (Three Types)

(Includes Kindergarten, Elementary, Junior High, & High Schools – Public & Private)

School Type	Number of Schools	Number of Students
Schools for the Blind <i>mōgakkō</i> [養護学校]	71	3,688
Schools for the Deaf <i>rōgakkō</i> [養護学校]	104	6,544
“Protective Schools” <i>yōgo gakkō</i> [養護学校] (For Physically & Mentally Impaired)	831	94,360
Totals for Special Schools	1,006	104,592

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, Preface p. 13.

- The statistics in Appendix A are drawn from The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology’s *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools - 2006* [*Gakkō kihon chōsa hōkokusho - heisei jūhachi nendo*].

Table A.2: Japanese Student Population by Grade Level
(Includes data from both public & private schools in Japan)

Educational Level	Number of Students
Elementary School	7,187,417
Junior High School	3,601,527
High School	3,494,513
Total Students (First Grade thr. High School)	14, 283,457

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, p. 36, 99, 170.

Table A.3
Percentage of Students Attending Special Educational Schools in Japan

Total Student Population: Elementary School thr. High School	Number of Students Enrolled in Special Educational Schools	Percentage of Students Attending Special Educational Schools
14, 283,457	104,592	0.73%

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, Preface p. 13 & p. 36, 99, 170.

Table A.4
Increasing Number of Special Needs Classrooms
Within Mainstream Public Elementary Schools

Year	Total Number of Classes	Number of <i>fukushiki</i> Classes
1996	288,905	15,511
2001	270,979	19,046
2002	271,043	20,206
2003	272,257	21,384
2004	274,062	22,436
2005	276,083	23,706
2006	277,524	24,994

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, Preface p. 6.

Table A.5
Students Attending Special Needs Classrooms
[fukushiki gakkyū] at Mainstream Public Elementary Schools

Total Number of Elementary Students	Number of <i>Fukushiki</i> Student	<i>Fukushiki</i> Students Percentage
7,187,417	73,151	1.02%

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, Preface p. 7 & p. 36.

Table A.6
Students Attending Special Needs Classrooms
[fukushiki gakkyū] at Mainstream Public Junior High Schools

Total Number of Junior High Students	Number of <i>Fukushiki</i> Student	<i>Fukushiki</i> Students Percentage
3,601,527	31,393	0.87%

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, Preface p. 9 & p. 99.

Table A.7
Special Needs Students [fukushiki gakkyū] at
Mainstream Public Elementary Schools by Type of Impairment

Total Students	Cognitive Impairment	Physically Impairment	Chronic Sickness	Visually Impairment	Hearing Impairment	Speech Impediment	Emotional Impairment
73,151	42,085	3,024	1,279	252	822	1,150	24,539
Percent (100%)	57.5%	4.1%	1.7%	0.3%	1.1%	1.6%	33.6%

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, p. 36.

- Note that those classified with “cognitive impairments” and “emotional impairments” account for over 90% of the *fukushiki* student population.

Table A.8
Special Needs Students [fukushiki gakkyū] at
Mainstream Public Elementary Schools by Grade Level

Total Students	First Graders	Second Graders	Third Graders	Fourth Graders	Fifth Graders	Sixth Graders
73,151	10,259	11,830	12,353	13,150	12,755	12,804
Percent (100%)	14.0%	16.2%	16.9%	18.0%	17.4%	17.5%

Source: *Annual Statistical Survey of Schools – 2006*, p. 38.

- Note the trend toward increasing participation in special needs classrooms as the students' grade levels advance.

Appendix B

Weekly Schedules for the *fukushiki* Class

Table B.1: Class Schedule for February 2003, Third Week

Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning Event	Outdoor Exercises	All School Music Event	All School: Mixed Grades Play Time	Club Meetings & Events	Club Events
1	Physical Education	Japanese (Two Groups)	Japanese (Two Groups)	Japanese (Two Groups)	Ethics / Morals: NHK Kid's TV
2	<i>Gakkatsu</i> : Our Holidays	Math (Two Groups)	School Play Practice	Life Skills (<i>Seikatsu</i>)	Japanese: Reading
3	Japanese: Reading	Sogo Class (Two Groups)	Art: Milk Carton Project	Art: Milk Cartoon Project	Japanese: Writing
4	Life Skills (<i>Seikatsu</i>)	Japanese (Two Groups)	Art: Milk Carton Project	Physical Education	Life Skills (<i>Seikatsu</i>)
Lunch	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm
Recess	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm
Cleaning	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm
5	<i>Sogo Class</i> (Two Groups)	Music: Singing	Life Skills (<i>Seikatsu</i>)	Music: Singing	Japanese (Two Groups)
6	-----	Japanese: Kanji	-----	Club Activities	Club Activities
Finishing Time	Lower: 2:00 pm Upper: 3:00 pm	Lower: 3:00 pm Upper: 4:00 pm	All: 3:00 pm	Lower: 3:00 pm Upper: 4:00 pm	Lower: 3:00 pm Upper: 4:00 pm

Japanese Version

たけのご通信 (今週の学習予定)						お知らせ
小学校様式学校 1, 2 級) 2003年2月21日 NO.41						
日 (2-24)	火 (2-25)	水 (2-26)	木 (2-27)	金 (2-28)		
行事	朝の運動	音楽朝会	みらいロングタイム	クラブ クラブ発表会 担任発表	まつかぜ 麻枝 クラブ	合同発表会について
1	体育 サーキット マット	高一国語 高一作文、漢字 低一言葉、文章	高一国語 高一作文、漢字 低一言葉、文章	高一国語 高一作文、漢字 低一言葉、文章	道徳	<p>14日に合同発表会が、各クラスから発表を待ちたいし、発表の日には、発表の準備が完了したかを確認させていただきます。</p> <p>お知らせとお願い ・牛乳パックを工作で使いたく、洗ってくださるようお願いいたします。</p> <p style="text-align: right;">埼玉県子ども動物自然</p>
2	学活 休みの日のこと	高一家庭 高一計算 低一いくつかな	高一家庭 高一計算 低一いくつかな	生活 クラブ発表会	11 11 びきのねこ	
3	国語 11 びきのねこ	すくすく 高一牛乳パック 低一町探検	国工 牛乳パック	国工 牛乳パック	国語 読書	
4	生活	すくすく 高一牛乳パック 低一町探検	国工 牛乳パック	体育 サーキット サッカー	生活	
	給食	給食	給食	給食	給食	
5	すくすく 高一牛乳パック	音楽 楽しく歌おう	生活	音楽 楽しく歌おう	国語	
6		国語 漢字		クラブ	クラブ	
下校時刻	1, 2年→2時 5, 6年→3時	1, 2年→3時 5, 6年→4時	全体→3時	1, 2年→3時 5, 6年→4時	1年→2時 2年→3時 5, 6年→4時	

Weekly Schedule for the *fukushiki* Class

Table B.2: Class Schedule for October 2003, Fourth Week

Period	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning Event	Organizing the Room	Outdoor Exercises	Indoor Exercises	Outdoor Exercises	Morning Reading/Writing
1	Cleaning & Organizing	School Play Practice	School Play Practice	School Play Practice	School Play Practice
2	Art: Fieldtrip Pictures	School Play Practice	School Play Practice	School Play Practice	School Play Practice
3	School Play Practice	School Play Practice	School Play Practice	School Play Practice	School Play Practice
4	Math (Two Groups)	Japanese (Two Groups)	Math (Two Groups)	Japanese (Two Groups)	Math (Two Groups)
Lunch	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm	12:25-1:00 pm
Recess	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm	1:00-1:25 pm
Cleaning	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm	1:30-1:55 pm
5	Japanese (Two Groups)	Music: Singing	Life Skills (Two Groups)	Music: Singing	Japanese (Two Groups)
6	-----	Sogo Class (Two Groups)	-----	Club Activities	Sogo Class (Two Groups)
Finishing Time	Lower: 2:00 pm Upper: 3:00 pm	Lower: 3:00 pm Upper: 4:00 pm	All: 3:00 pm	Lower: 3:00 pm Upper: 4:00 pm	Lower: 3:00 pm Upper: 4:00 pm

Japanese Version

たけのご通信 (今週の学習予定)						お知らせ
小学校様式学年 1, 2 組 2003年 10月 24日 NO. 24						
行	月 (10-27)	火 (10-28)	水 (10-29)	木 (10-30)	金 (10-31)	
	秋の一斉清掃	朝の運動	室内運動	朝の運動	朝読書	
1	秋の一斉清掃	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	<p>今週は あつまれえがお2 の準備一色です。 3つともたすもがすばりです 保護者の皆さんも ご協力お願いします。 28日~31日 9:30~集合 都合のよい時に果て お手伝い して下さい。</p> <p>27日は 秋の一斉清掃です。</p>
2	学活 休みの日のこと	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	
3	高一図工 鑑賞旅行の絵 あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	あつまれえがお 2準備	
4	算数 低→いくつかな 高一図工 鑑賞旅行の絵	低→本読み 高一国語 作文 給食	算数 低→いくつかな 高一国語 作文 給食	国語 低→本読み 高→すくすく フクシキ屋本館特設の うがらしを作ろう	算数 低→いくつかな 給食	
5	低→国語 高一国語 作文	音楽 楽しく歌おう	低→生活 作って遊ぼう 高→すくすく フクシキ屋本館特設の うがらしを作ろう	音楽 楽しく歌おう	国語 低→本読み 高→すくすく フクシキ屋本館特設の うがらしを作ろう	
6		低→生活 ボーリング大会 高→すくすく フクシキ屋本館特設の うがらしを作ろう		クラブ	高→すくすく フクシキ屋本館特設の うがらしを作ろう	
下校時刻	1, 2 → 2時 3, 6 → 3時	1, 2 → 3時 3, 6 → 4時	全休 → 3時	1, 2, 3 → 3時 6 → 4時	1 → 2時 2, 3 → 3時 6 → 4時	

Notes on the *fukushiki* Class Schedule at Midorikawa Elementary School:

- (1) Wednesday morning: Every six weeks or so there was an all school event aimed at having children from different grade levels play together. The special needs children were included in this event.
- (2) Finishing times for the lower and upper grade students sometimes differed.
- (3) "Two Groups" indicates class periods in which the *fukushiki* class was divided into two age-based groups with each group studying in a separate classroom.

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Caregivers of Children with Special Needs

(English version)

Below is the list of questions that I asked to the *fukushiki* students' primary caregivers (i.e. their mothers) in private interview sessions. This list provided some consistency to my interviews and allowed for cross-interview comparisons; however, the interviewees often chose to take the discussion in unanticipated directions. When this occurred I followed the topic as far as the interviewee desired and then returned to my list of questions. (A careful reading of the interview transcripts reveals when the interviewees "took possession of the interview" for their own purposes. See Appendices D-I.)

- *Thank you setting aside this time to meet with me today. As you know I am working on a doctoral thesis about children with special needs. May I tape this interview?*
- *Could you tell me what you remember about your pregnancy and the birth of your child?*
- *When did you first suspect that there might be something unusual about your child's development?*
- *Could you describe your child as a toddler? Did he/she play with his/her peers? Do you have any strong memories from this time?*
- *Did your child attend a daycare center, a kindergarten or some other type of individual or group early educational program?*
- *Did your child go through any kind of screening or testing in order to enter the preschool program?*
- *Do you have any strong memories from this preschool period?*
- *Has your child been diagnosed with some sort of developmental impairment. If so when was this diagnosis first made? Can you remember your initial reaction to the diagnosis? What was the reaction of your extended family?*
- *Does your child have any siblings? Could you tell me about their relationship? Has their relationship changed over the years?*

- *Did your child ever belong to a mainstream class at the preschool or elementary school level?*
- *How did you first learn about the fukushiki educational track?*
- *Did you consider a Protective School [yōgo gakkō] for your child?*
- *Could you explain when and how your child joined the fukushiki track?*
- *What is your impression of the fukushiki system? Do you have any strong memories (happy or sad) from the your child's time in the fukushiki class? Are there any changes you would like to see in the fukushiki class or in your child's education?*
- *Does your child have a Disability Passbook? If so, when did you apply for it? What are the benefits and/or disadvantages of the Disability Passbook system?*
- *What are your thoughts or concerns about your child's education in junior high school and beyond?*
- *Has your child expressed an interest in some sort of future work?*
- *Is there anything I didn't ask you about that we should touch upon?*
- *As you know, I will use pseudonyms in any writing done in connection with this research. Thank you very much taking this time to share your child's life history with me.*

Appendix D

On Translation, Transcription & Interpretive Anthropology

During the two-year period of my field research on special needs children in Japan (2001.06-2003.05), I audiotaped more than twenty hours of interviews with caregivers, teachers, and advocates. I also videotaped many hours of classroom interactions. Subsequently I transcribed a portion of this material for content analysis. Appendices E-J provide transcriptions of six interviews with Japanese women who were mothers of special needs children. Before proceeding to these interviews, I want to pause here and consider the role of translation and transcription in an interpretive study such as mine.

As I listened to and transcribed these interviews, I was forced to consider various analytic strategies for unraveling spoken discourse. Sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology and conversational analysis have produced an array of sophisticated techniques for transcribing and closely analyzing talk. Conversation Analysis, for instance, attempts to describe the orderliness, structure and sequential patterns of dialogic interactions. This micro-level analytic technique, which grew out of Harvey Sack's pioneering work in ethnomethodology, seeks to uncover the implicit rules that govern spoken discourse. I was, however, primarily interested in the thematic content of these women's narratives. Micro-level approaches to the study of spoken discourse usually restrict the focus of the inquiry to rather succinct exchanges. The level of analytic detail necessitates that the length of the conversation remains relatively

brief. But in my research I wanted to explore and compare themes that emerged in dialogs that stretched over many hours.

Written analysis of spoken discourse always misses some things and adds other dimensions that may not have been very visible on first hearing. Even a “complete” phonetic transcription still fails to capture much of the original context. How does one go about conveying all the sighs and long pauses, the exchange of meaningful glances, the fluttering of hands, or the times when a speaker leans toward or away from the listener, catching one’s eye or staring off into the distance? The written transcript inevitably fails to convey the rhythm and tempo of the exchange; socially significant idiosyncrasies in intonation and accent also disappear. When one attempts to include all this with some sophisticated system of notation, the text becomes so weighted down as to be almost unreadable. There is a limit to the amount of notation that a reader can reasonably be asked to endure.

Anyone who has done transcription will recognize that spoken discourse has a good deal of repetition, false starts, digressions and half finished sentences that trail off into silence or are terminated midstream in favor of another phrasing. If we are aiming for a reasonable degree of readability, a transcription must try to resolve much of this ambiguity. While a transcription should attempt to convey a sense of the oral exchange, the etiquette of oral and written discourse are very distinct, so much so that, I would argue, a “good” (that is, readable and sympathetic) transcription will necessarily alter the oral encounter that it seeks to preserve. Perhaps this is what Bourdieu is implying when he writes that, “Transcription, then, means writing, in the sense of rewriting (Bourdieu and

Accardo 1999, 622).” A Bakhtinian perspective was also helpful to me here for if *context* is truly more crucial than *text*, then a transcription should strive for a sympathetic reading and re-encoding of the oral encounter rather than a technically “accurate” rendering of every syllable that was uttered.

Of course, words and phrases are important—crucially so, as these are the prisms through which we interpret the world and retroactively impose meaning on our lives. In the transcriptions that follow I strove for a middle path, paying very close attention to particular phrasing and even to sentences cut off midstream, while also seeking to produce a text that is sympathetic to the informant’s perspective and reasonably readable. While I attempted to maintain fidelity to the women’s words, I took the liberty of editing out a good deal of repetition. When the conversation went “off topic” or the informant restated things that had already been covered, I skipped ahead to the next topic. Those places in the transcription where words have been omitted are indicated with a three-dot ellipse.

Some theorists argue that transcription itself is a type of translation, for in the process of recasting an oral performance as a written text a fundamental transformation occurs (Bourdieu and Accardo 1999, 621-2; Briggs 1986, 99). If that is the case, then the six transcriptions in these appendices are the product of a *double-translation*: words spoken in Japanese are rendered in English and oral discourse was transformed into written text. For clarification and transparency, I have included some key phrases in bracketed, romanized Japanese. When I occasionally insert a Japanese word directly into an English sentence, the term is followed by its English equivalent in brackets. I realize this is only a half-happy

solution, some readers might have preferred for the Japanese to be rendered in Japanese script (that is, with characters and kana), while others may find the inclusion of even the romanized Japanese a distraction. I sought a middle ground, aiming for a transcription that is simultaneously readable and retains a high degree of fidelity to the original discourse.

In my translation and transcription of these extended interviews, I was primarily interested in the thematic content of the caregiver's narratives and in the metaphors they deployed to describe their experiences.

Appendix E

Interview with Koiwa Mika (mother of Daisuke)

Interview Location: Midorikawa Elementary School

Date: March 10, 2003

Names, Subheadings & Elisions

All names are pseudonyms. In order to make the narratives more accessible and inviting, I have inserted numerous breaks in the transcripts. These subheadings are quotes borrowed directly from the informants' discourse. Those places where I have made any elisions in the transcription are indicated with an ellipsis...

“Well he is a *boy* so...” [*otoko no ko dakara...*]

Let's see, Daisuke was born on Culture Day.¹ Until his second birthday I didn't think there was anything particularly unusual about his development. Well, I do remember thinking to myself that he is always moving about. He has an older sister so I thought it was impossible to compare the two.

At Daisuke's 18-month health check at the Health and Welfare Office, I remember being told, “Your son speaks well.” I think that at that point he was even ahead of his age group, but by the time his second birthday arrived he had lost all of his words except for two, “Papa—company [*papa—kaisha*].” A few months after that birthday I decided to consult with our regular pediatrician. But the doctor said, “He is a *boy* [*otoko no ko dakara*] so you don't need to worry yourself sick.” And everyone [*maruari no hito-tachi*] said reassuring things like, “Boys are always slow starters.”

When Daisuke turned three, I enrolled him in a kindergarten in the *nenshō* class.² It was just an ordinary kindergarten. It was the same kindergarten his older sister, Mayumi, had attended. Actually Daisuke was still using diapers at the time. I knew there could be problems for us, but I didn't try to cover up [*tsutsumi o kakusazu*] anything. I told the kindergarten everything, even that my son was still in diapers. The principal of the kindergarten had the same attitude as everybody else, “Well, he is a *boy* [*otoko no ko dakara*]...” (Koiwa-san is sniffing a little as she recalls these details.)

“We/I didn’t hide anything.” [*tsutsumi o kakusazu*]

Well, Daisuke learned a lot by joining with the other kids in his age group [*shūdan no naka ni haitta okage de*] and mimicking the things they were doing. He didn’t advance [*nobiru*] with them the way I had hoped. Still, he really liked kindergarten and was always happy to go in the morning. Some of the children at the kindergarten tried to include Daisuke [*hoe o kaheta kedō*] but he didn’t have any interest in making friends. Even today he has little interest in making friends. Well the doctors say that he “has autistic tendencies” [*jūhei keikō*].

We were fortunate that in addition to the regular kindergarten teacher [*tannin*], there was also an assistant teacher available for my son’s class. That was a great help. But when they noticed that Dai-chan’s vocabulary was not expanding, the principal had a talk with me. He told me in an extremely roundabout fashion [*toomarwashi toomarwashi de*] that I should seek assistance outside the kindergarten [*soto no tokoro ni*]. He said something like, “If we consider only what is best for Dai-chan then don’t *you* think it would be best to place your son in another institution?”

Actually at that time I was already taking Daisuke to the Clinic for Developmentally Delayed Children [*hattatsu kurinikku*], which is a program sponsored by the city. We went to special classes there once or twice a month. Well, somehow the kindergarten found out that we were attending those classes. One day out of the blue the principal of the kindergarten told me to arrange a meeting for him with the therapist that ran the classes at the Clinic. Can you imagine that! Then I wondered, of course, does the kindergarten want advice on how to help teach Daisuke or are they simply looking for some solid proof that he is developmentally impaired [*okureteru to iu jōhō o shikkari moratte*] so that they can throw him out?

Well anyway the therapist at the clinic, who is a public health employee [*hokenfū*], got wind of this. She was so upset that she took matters in her own hands and contacted the principal of the kindergarten herself. She let that principal know in no uncertain terms that she was not about to give him one iota of information about anyone. Whatever went on at the clinic was strictly [*akumademo*] a confidential matter between the clinic and the mothers of children who attended. The blood still goes to my

head [*chi ga atama ni nobotte*] when I think about it. I was really infuriated over the entire episode.

After that incident the kindergarten start dropping all kinds of hints that Daisuke was not really welcome there. Some time later I learned from a social service caseworker that the Umeda Kindergarten usually refuses to accept children who have any kind of developmental delays. But I didn't hide anything from them. And that principal, who was trying to make all kinds of recommendations to me, didn't even know the term *ryōiku* [educational-therapy]. Can you imagine? My husband had to teach him that word! If he isn't even familiar with the terms of the debate, how can he be assessing my son's potential?

At that point I considered pulling Daisuke out of the kindergarten and placing him in the city's program for developmentally delayed preschooler, Aozora Gakuen. I knew this program had some advantages because the class size is limited to only 8 or 9 kids per class, and each class has three teachers so the children can really get individualized attention. But, as a parent, I thought at the time that if I enrolled Dai-chan at Aozora then I would be admitting that there was something wrong with my son. I mean it would be like I was certifying [*mitomeru*] that he was developmentally impaired [*okureteru to iu koto*]. If I did that all the regular mothers [*futsū no okāsan*], who were my friends at the kindergarten would be like, "What happened to Daisuke?" The gossip would have been really intense [*sugoi-n desu yo*]. At that point I must have still have been more focused on protecting myself than on protecting Daisuke...

"It is embarrassing to say..." [*hazukashii hanashi desu ga...*]

So we didn't quit the kindergarten, but when it came time to start practicing for the annual Sports Day—Daisuke was four-years-old by then—he really hated it and refused to go. So we ended up skipping the Sports Day and I pulled Dai-chan out of that kindergarten at the end of his first year. Still when I think back on being forced out [*oidasarete*] of the Umeda Kindergarten, well that whole incident is it like the third or fourth most bitter-tasting memories of my life [*jinsei de yon ka san banmei gurai kuyashii omoide*]. (She laughs at herself here.)

When I think about it now I realize that putting Daisuke in the Aozora Gakuen was a good thing, but at the time... It is embarrassing to say this [*hazukashii hanashi desu ga*] but that was really a turbulent time for us. It almost came to the point of getting a divorce from my husband. (laughs) My mother-in-law was also living with us at that time. Well the two of us really got into it [*yariatte*] and I stormed out. It was her house so after talking it over, my husband and I decided to move out. We had our hands full with Daisuke...

Anyway I think that putting Daisuke in the Aozora Gakuen program was definitely the correct choice [*seikai datta*]. One of the teachers there has a child with Down Syndrome. Due to the efforts of that teacher Aozora's program really improved [*gun to yoku natta*]...

“Why does he have an impairment?” [*naze shōgai ga aru no*]

Daisuke has an older sister, Mayumi, who is four years older than Dai-chan. Until sometime after his fourth birthday, Daisuke was unable to address Mayumi as either “*Onē-chan*” or “*Mayu-chan*.”³ This was really hard for Mayumi. She just couldn't understand it. So when we put Daisuke in the Aozora Gakuen, I tried to explain to Mayumi that Dai-chan was behind in learning to speak so we had decided to send him to a special school. One day that spring Mayumi asked me, “Why does Daisuke have a disability [*naze shōgai ga aru no*]?” I had never used that word with her so the question really surprised me. When Mayumi was in the second grade she used the term “*jiheishō*” [autism] in one of her writing practice exercises. I still remember the last sentence of her essay, “But I love my little brother” [*demo watashi ga otōto ga daisuki desu*].

Did you see the NHK special entitled “*Dakishimetai*,” which aired a few months ago?⁴ It is about an autistic boy and his older sister. The relationship mirrors Daisuke's relationship with Mayumi. Well Mayumi and I watched that drama together. Afterwards she cried and asked me, “Will Dai-chan turn out like that [*kō ni naru no*]?” I didn't know how to answer her. Then I thought that maybe Mayumi was too young to watch that program, but it was too late. Sobbing Mayumi said, “Dai-chan never listens to me so I was always hitting him.” (The sister in the drama is always gentle with and

protective of her autistic brother.) I told Mayumi that sometimes when Dai-chan won't listen to me I hit him too. Then we both cried. Mayumi said, "I'm glad we watched this drama." It wasn't all tears; there were many scenes that made us laugh so I guess it was for the best...

I worry that Mayumi thinks she always has to be the *good* daughter. When a child has a brother or sister with a disability, the able sibling often tries to be the perfect child [*ii ko ni narō to*]. This is a very common pattern. I worry though, isn't that *good* child going to explode at some point? I have heard of many cases where these *good* children have a difficult adolescence and end up getting into trouble [*furyō in naru*]. I wonder if Mayumi thinks to herself, "Things are so tough for mom so I have to be good and help out." I don't want her to think like that.

Of course Daisuke can be difficult. Sometimes I know he is watching my facial expressions very closely, and trying to see if he can upset me. "If I do this mom is sure to get angry..." He can be cunning [*iyarashii seikaku*]. (She laughs.) He watches people and then decides what action to take [*hito o mite kodō suru*]. When Daisuke was younger we had to move from one apartment because he was just too loud. He would bang his feet on the floor, look over at me and say, "Is this noisy?"

"Return to normality?" [*futsū ni modoreru?*]

While Daisuke was attending Aozora Gakuen, he was tested four times for intelligence, social skills, language ability and fine motor skills. No one would give us a firm diagnosis. We would take him for testing at public facilities and private hospitals, but everyone was slow to tell us the results of their tests. Finally when Daisuke was about four and half a doctor gave us a diagnosis of low intelligence and delayed development [*hattatsu chitai*].⁵ The thing was they gave me this "diagnosis" over the telephone! I was so upset. Still we decided that he would benefit from some additional therapy so we began taking him to a private clinic downtown in addition to his classes at Aozora. Actually I was determined to prove to the kindergarten that had rejected Daisuke that he could succeed. I wanted to use his two years at Aozora Gakuen to catch up on any lag in my son's development [*torimodoshite yaru*]. That was motivated me at

the time [*ikigomi ga atta*], but I eventually realized that such a project was undoable. In Kochi's case "catching up" was just not possible [*sō iu mon jya nai*].

I do have some regrets. Sometimes I think if I had only put Daisuke educational therapy when he was still two years old... You know they say that therapeutic interventions work best if they are begun early [*hayakereba hayai hodo*]. I have heard that there were some researchers in America who showed that if an aggressive therapeutic program [*ryōiku o shikkari yareba*] was implemented early by five years of age the children could be returned to "normal" [*futsū ni modoreru*]. I think I read that. Could it be true? (doubting nervous chuckle) Of course, now the only thing to do is try to do all we can for Daisuke...

While Dai-chan was attending Aozora Gakuen we learned about the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa. Mayumi was attending the local elementary school, but that school didn't have a *fukushiki* class. We decided to move into this school district so that Dai-chan could attend the *fukushiki* class. Of course this was hard on Mayumi. She was just starting fifth grade when Daisuke entered elementary school. Changing schools late in elementary school is tough [*tsurai*]. The later grades are usually the most interesting and you already have a solid group of friends. It is not easy to part with close friends. Her old elementary school is not so far away from our new apartment so we asked if Mayumi could continue attending there for the fifth and sixth grades. We didn't want to cause Mayumi any mental anguish because of her brother [*wazurawashii omoi o sasetakunakatta*]. She only had two years of elementary school remaining, but the school district flatly turned down our request. Well, she would have had to part from those friends at junior high school anyway so I suppose it was for the best. Mayumi has managed to get through this in her own way [*kanajō nari ni norikoete kurete imasu*]...

Last week I had a meeting at the *Gakudō* [After School Program]. It was the second time I had requested that Daisuke be allowed to attend the program, but they are reluctant because there are only four teachers to watch over the 63 children already enrolled. The mainstream kids and their parents do not have to go through any interview to get into the After School Program, but since Daisuke has a developmental impairment we were asked to attend an interview with the *Gakudō* teachers. Unfortunately Daisuke didn't say a word to those teachers [*damatte ita*]. In fact, he

wouldn't even stay in the room. The *Gakudō* teachers warned me that not all of the mainstream children understand about disabilities. They said that if Daisuke enters the *Gakudō* he might experience some cruelty [*zangokuna koto*] at the hands of his mainstream peers. They asked me why I would want to place my son in such a difficult situation [*naze sonna muzukashii jyōkyō ni okeru*]. But I don't worry about that at all. They said that kids are cruel, but it's usually the adults that are the problem. If someone is not going to cooperate with you, well they just are not going to cooperate. Daisuke needs to face new challenges and be stimulated [*shigeki ga hitsuyō*]. He can get a lot more of that from his peers than from his parents. Before I applied to Midorikawa's *Gakudō* I asked Ichikawa-sensei about it. He said that while there was no rule against the *fukushiki* children joining the After School Program, in fact none of his previous students had been accepted. On the other hand few parents had tried to get in so he encouraged me to have a go at it, but it looks like it is hopeless [*muri mitai*].

“The World of Disabled Children” [*shōgai no aru ko no sekai*]

I just want to try to expose Daisuke to mainstream society as much as possible [*narubeku futsū sekai*]. I want people to accept him the way he is [*atarimae to shite ukeirete hoshii*]. If we had put Dai-kun in a special ed. school, he would have been surrounded by children with really serious impairments. That would have situated him in an entirely different world, “the world of disabled children” [*shōgai no aru ko no sekai*].” I didn't want that. Of course, I know that Daisuke's options are limited and when it comes time for junior high he may have to join the protective school. That's why I want him to mix with regular kids [*futsū no ko*] as much as possible now. I want my son to be exposed to how regular kids think and respond, even if it is impossible for him to act or think in the same way [*omae wa shōganai kedo, futsū no ko wa kō iu fū ni omotteru*]. While at times this may be really hard on Dai-chan [*tsurakutemo*], he must deal with it or he will never be able to join in the larger society [*shakai ni dete ikemasen*]. I realize that this approach may lead to some conflicts, but I am prepared to fight any necessary battles during my son's remaining five years at Midorikawa Elementary [*momareru tokoro wa momarete koi*]...

If I always protect Daisuke just because he has a “disability” [*shōgai ga aru kara kabattara*], that would be unfair to my daughter. In the long run it would just make Mayumi’s life that much harder. I worry about Daisuke’s future, but I also have to think about Mayumi’s future. Of course we are trying to put aside some assets for Daisuke [*nokoshite agerareru mono*] because we realize that we will die before him. If he isn’t somewhat independent by then [*shikkari shite nai to*] it will really place a burden on Mayumi. That would be unfair to my daughter [*Mayumi ga karwaisō*].

In the *Dakishimetai* drama, there is a scene where the grandmother says that it would be tragic [*karwaisō*] if the daughter could not marry because of her brother’s disability. But the daughter says, “Don’t look at me with pity in your eyes [*karwaisō ni minai de*]. As a parent, I want Mayumi to face the fact that there are people out there who will inevitably see her situation as pitiable. At the same time I want her to realize clearly that she is *not* pitiable [*jibun ga karwaisō jya nai to iu ishiki o sasetai*]. “Yes I have a younger brother who has a disability, but there is nothing pitiable about that or about me.” I want her to think like that.

When I was in elementary school there was a special classroom for kids with impairments. It was called the *Himawari Kyōshitsu* [*Sunflower Classroom*]. In art class and shop we used to interact with the Himawari kids. I knew that those kids were slow, but I never really gave it much thought. Everyone at the school was aware of the Himawari kids because they sold pencils and notebooks at the school store. I wonder if that little store—it was inside the school—was unusual. At Midorikawa Elementary don’t have a store like that at. Anyway I thought the store was a good thing because it was the place where the mainstream kids got to know the Himawari kids. At my elementary school there was more contact between the two groups of students [*mo sukoshi kakawari ga atta*]. At this school, I get the sense that the mainstream students don’t have much to do with the kids in *fukushiki* track.

“What’s up with this kid?” [*nani kono ko*]

Mayumi walks home from school everyday with her classmates [*tōkōhan*].⁶ One day Daisuke and I were walked home with Mayumi’s group. Well, Dai-chan became really interested in one of the girl’s school bag and this irritated the girl. Mayumi’s

classmate turned to my daughter and said, “Hey, what is up with this kid [*nani kono ko*]? Is your little brother a *fukushiki* kid?” Mayumi couldn’t answer the girl. I was about to say something, but the timing seemed impossible as my daughter was with her friends in a group [*shūdan gekō no tochū de... muri*]. Later we talked about it. Mayumi said to me, “Now I think that I should have explain about Dai-chan to that girl, but mom, I was really in a pinch. I told my daughter I was in a pinch too. (Koiwa-san sniffles a little here.)

I wish that the other children in the *tōkōhan* could come to see the *fukushiki* students as ‘fun’ or ‘interesting.’ I overheard some of the mainstream children speaking of Daisuke in this way, saying that he is a fun or interesting kid—not a weirdo [*omoshiroi tanoshii yatsu—hen jya nakute*]. I realize the word ‘*omoshiroi*’ [‘interesting’] can be taken in various ways. Sometimes people use it to mean ‘stupid,’ [*baka to iu imi mo aru ga*] but I don’t think those kids meant it that way.

A few months ago Daisuke and I were walking home from school and Dai-chan suddenly took off after a cat. He wasn’t trying to hurt the cat or anything. He was just really interested in it. But Dai-chan can be rough [*ranbō*], and that cat was afraid. Before I could stop him, a man came flying out of his house and yelled at Daisuke strongly, “What’s up with this child [*nan da, kono ko wa*]!” Dai-chan was really flustered and the next day he didn’t want to go to school.

“It defies explanations.” [*nan tomo ienai*]

My son is big for his age. Often people mistake him for a third-grader, but cognitively he is only about 3 or 4 years old. I wanted to explain to this the man, but I didn’t have the time to do it properly. At times like those I just think, “Oh my...” [*aa cha’ to omocchaimasu yo ne*]. The trouble is that Daisuke’s impairment is not physical. It is something you can’t put your finger on or detect with your eyes. It’s invisible [*me ni mienai*]. This makes it hard to explain [*nan tomo ienai*]. When your child looks just like a ‘normal’ kid it makes it hard for others to understand. It is impossible to keep explaining about your child to everyone, everywhere you go [*ichi-ichi hanashite raremasen*].

Unfortunately we kept on running into that darn cat on the way home from school so finally I told the man [*ojisan*], “My son has a disability. Even if I tell him, ‘Don’t chase the cat’, he just can’t grasp that so easily. It is going to take time. Please give us that time. But no matter how hard I explained things to that guy, he wasn’t going to understand it. Then I just thought, “Enough of this [*mō ii ya*].”

As a parent of a disabled child, you feel like you want to avoid going places where there might be lots of *those* kinds of people [*sō iu hito ga iru tokoro o saketai kimochi*]. I do often feel irritated and worn down by these kinds of situations. I always think that I want to tell people straight, in no uncertain terms about Daisuke [*sutorêto ni hanashitai*]. When I do breach the subject, quite often the other person will say something like, “Actually, my sister’s daughter also has an impairment or my nephew has a disability.” There are so many people, who really want a chance to talk about this [*minna ga shaberitai*]...

At Midorikawa Elementary they refer to the special needs class [*tokugaku*] as the ‘*Fukushiki Gakkyū*,’⁷ but no one knows what that means. Why ‘*fukushiki*’ I wonder? I wish the school administration would be more open about the special needs class. They should begin by explaining about the name to the mainstream student’s and their parents. But the administration usually has very little or nothing to say about the *fukushiki* class. You know at the annual all school information meeting for new parents they didn’t even mention the *fukushiki* class. Does that mean that *we* are the one’s who have to explain about the special needs track to the mainstream families [*watashi-tachi ga yaranakereba naranai n deshō ka*]⁸

The other day when I was meeting with the Gakudō teachers one of them asked me, “Why ‘*fukushiki*’? Why doesn’t the school refer to it as the ‘Sunflower’ [*Himawari*] or the ‘Friendship’ [*Nakayoshi*] class? I told her that if they used a name like that, the *fukushiki* students were bound to be teased [*karakawarechau deshō*]. “Oh so you are a *Sunflower* [*omae wa himawari darō*]!” If you use a name like that there are always a few mainstream bullies who will try to use the name against the special needs students. It seems that is why the school uses ‘*fukushiki*,’ which is such a generic label that you can’t really get a hook in it [*tsukamiyō no nai namae ni shiteru rashi*]. Well I explained all this, but I don’t think she really got the point...

“Ritalin...was little too strong for us.” [*chotto kitsui*]

After we pulled Daisuke out of kindergarten when he was four-year-old, we took him for consultation and testing. I heard about one private clinic in Mitaka. There is a doctor there who is known for prescribing Ritalin to ADHD kids. That doctor even says that he himself is ADHD. Well, we went to see him and tried putting Daisuke on Ritalin, but there were a lot of side effects [*nonda ato ni iroiro attē*]. I just think it was too strong for him [*chotto kitsui*] so we stopped that pretty quickly. We also tried “Doparu,” which is a form of the dopamine. Dai-chan stayed on that for two or three months, but I couldn’t detect any difference in him so we gave up on that drug as well. (Koiwa-san laughs here in resignation.)⁹

Drugs? You know I wanted to ask you something about vaccinations. I have heard that in the United States Caucasians [*hakujin*] have a higher incidence of having children with disabilities because they generally have a higher rate of vaccination [than African Americans?]. Is that true? ...

“Fathers are never to blame!” [*otōsan no sei ni sarenai*]

I suppose in some ways things have improved a little. If you talk to people who raised disabled children (in Japan) twenty or so years ago, they will tell you that the blame for the ‘problem’ always fell on them [*jibun no sei ni sarete imashita kara nē*]. I have one friend who has an autistic son who is now 27 or 28 years old. She told me how impossible things were back then. There was always a lot of innuendo to the effect that inadequacies in the way she was raising her son were to blame for his autism [*okāsan no shitsuke no sei ni sarete ita*]. I wonder why the blame never falls on the father [*otōsan no sei ni sarenai*!] (laughter) So compared to that era I suppose most people today have a little more understanding about these things.

Even so there are still a lot of parents who will push to have their (impaired) child placed in the mainstream classroom. Parents often feel that even if their son or daughter cannot do their schoolwork [*benkyō wa ii kara*] still they want them to belong to the mainstream class. Not that I can’t understand the feelings of parents who push their kids into the mainstream even if it is really impossible for them [*muri-muri ni futsū*]

gakkyū ni ireru kimochi]. Those parents often realize that there is no way that their child will be able to stay up with the class, yet still they insist on the mainstream class.

I am pretty happy with things at Midorikawa Elementary, although I wish the school had a few more assistant teachers [*hojō no sensei*], like Iida-sensei. If we had a few more assistant teachers then the *fukushiki* students could spend more time in the regular mainstream classes [*tsūkyū noikai ga fueru*].¹⁰ Why can't a few assistant teachers be made available for the mainstream classes? I think it is important for the *fukushiki* students to have opportunities to participate in the regular group and interact with their peers [*ippan no shūdan no naka ni hairu chansu*]. For example, why can't the *fukushiki* students join in the mainstream classes for the 'Tsuku-tsuku' Class?¹¹ I understand that the *fukushiki* students require extra attention [*me ga tarinai no o wakaru*], but if they could just add one or two assistant teachers. But I'm not sure how to go about taking up this request with the school administration...

Not long ago I was talking with Daisuke's educational therapist [*ryōiku no sensei*] about my son's future. I was saying that if necessary we might send him to the protective school for junior high school. If we choose that route he might learn some kind of trade [*te ni shoku o tsukeru*].¹² Then his therapist said, "But if Daisuke doesn't come to learn to successfully interact with other people then what's the point [*hito to tsukiaenakattara dō suru no*]?" I agree with that point of view. The most important thing for my son at this stage is learning social skills [*shakasei ga daiji*]. That's why we placed him in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa. The doctors say that my son has 'autistic tendencies' [*jiheisei ga aru*], but I know that he has the ability to successfully interact with others [*hito to tsukiaeru chikara ga aru*].

When it comes time for middle school we may consider moving to Adachi Ward as they have implemented an open system with regard to school choice.¹³ In fact, I have already observed classes at several schools in Adachi. There were some good schools and some that I thought were terrible [*ii gakkō mo... iyana tokoro mo atta*]...

NOTES (APPENDIX E):

¹ *Bunka no hi* [Culture Day] is November 3. This holiday was originally established as a celebration of the birth of the Meiji Emperor. Upon the emperor's death in 1912 it was re-christened as "Culture Day."

² The *nenshō* [few years] class is the youngest age grouping. *Nenshō* usually designates a class for three-year-old children.

³ In Japan elder siblings usually address younger siblings by name, but younger siblings are expected to address older siblings by the title that designates their relative position within the family birth order: *onē-san* [お姉さん], or more intimately and more commonly *onē-chan*, for older sister and *onii-san* [お兄さん], *onii-chan* or *aniki* for older brother.

⁴ *Dakishimetai*, which translates as "I Want to Hold You," was a two-hour television drama that focused on the bonds between a young woman and her autistic brother. The woman's marriage prospects are put at risk by the presence of her autistic brother.

⁵ A more literal translation would be "developmental foolery."

⁶ It is common in Japan for public elementary schools to assign students to small "commuter groups" [*tōkōhan*]. These groups of five, six or seven members are comprised of students who live within close proximity of one another. The *tōkōhan* members are expected to commute to and from school together to promote safety and to instill a sense of neighborhood in the children.

⁷ While the *fukushiki gakkū* can be rendered in English as the "plural type class," the meaning is not immediately clear in the Japanese original or the English translation.

⁸ In this context when Koiwa-san uses the word "we" [*watashi-tachi*] she most probably means "us mothers."

⁹ Koiwa-san offered this information after I asked her directly about drug therapy.

¹⁰ *Tsūkyū* [通級], which translates literally as the "commuter class," is a limited integration system used in public elementary schools that have a *fukushiki* track class. Under the *Tsūkyū* system, students with special needs occasionally join their mainstream, age-grade peers for select classes, most commonly for art and music.

¹¹ *Tsuku-tsuku gakushū* was a relatively new open format class at Midorikawa that was part of the *sōgō gakushū* [integrated studies] curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2002. Integrated Studies was one of the cornerstones of the Ministry of Education's *yutori kyōiku* [relaxed education] initiative, which was designed to reduce academic pressure within compulsory education in the hopes of mitigating against both school refusal syndrome [*futōkō*] and bullying [*ijime mondai*]. In theory the students and

the teacher were to decide together on the topic to be explored in *tsuku-tsuku gakushū* class. During the time of this fieldwork environmental issues, local history, natural history, and introductory English were all popular topics in this new class. In 2004 and 2005 it was widely reported in Japan that students' test performance was falling at both the elementary and junior high school level. The *yutori kyōiku* initiative was usually blamed for this decline in test scores. It remains to be seen if the newly adopted Integrated Studies curriculum will survive.

¹² At the junior high and high school level, Japan's public special education schools [*yōgo gakkō*] devote some class time to vocational training.

¹³ As in America, local residence is the critical factor determining one's eligibility to attend a particular public elementary school in Japan. Note, for instance, that the Koiwa family had to relocate in order to gain admittance for their son into Midorikawa Elementary. Residency is important factor in determining eligibility to public junior high schools, but it does not play a central role in admission to public high schools, which use competitive exams as the gatekeeper. Recently some municipalities in Japan have begun to allow families a degree of choice in selecting which public elementary or junior high school within the district they would prefer their child to attend. At the time of this fieldwork this option was still very unusual at the elementary school level, although the trend was toward increasing choice at junior high school. Note that this increase in choice implies a decrease in educational equity and an increase in competition as certain schools inevitable begin to attract the more proficient students.

Appendix F

Interview with Hibino Junko (mother of Aya)

Interview Location: Café near Midorikawa Elementary school

Date: April 14, 2003

Names, Subheadings & Elisions

All names are pseudonyms. In order to make the narratives more accessible and inviting, I have inserted numerous breaks in the transcripts. These subheadings are quotes borrowed directly from the informants' discourse. Those places where I have made any elisions in the transcription are indicated with an ellipsis...

She kept insisting that, “regular is best” [futsū ga ii]...

We put Aya in the regular mainstream first grade class, but there were thirty-eight kids in that class and the teacher was male. Actually even before the first grade there were various complications with Aya [iroiro atta kedō]. Opinions about how to proceed were divided, even within our family. You see Aya's grandmother, my mother-in-law, is living with us. Well, our opinions—my husband's, his mother's and mine—were all in a tangle. Aya's grandmother has an old-fashioned way of thinking [mukashi no kangae] and she insisted that “regular is best” [futsū ga ii]. My husband thought that Aya could probably do the schoolwork, as her disability was not so great. So in the end it was decided that we would go ahead and put Aya in the mainstream class.

We thought about asking if the school might be able to make an assistant teacher available for our daughter's first grade class, but... Well, anyway we had some concerns, and actually I wanted to put Aya into the special needs track from the get go. But those two kept insisting that, “The world works like this or like that [futari wa dōshitemo seken wa dono kono]...” So we opted to try the regular mainstream class at the local public school for a year and see how it went.

Well the homeroom teacher was... I mean, if it had been a female teacher it would have been better, but since he was a male... Well after a few months that teacher started complaining and saying things like, “I can't devote all my time to just one student.” Toward the end of the second term he told us to think about moving our daughter out of his class [ugokasu hōkō ni kangaete kure to iwarechattē]...

Aya was hovering between life and death [*seishi ga abunai*]

Let me back up a bit. Aya was born via cesarean section. When they pulled her from my womb [*tsuriageta dankai de*] she didn't cry at all. Finally after nearly ten minutes she started crying. But that means she wasn't breathing for the first ten minutes of her life [*jihatsu kokyū dekinakatta*]. Isn't that a long time? Just before it was too late [*girigiri no tokoro de*] she finally started to cry. But her breathing was irregular and she kept stopping for one or even two-minute intervals. The doctors told me that my daughter was hovering between life and death. I wonder if there aren't some other children in the *fukushiki* class who had difficulties at birth? Are there any? I wonder if Kai might not have had similar problems. Well until Aya reached her first birthday, the doctors were afraid that she might have cerebral palsy. She didn't have CP, but there certainly were some after-effects [*kōishō ga atta*]. I remember just after Aya was born the nurses were frantically placing calls to other hospitals, hoping they could take my daughter, but it was the middle of the night. I was in a room right next to the nurses' station so I could hear everything.

The next morning when I awoke I was alone; everyone was gone. I remember lying there in bed thinking that they all must have gone over to the other hospital. Finally in the afternoon the doctors came in and told me that my daughter had in fact been taken to another hospital because there had been some complications after the birth [*shishō ga atte...*]. She had to be in an incubator for two days. I have a photograph here from that period. I brought it along with me today to show you... After that we moved her to a hospital with a special unit for newborns, where she stayed for about a month. At about three months the doctors told me that my daughter's hearing might be impaired as well.

You know how infants usually laugh and make faces by about three months. Well, Aya didn't do that at all. She was expressionless [*muhyōjō*] and she never threw any looks my way. The medical people also told me that my daughter's legs were weak and so we started physical therapy at about eight months. At about sixteen months she did start walking, but even now Aya's lower half is still rather frail [*kahanshin ga yorwai*]. She is quick to stumble. Her left leg is particularly weak.

Our views were completely opposed [*iken ga zenzen awanakute*]

By two years of age Aya was just beginning to say her first few words and she was walking pretty well by then, but it was clear that her development was delayed. That was when my mother-in-law and I really had a falling out. Our views were completely opposed and so she finally left... Now she has come back and is living with us again, but she lived apart from us for two years.

When Aya was four we enrolled her in a private kindergarten. That wasn't so easy though. There was some talk of perhaps making an assistant teacher available to help Aya, but in the end the kindergarten said that they didn't have enough teachers. They would only agreed to accept our daughter if a parent, that is, if I [*oya ga—watashi ga*], could be available to help out with things at the kindergarten [*hojo yaru to iu koto de*]. Well, we agreed to that but it was difficult because that really limited how much I could work. Around this time, when Aya was three and four, I took her to a class run by the city for developmentally delayed children and their parents [*kosodate shien no kurasu*]...

Don't you think that Aya's pronunciation is a little off? I'm sure that even today here hearing isn't quite right. She talks a lot, but sometimes her sentences are a little broken [*bunshō ni natte nai*]. When she can't explain what she really wants to say she get irritable...

When Aya was a preschooler we talked about sending her, or not sending her, to Aozora Gakuen. Both my husband and his mother were dead set against the idea of her joining a facility for the disabled so in the end my daughter did not attend. I know that the kids who recently joined the *fukushiki* class, Dai-kun, Momo-chan, Kai-kun and Kento-kun all attended Aozora, but Aya and the kids in the upper grades at Midorikawa didn't go...

“It's 'cause my little sis is really stupid... [*atama ga warui kara...*]”

“We transferred Aya over to Midorikawa's *fukushiki* class from the beginning of second grade. I think this switch was actually a little harder on Aya's older sister, Tomoko, than it was on Aya. The two of them had been commuting together to our local public school for one year. Then all of the sudden Aya was sent to a special needs

class at another school, but her older sister was left behind at the old school. Many of the neighborhood kids had gone to the same kindergarten with that both Aya and Tomoko had attended. That's where most of the neighborhood kids went. So everyone knew both of them, and the kids were asking, "Why did Aya change to a different school?" Tomoko didn't really understand about the special needs track so she didn't know how to answer. It seems she just told her friends something like, "It's 'cause my little sis is really stupid [*atama ga warui kara...*]" (Nervous laughter here.)

That was not an easy time for Tomoko. She started to use really rough language and she wouldn't listen to us—her parents. She was really focused only on herself at that point [*wagamama shi-hōdai*]. On the other hand, things were better for Aya. It was as if she finally had her own space [*idokoro*] and could do things at her own pace [*nonbiri shite ita*]. After about a year things settle down as they both adjusted to the new situation. Things improved, but recently they have been fight quite a bit again. (Hibino-san softens this statement with a 'girls-will-be-girls' sort of giggle.) Now it is like they both have their own space and their own lives, which is good, but at times they do still do bump elbows with each other [*tokorodokoro butsukatteru to iu kanji*]. Tomoko is a freshman in high school now, which is tricky. I understand that she is at a difficult age, but my personality is like this. (Here Hibino-san pantomimes shadow boxing.)

When I get angry I come out swinging. Well not really, but...

[*watashi wa okoru toki wa naguru...jya nai kedo*]

The three of us end up fighting it out together. If one of the girls tries to tell me off, I won't take it standing still. With the three of us everything is right out on the table [*mā otagaini kimochi o kakusezu*]. Single child families are very different as only children almost always avoid picking a fight with their parents; they tend to hold everything inside [*osaechatte to iu kanji*]. When I get angry I come out swinging. Well, not really but if push comes to shove, I will hit back [*nagutte korareba naguri kaeshichā*]. For us, or for me at least, this works best. Things settle down.

It's rather a shame, but as my older daughter becomes more aware of her gender there is a gap is opening up between Tomoko and her father [*kyori ga hiraitte...onna to iu ishiki ga takamatte kuru kara*]. I think it is unfortunate that she sees her father as sort of

dull and annoying [*uttōshii*], but it is not like they have stopped talking to each other entirely... Among us ‘girls’ anything goes [*onna dōshi nara mō nanni atte yō ga*], but once you become aware of the opposite sex [*otoko to mite kichau to*], well that changes everything. Aya doesn’t see things like that yet, but with Tomoko well it’s inevitable [*yappari shōganai*]. At the moment that’s pretty much were things sit with the family...

But how to go about explaining the switch to Aya?...

[*tada Aya ni dō setsumei suru kana to iu no ga atta*]

Yes, Aya joined the *fukushiki* class from the start of second grade. On the “suggestion” of her first grade teacher she actually began attending Midorikawa Elementary’s *fukushiki* class once a week on a trial basis in the final term of first grade. At that time she was still in the mainstream class at Daisan Elementary School, but she started commuting once a week to Midorikawa Elementary to participate in the *fukushiki* class. I think she is the only *fukushiki* student at Midorikawa who commuted from another school district before switching over. Well everything went okay so she transferred to Midorikawa from the start of second grade. There is another kid from our neighborhood, Takeki Kawakami, who was attending Midorikawa’s *fukushiki* class so I knew a little about the class already. I was already on friendly terms with Takeki’s mom so we talked about it and I decided that the *fukushiki* class was our best option.

But I was concerned about how to go about explaining the switch to Aya [*tada Aya ni dō setsumei suru kana to iu no ga atta*]. While Aya was commuting once a week to Midorikawa she got used to the *fukushiki* class so when it came time for second grade there really was nothing left to explain. Aya had already made friends with a couple of the *fukushiki* kids so she was ready switch over from her mainstream class at Daisan with no trouble. That spring Hiroki, who was also a second grader at the time, transferred into the *fukushiki* track from a mainstream class at Midorikawa Elementary so those two soon became friends. I heard later that Hiroki had been teased and even poked at quite a bit in his mainstream first grade class, probably because he is overweight and not very athletic [*tairyokuteki ni taikeiteki ni ijimerarete, tsutsukaretari shite ita*]. He is a good kid, but that type of kid is always an easy target for bullies. Anyway

once Hiroki joined the *fukushiki* class the atmosphere really improved. He brightens things up [*kare no okage de akaruku natta*].

It's like there is a (scarlet) letter attached to these kids...

[*retteru o harawareru mitaina kanji*]

Does Aya have a disability passbook? Well, that was really a dilemma for us [*kanari mayotta*]. When you think about your kid's future, you realize that the passbook is something that is going to stick with them throughout their lives [*isshō tsuite kuru wake*]. It's like there is a (scarlet) letter attached to these kids [*retteru o harawareru mitaina kanji*]. We were fully aware of that so we never applied for the passbook. But you see the thing is, Aya is a girl so in the future she might want to get qualifications for some sort of field [*shikaku o torasetai toka*]. If she were a boy then just finding some sort of work would be okay I suppose [*otoko no ko dattara shigoto sureba ii to omō*], but anyway the thing is whatever she ends up doing she isn't going anywhere if she can't get into some sort of school. Compulsory education goes only through the end of junior high. Then what happens?

We went back and forth about the passbook for about three years, but in the end we decided that it would be best if Aya had one. At first my husband was dead set against the idea, but finally, just a few weeks ago, after we went together on that fieldtrip to the zoo, he said to me, "Maybe it would be best if Aya had a passbook..." So I put the application together right away and dropped it by the city hall. Actually on Wednesday of next week some city official [*yakusho no hito*] is scheduled to come to our apartment for an interview. I suppose they want to talk all about Aya's case history or something like that... You know they have to rank her disability. It is an A, B, C scale; an "A" ranking is for the most severe impairments.

There are some discounts and special services available if you have the passbook. Even without the passbook the city pays half of Aya's school lunch fees and her textbook expenses. They have some funds available for special needs classes so once your kid joins the *fukushiki* system you get some small discounts. The main thing is that if you have a disability passbook you can get into the protective school system. As long

as there is an open space at the school then your child can get in. On the other hand, if you don't have a passbook you can't get into a special needs school. No way [*muri da na*]. That's why Naoki's mom applied for the passbook when her son entered fifth grade. She never showed me his passbook, but I'm sure he is ranked "C." Recently I was talking with Fumi's mother (Yamashita-san). I told her straight out that we had finally decided to apply for a passbook and she said, "I wonder if it's best to get one..." Then she was asking me all about the application system [*sōdan yoserarechatta*].

I told her that well until the end of junior high it is compulsory education so things would be okay, but after that would Fumi really be able to be independent [*hitoridachi dekiru*]? Of course she had to admit that that would be difficult. I think that Yamashita-san will probably apply for a passbook for Fumi within a year or two. I know she is considering it.

The mainstream kids can't understand it [*mawari no ko wa rikai dekinai*]

At the moment there is some friction between Yamashita-san and Ichikawa-sensei [*chotto mometeru*]. At one of the parent/teacher conferences earlier this year Ichikawa-sensei told Yamashita-san that he thought she was neglecting Fumi at home [*te o kakenasuguru to iwareta node...hottarakashi jōtai*]. Well, at the time Yamashita-san didn't say anything in reply, but his comments really irritated her [*atama in kita rashikutē*]. She still can't let go of his words. And then this past year Fumi has had some troubles with her school-commuter group [*tsūgakuhan*]. Well, you know how Fumi is... Suddenly without warning she will scream out in a loud voice. It can't be helped but still the mainstream kids can't understand it [*mawari no ko wa rikai dekinai*]. So...

Midorikawa is a regular public school so there are a lot of mainstream children right here. It is odd but all too often the special needs kids and the mainstream just aren't able to get along well and establish friendships [*nakayoku narenai*]. They need more contact with each other. For example, a couple of weeks ago when the *fukushiki* class made butter it was nice that the parents were invited to watch, but what about their mainstream classmates? When we have those open class days, the school's policy is to limit visitors to only the children's parents, but I don't think that is so smart. Wouldn't it be much better if the school let the mainstream kids and the *fukushiki* kids

attend each other's open class days? Don't you think some of the mainstream kids might have been interested in that butter-making project that *fukushiki* class put together?

Have you ever attended the all school information meeting [*gakkō setsumeikai*]? The school administrations don't mention a single word about the *fukushiki* class at that meeting [*fukushiki no koto wa issai haitte nai*]. Daisuke's mother is trying to get that changed. She is a tough cookie. I have to give her credit.

When we switched Aya into the *fukushiki* class, I gave it to her straight. I said, "Look you are going to join the special needs class, okay? If someone asks you, "Why are you in *that* class?", you tell them, "There was some trouble when I was born and I have an impairment [*hō iu shōjō o motteru kara*] so this class is best for me." Anyway this is best because now finally you will be able to focus on yourself [*jibun no koto ga dekiru kara iin da yo*]. I explained everything to her. She didn't say much at the time, but by the time she entered third grade she came to understand. Now Aya is able to say, "I am a member of the *fukushiki* class." It's not easy for a child to say that. After all, some mainstream students think "those *fukushiki* kids are all weirdoes" [*henna ko bakashi mitaina kanji*]. It is scary how some children will say whatever pops into their heads without a second thought.

I don't want them to think of the *fukushiki* kids as outsiders

[*yosomono to omowanai yō ni*]

I thought Aya might have to face a lot of that kind of thing so I try to drop by the school as often as possible. I know that Aya is trying her best so I have to try my best too. I make a point of talking to the mainstream mothers whenever I get the chance. I want to stop them from thinking of the *fukushiki* kids as outsiders [*yosomono to omowanai yō ni*]. Now sometimes Aya plays with a few friends from the mainstream classes. She is getting more chances to interact with those mainstream kids, which I think is good.

When Aya is presented with something new it takes a good long while before she will show any interest in it. Still once she has become interested in something she will keep at for a long time. She will stay at it until she is convinced that she really has a grasp of it, which is good, but she can be pretty single minded and inflexible [*yūzū ga*

kikanai]. When she completes something to her own satisfaction I always try to praise her. But then once she is satisfied, it never goes any further than that. Well, that's just the kind of kids she is. I hate to admit it, but in many ways she takes after me. I don't like to be told how to go about doing something [*osowaru no ga kirai*]. (Hibino-san laughs at herself here.) I tend to just silently watch other people doing stuff like knitting or whatever until I have an idea about how to do it myself. This leads to lots of false starts and mistakes, but eventually I get the knack of it. That's me. People often say that I won't listen to the opinions of others, and there is some truth in that. They tell me I'm an egotist [*jihochū datte*]. Aya inherited that same trait from me. Sometimes she even seems like my alter ego [*watashi no bunshin*].

When it comes time for junior high school Aya wants to go to same school where Naoki is now a freshman—Yonemura Junior High. You remember Naoki.¹⁴ They have a *fukushiki* track at Yonemura so hopefully Aya can get in there. Tomoko (Aya's sister) is going to the local junior high, Daisan Junior High, so once again those two will be studying at different schools. The atmosphere at Daisan isn't so great. I mean it is located right in the middle of an industrial zone [*mawari wa kōjō darake*]. So I thought about trying to get Tomoko transferred over to Yonemura Junior High, but my daughter said “no way” to that plan. Her friends all attend that school so what can you do? Anyway it may be for the best that those two attend different schools. That way they each have their own schedules, which they have to learn to manage themselves.

I have no idea what is going to happen when Aya reaches high school age. I'm really not even sure if Tomoko will or won't be going to high school herself. (Hibino-san chuckles nervously here.) Recently Tomoko has said something about wanting to get some kind of qualification and get a job [*shikaku o toritai*]. If it comes to that I won't oppose her [*torasechā kana to omō shi*].

“I want to be a hairdresser [*tokoyasan ni naritai*]”

A few months back when Ichikawa-sensei had the *fukushiki* kids draw pictures of their future selves, I was surprised to see that Aya had drawn a picture of herself working in a beauty parlor and wrote clearly, “I want to be a hair-cutter [*tokoyasan ni naritai*].”¹⁵ She never said anything about that to me. Anyway at that time I got a

telephone call from Ichikawa-sensei saying, “Aya did a great job with her artwork and her picture has been selected for a prize.” That was the first time that Aya received a prize for anything to do with school. The *fukushiki* teachers showered her with praise and this really gave Aya’s confidence a big boost. They even displayed her picture at the city hall’s gallery, which I thought was great. When they told us that Aya’s picture was going to be sent around the country as part of some sort of school artwork exhibition then I realized just how good that picture was. Even my husband, who is hard to excite, was impressed with that news.

My husband won’t believe anything until he has seen it with his own eyes; he can be really bull-headed [*nattoku saseru no wa taihen*]. Sometimes I wonder why in the world we hooked up. (Laughter) I thought he was more flexible, but it turns out he is as stubborn as they come [*atama ga katakute sa*]. Of course you can never see those things when you are dating. (Laughter) We dated a long time, six years. Now when I think back on it I wonder what we were up to those years. I thought we had sized each other up pretty well, but there was a lot we had overlooked [*miteyō de mitenakkata to iu yōna koto ga ippai*].¹⁶ Now we have been married for thirteen years. If you throw in those six years we were dating it is about twenty years we have been together. (She laughs.) My husband and I are from this area. I attended Midorikawa Elementary and he attended Daisan Elementary, where Tomoko went. We both went to Yonemura Junior High, but we didn’t know each other then. We started dating after I had finished high school...

You have to make your own way in the world [*michi wa jibun de hiraki*]

You know I work at a convenience store. Well, my older brother and his wife who own the store. They opened a Lawson store¹⁷ when Aya was still a preschooler. I think she was about four at the time. Aya used to like to help out in the store, but now she stays away. She has no interest in that kind of work. At Midorikawa she drew that picture of herself working in a barbershop, but I don’t think she really knows what she wants to do. Most kids nowadays think that their parents will give them everything, even find them a job. I had to look out for myself and make my own path. I just can’t understand these kids today. Anyway I tell my daughters that they will need to make their own way in the world [*michi wa jibun de hiraki*]. Tomoko is good with her hands

so she will probably end up fabricating something or other. She is good at drawing and making things, even electrical stuff. So I tell her she should pursue that [*sō iu hōmen de ike to itteru kedo*]. Aya is the type who likes to duplicate something that she has already perfected. She is not someone who can master many different kinds of tasks. I think a job in the service industry would be impossible for her [*sekkyaku wa zettai muri*]. Maybe simple office work would be okay or anything where she could make one thing...

After all she is just a regular kid [*datte futsū no ko nan dakara*]

As a parent you get tired of trying to explain about your child. I figure that if I do or don't explain it all works out about the same [*setsumei shitemo, shinakutemo*]. The people who are going to understand, do understand and those that don't never will [*wakaru hito wa wakaru shi, wakaranai hito wa wakaranai n dakara*]. Don't you think it is better to take them (special needs children) along? I mean if we are going somewhere as a family, that is fine or if they are going somewhere as siblings then that is okay too. I take Aya and her sister to all kinds of places. I don't make a point of doing it just because Aya is developmentally delayed; I mean after all she is just a regular kid [*datte futsū no ko nan dakara*]. I was talking to Daisuke's mom the other day and I told her that I thought children should all be treated the same. That's what I think.

I like to get out and go places; usually I take Aya along with me. People often tell me, "Wow, you have no qualms about taking your daughter anywhere." I just say, "But taking her along with me is the best thing, don't you think [*tsurete iku no wa ichiban jya nai no*]?" Look, at the reverse example. If you get into a situation where the parents are really concerned about taking their (disabled child) out in public and opted to keep them inside at home then people are bound to say something like, "What are those parents up to [*asoko no oya wa nani yatteru no*]?" That's how people will look at it. I don't want people saying, "Her daughter is *that* kind of child so she can't take her out in public [*ā iu ko dakara derarenai to iwaretakumo nai*]." That is why we go to all kinds of places, both close and far. I like to take Aya to places that most parents wouldn't think of bringing their kids. I try to keep my husband involved too or else he would just stay at home [*danna mo makizoe ni shite, jya nai to uchi no danna wa deya shinai kara*]¹⁸...

Next year it is unclear if the school district will employ Iida-sensei.¹⁹ There is a rumor that it may be impossible for her to keep her job. She has to empty her desk sometime in March and then if the district offers her the job for another year she can put her things back. That is the way it works. Well, they are saying that the whole *fukushiki* system, including the employment of assistant teachers like Iida-sensei, is going to change in about two years. To put it bluntly, when I heard that I was really furious [*hakkiri tte sore o kiite hara ga tatsu shi*]. What should I say? They²⁰ don't even understand the position of mainstream parents, and so they certainly haven't got a clue about us *fukushiki* parents. They need to respect the position of parents of disabled children and consider things from our point of view [*shōgaisha no oya to iu mono o motto jūshi shinakereba naranai noni*]. But they haven't given a second thought to us.

Apparently there is some little room tucked away somewhere within the Board of Education where you can take questions about the proposed changes. Koiwa-san found out about it and paid the office a visit last Saturday. Well Koiwa-san really gave them a piece of her mind [*sore ni tsuite mō—itta rashi kedo*], but I do wonder what is really going to happen with the *fukushiki* class system. When Koiwa-san was talking with those education officials she also asked about Iida-sensei keeping her position for another year, but they indicated that Iida-sensei would probably be moved or something like that. Last year they were also threatening to move Iida-sensei out of the *fukushiki* class, but Kai's mother went to talk with those officials and asked them to please let Iida-sensei stay with the *fukushiki* class for another year. At the time they sent her home saying it was an internal personnel matter, but Iida-sensei did end up keeping her position...

Those city hall people can really be a headache, but luckily I happen to know the current mayor of the city. We were in the same elementary school class. (Laughter) Kai's father is also on a talking basis with the mayor. Those two are really quite tight as they belonged to the same Chōkai [*onaji chōkai dakara sō iu karami mo atte, kekkō hanashi ga tsūjiru*].²¹

I really hate it when people are two-faced and doubled-sided...

[ura omote ga aru no wa kirai dakara]

I'll bet when you sit down with the mothers and talk at length like this, most everyone talks up the good points of their own kids [*jibun no ko ni tsuite wa kekkō ii yō ni minna ga iu darō*]. I won't do that. People sometimes say to me, "Why don't you praise your children more in public?" But I tell them, "How can I? I know my kids too well!" Anyway I really hate it when people are two-faced and doubled-sided, pretending to be something they are not in public [*ura omote ga aru no wa kirai dakara*].

This morning when my husband was going out the door I said, "Oh by the way I'll be out this afternoon. I have a little date with Mare-san. He has some things he wants to talk over with me... [*uchi no danna ni, kyō wa mare-san to ohanashi suru noni ni chotto dēto nan da*]" My husband answered indignantly, "What are you talking about! Why do you call it a "date" [*nani...nande dēto nan da yo*]?"

(Hibino-san and I share a good laugh at her teasing story, and then, sliding our glances aside, we draw the conversation to a close.)

NOTES (APPENDIX F):

¹⁴ Naoki was two years older than Aya. They studied together in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary for two years until Naoki graduated the previous spring.

¹⁵ Note that Hibino-san and her daughter opt for the working class word *tokoyasan* [barber] rather than the more middle class and feminized terminology of *biyōshisan* [hair stylist].

¹⁶ Two years after this interview Hibino-san and her husband were divorced. In retrospect I think that she may have been hinting here that they were having some marital difficulties.

¹⁷ Lawson is the second largest convenience store franchise in Japan. It is only surpassed in size by the rival 7-Eleven chain.

¹⁸ Hibino-san's word choice here attests to both her working class background and her self-assured attitude. Her gruffy "*deya shinai*" stands in opposition to the more innocuous, "standard" Tokyo dialect in which the phrasing would be "*deyō to shinai*."

¹⁹ Iida-sensei did not have a teacher's license. She was paid a relatively low wage by the district to work in the *fukushiki* classroom as a "teacher's aid" [*hojoin*]. She was employed on a one-year contract that was always in jeopardy of not being renewed.

²⁰ Japanese sentence construction often relies on implicit, contextual understanding to suggest the subjects and objects of actions. Here Hibino-san does not specify whom she is upset with, but the context suggests that she is angry with local city officials, particularly the Board of Education and perhaps the school administration.

²¹ The *chōkai* [町会] or *chōnaikai* [町内会] are semi-independent neighborhood organizations that sometimes compete with the local government for administrative control of local politics. Local municipalities also rely on cooperation from the *chōkai* to implement many policies. For a detailed ethnographic account of one *chōkai* in Tokyo see Bestor (1989), especially pages 75-77 and 181-82.

Appendix G

Interview with Lin Mei (mother of Momo)

Interview Location: Midorikawa Elementary school

Date: February 10, 2003

Names, Subheadings & Elisions

All names are pseudonyms. In order to make the narratives more accessible and inviting, I have inserted numerous breaks in the transcripts. These subheadings are quotes borrowed directly from the informants' discourse. Those places where I have made any elisions in the transcription are indicated with an ellipsis...

We arrived in Japan about fifteen years ago...

[nihon ni watatte kita no ga mō jūgo nen mae ni narimasu]

My husband came over first. He arrived in 1988. I came the next year, but first we had to file our marriage papers back in China. Everything happened all at once; there was no time or money for a wedding ceremony. We had met a few years earlier at a university in Shanghai where we were both teaching. He was a professor of computer science and I was in the department of Chinese. At that time things were just starting to open up in China. I loved Japanese literature, especially the works of Kawabata Yasunari. Have you read any of his books? When I was a student he was still the only author from Asia to have received the Nobel Prize in literature. My husband realized that Japan was at the center of computer innovations. Before coming over we both studied Japanese for about a year. We were teaching during the day at the university and taking Japanese classes at night. That seems like ages ago now.

We both came over on student visas so we had to go to school. My husband entered a design school in Gotanda, but he didn't like that after having been a professor in China. I studied Japanese for two years at a little school in Kanda, and I had a part-time job working nights at an *izakaya* [Japanese pub]. I did all kinds of work there, sometimes even washing dishes. It was hard, but fun too. Finally in 1991 my husband found a job at a computer software maker and his working visa was approved. That meant that I no longer needed to keep my student status because I was eligible for a spouse visa. At the time I was considering entering a masters program in Japanese literature at Tokai University. My Japanese teachers were encouraging me, but I was

growing weary of being a student so I decided to try a hand at being a housewife [*katei ni hairu koto ni shita*].

The doctors advised us to give up on this one and try again

[*kono ko o tebanashite, mata umeru kara to isha ni iwareta*]

In 1994 I became pregnant and returned to Shanghai to have the baby. My daughter Momo was born here in Japan, but I gave birth to her older brother, Shuji, in China. He was my first child so I wanted to be near my mother for the birth. Shuji was several weeks premature. He only weighed 1,850 grams at birth and had to stay in an incubator for a number of days. It was touch and go for the first month or so. The doctors advised us to give up on this one and try again [*kono ko o tebanashite, mata umeru kara to isha ni iwareta*]. With the one-child policy many people are reluctant to raise a child that might be impaired [*kodomo wa hitori shika yurusaretenai kara shōgai o motteru ko wa chotto...to omō hito wa ōi*]. But I wouldn't listen to those doctors, and once Shuji passed the second month he started gaining strength. Now look at him!²²

When Momo was born there were no problems at all. She was healthy, weighing 2,580 grams. Just after she turning one she began speaking. Momo picked up language a lot quicker than Shuji, but she's a girl after all [*onna no ko dakara*]. When Momo was a toddler I taught her everything in both languages, Chinese and Japanese. She was a quick-study and had no problem memorizing both. Momo had a knack for languages.

But everything changed a few days after her second birthday. We had gone to the sea that weekend and Momo seemed to have caught a cold. She told me she was sleepy that evening. I remember it so clearly I was making dinner at the time. I put her to bed early. By 10:00 pm her fever had climbed to almost 40° C. I was trying to cool her down, but at 11:00 pm she suddenly had a seizure [*totsuzen tenkan, hikitsuke*]. That really scared us so we called an ambulance immediately. They were quick, arriving in just about ten minutes. At the hospital the seizures continued late into the night. The ambulance people had said that it was probably nothing serious, but a doctor at the hospital said there might be some sort of problem with her brain. We didn't know what to do.

She looked at me and said, “Mama...”

[watashi no hō o mite, ‘mama...’ to itta]

The next afternoon Momo awoke and she seemed to be okay. She looked at me and said, “Mama...” Not long after that she went unconscious again and the seizures returned. She was in the hospital for a week and the seizures came in waves. Finally she regained consciousness again, but this time it was no good. She had lost all her language. It was as if she awoke as a completely different person *[me ga samasu to hontō ni betsujin mitai datta]*. The doctors said that she was lucky to be alive. They told us she had contracted “*kyūsei nōshō*.”²³

For a while things were really difficult. Momo could hardly move her arms and legs. Getting out of bed was impossible for her. She became an infant once again *[akachan ni modotta no]*. At the time I tried to tell myself, “This is an illness. She will get better.” But that first year her seizures returned from time to time, and it became clear that her impairments were going to persist. We took her regularly to see a doctor in the neurology department at a university hospital in Ueno, but she didn’t improve at all. The doctor told us that we should be thankful that Momo had survived. He warned us that she might be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. That’s what he said... We had CAT scans and MRI tests done, but the doctors couldn’t tell us much. They said that they didn’t have any medicine that could help our daughter, and so the hospital sent us to a rehabilitation clinic. We were told that all we could do now was to hope that Momo was a fighter *[honnin no seimeiryoku ni taiyōru shika nai]*. We were confused and distraught *[dōshiyō to omotta]*.

Momo became just like a little baby again *[akachan no yō ni narimashita]*

She kept trying to put things in her mouth. When I saw her doing that I was really shocked. And she didn’t even understand that we were her mother and father. She forgot everything. I was amazed that they released her from the hospital even though she couldn’t get out of bed. We took her to the rehabilitation clinic, but the therapist said, “We can help with moving her limbs, but we are not set up to assist with mental problems...”

One doctor did give us a little hope, saying that when children like our daughter started to speak again often they were quick at re-learning the language they had lost. But in Momo's case things didn't work like that. She really lost everything and had to start over from scratch. Finally she did call me "mama" again. That must have been about a year after she had learned to stand. I was so happy, but it really was like she was still a little baby. This time she was so slow with language. It took her forever just to master a few words, but these words filled our hearts with happiness. By that point we thought she might never speak again.

...so she really isn't a 'normal' child [*yahari futsū jya nai*]

We were completely consumed with taking care of Momo so we decided to send Shuji back to Shanghai to be looked after by his grandparents. For the next two years Shuji was shuttled back and forth between Tokyo and Shanghai. Around Momo's fourth birthday the four of us started living together again in Tokyo. We tried to put Momo in the daycare program that Shuji had attended, but they told us that an interview would be needed. So we took Momo to an interview with the daycare center principal and someone from city hall. They said that Momo couldn't be admitted to the daycare program because for one thing she was still in diapers. I cried and cried when they told us that, and I thought so she really isn't a 'normal' child [*yahari futsū jya nai*]. She can't even get into the daycare center...

A public servant at city hall introduced us to the Nobi-Nobi Program, a special class for disabled children run by the social welfare section.²⁴ But they only hold these classes, which are for the children and their mothers, once or twice a month. The city doesn't have a set facility for the classes so the location was always changing. The children could play together and the mothers got to network with one another [*kodomotachi ga asoberu to okāsan-tachi wa kōryū ga dekiru*]. The classes seemed fun and interesting to me, but Momo only cried when we attended. I wondered, "Why in the world is she crying?" But she just didn't seem to be able to adapt to a group environment.

At that point we really didn't have any other options

[hoka no sentaku wa nakute]

The teachers at from the Nobi-Nobi Program introduced us to Aozora Gakuen.²⁵ At first my husband was quite reluctant to put Momo in the Aozora program [*aozora ni tsuite shujin wa saisho teikō ga arimashita*]. He didn't want Momo grouped together with children who had really severe disabilities. It is true that there were some children at Aozora who could not walk and others who could not use chopsticks. But we really didn't have any other options at that point, and there was a waiting list to get into the program so I put Momo's name on the list. We had to wait about six months until there was an opening... It turned out that Momo really liked Aozora, which was great. She attended for two and a half years. A bus would come in the morning to pick her up.

The social welfare office said that it would be better if Momo had a "Green Passbook" before we applied to Aozora Gakuen [*midori no techō o moratte kara Aozora ni moshikomu yō ni to iwareta*]. So I went to Parental Support Office at city hall and applied for a passbook [*kosodate sōdanjo ni itte midori no techō o tsukurimashita*]. If you have the passbook all medical expenses are free until the child's third birthday, and the city provides some subsidies for transportation costs and other things. In order to get a passbook Momo had to take a series of tests at the Child Consultation Office [*sono techō o morau tame ni jidō sōdanjo ni itte, iroirona tesuto saremashita*]. I think there was an intelligence test and some others...

The 'verdict' was a moderate impairment

[chūdo no hanketsu o kudasaremashita]

In the end they ruled that Momo's impairments were 'moderate' [*momo wa chūdo no hanketsu o kudasaremashita*]. That's what it said on her passbook; the letter ranking is "B." The most severe impairments are given an "A" ranking you know. At the time that Momo entered Aozora Gakuen she could only say about six or seven words... She couldn't use chopsticks very well then either, but she learned to use them at Aozora.

The instructors at Aozora really understood how difficult this whole thing was for the parents. That was great; it made a big difference. But us mothers were kept really busy. There was always something to help prepare for, the sports day, a school

play, a Christmas Party or something else. At these events the parents, that is the mothers, were expected to organize some kind of performance of their own [*oya mo dashimono o suru koto ni natteru no*] so there was always something that needed to be done. Plus I didn't have a car and Aozora Gakuen is located really far from the station. It was a tough schedule, but Momo enjoyed her days there.

When it came time for elementary school Momo had to be retested as we were hoping to place her in the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa Elementary. This time around the Board of Education organized the test [*mōichido tesuto sareta, kondo wa kyōiku iinkai o tōshite*]. It was held in early November at our local community center. The test had two parts, intelligence and motor skills. They took Momo into a room alone, but she got confused and couldn't say a word. So they let me enter the testing room and sit where Momo could see me. After that Momo started talking—what a relief! She had to build some things with blocks and put beads on a string. They had her go down a slide several times and walk up and down some stairs. After that she was asked a few questions, but couldn't answer the one about her birthday. I remember trying to prepare her for this test, but I didn't think she would be asked about her birthday. I was worried that we had failed [*dame kana to omotte ita*]...

She had to really battle it out with the Board

[*nebari tsuyoku kyōiku iinkai to tatakaimashita*]

In mid-December I got a call from the Board asking me to come to their offices in the Education Center Building. I went straight away the next morning and they told me that Momo could enter the *fukushiki* track. I was so relieved. That same year Kai-kun and Kento-kun, who had studied with Momo at Aozora Gakuen, took the same test. I'm not sure if I should say this here, but... Well in our case Momo was admitted to the *fukushiki* track, which is what we were hoping for, so our conversation with the Board of Education was over quickly. But when the parent's opinion was at odds with Board's way of thinking then things could get really difficult. The Board declared that Kai-chan should attend the protective school, which set off a real battle [*kai-chan wa yōgo gakkō ni itte kudasai to iwaremashita, sore de tatakai no hajimari*]. Kai's mother said that there was

absolute no way that she was going to send her son to a segregated special ed. school. Then she battled it out with the Board [*nebari tsuyoku kyōiku iinkai to tatakaimashita*].

If your child is sent to a protective school they never have a chance to interact with the children living in the neighborhood. This is particularly the case with Tanba Protective School, which is where the children from this area are sent. That school is over thirty minutes away by car and it's so far from the nearest station...

We are really happy with how things turned out at Midorikawa Elementary. Ichikawa-sensei seems to really enjoy teaching the *fukushiki* children and he is good at it [*shigoto o taihen tanoshinderu, kono shigoto ni muiteru shi*]. Six months ago we moved into a new apartment; we put a priority on finding a place that was not too far from Midorikawa. Luckily we were able to find an apartment quite close the school.

It is scary to think about what might happen when compulsory education is over... [*gimukyōiku ga owaru to kowai*]

Momo has really improved her vocabulary this year. In fact, now when you listen to her talk, you probably wouldn't guess that she has an impairment [*hanashi o kiku to shōgaiji to omowanai, omowasenai*]. She even can hold her own in arguments with her older brother, Shuji. We are so happy that Momo has been able to recover so much this year. We really couldn't be more pleased [*daimanzoku desu*]. Of course we still do have some concerns about her future. It is scary to even think about what will happen when compulsory education is over... I wonder if she will be able to attend high school. Will she ever be able to establish her own family? Of course I think about such things. When I start thinking that far into the future things can seem bleak [*soko made kangaeru to kuraku naru keredo*].

My mother (back in Shanghai) thinks that I shouldn't worry myself over whether or not Momo will get married in the future. She says that if Momo stays with me then I will never get lonely, so that really is best [*momo ga ie ni ita hō ga sabishiku nai kara*]. My mother thinks like that because our family is here in Tokyo. We are so very far away from her. Of course, Momo is still just a young child, but as a parent you can't help but think about these things. If we do end up living together in the future, it's true

that then at least I won't be lonely [*issho ni kurasu koto ni natte ite mo watashi wa sabishiku nai no wa tashika desu*]...

NOTES (APPENDIX G):

²² Shuji was two grade levels above his younger sister Momo. During my fieldwork I met Momo's older brother on numerous occasions as he was attending a mainstream class at Midorikawa Elementary. At the time of this interview Shuji was in the fourth grade.

²³ An acute inflammation of the brain usually caused by a virus.

²⁴ *Nobiru* means to grow, stretch or lengthen so this support program for developmentally delayed toddlers and their mothers could be translated (inelegantly) as the "Grow-Grow classroom" or more idiomatically as the "Stretch Yourself class."

²⁵ Aozora Gakuen is the alternative preschool program run by the city for developmentally delayed children. Often in Japanese urban areas when a child is refused admission to public daycare due to an impairment the parents are encouraged to enroll the child in an alternative short-day program exclusively for developmentally delayed preschoolers. At the time of my fieldwork the Aozora Gakuen accommodated about thirty children in four classes. Each classroom had two instructors (all women) and seven or eight children.

Appendix H

Interview with Saito Yurika (mother of Kento)

Interview Location: Midorikawa Elementary school

Date: May 22, 2003

Names, Subheadings & Elisions

All names are pseudonyms. In order to make the narratives more accessible and inviting, I have inserted numerous breaks in the transcripts. These subheadings are quotes borrowed directly from the informants' discourse. Those places where I have made any elisions in the transcription are indicated with an ellipsis...

When Kento was little he never said, “mom” or “dad...”

[mama toka papa toka iwanakatta shi..]

As you might expect when Kento was little he couldn't talk. Well, actually it wasn't that he couldn't talk at all. At about 18 months he had a few words. The trouble was he never used nouns. He could say things like “yummy [*oishii*],” but he couldn't say something like “This is juice.” And he never said, “mom or dad [*mama toka papa toka iwanakatta shi*].” Well, actually now that I think about it we were trying to teach him to say “mother [*okāsan*]” and “father [*otōsan*],” but that was only more difficult for him. He did pick up the names of a few cartoon characters, children's super-heroes like “*Anpanman*.” He was so crazy about these characters and even now he still likes them. The trouble was Kento just wasn't learning any nouns, not even baby words like *wanwan* [puppy-dog] or *yanyan* [kitty-cat]. I kept thinking it is strange that he is so slow. (Saito-san emphasized the word “slow,” drawing out the vowel: *o—soi*.)

Kento was our first child so my husband and I didn't want to push him. Everyone told us, “Of course he is slow; he's a boy after all [*otoko no ko dakara osoi to iwaremashita yo ne*].” We were fairly laid back about things, which may have made matters worse [*kekko uchi, watashi mo shujin mo nonbiri shite ita node yokei*]... We probably should have put him in kindergarten when he turned three, but we thought two years of preschool would be enough so we waited until Kento turned four years old. Some people think it is best to put toddlers in preschool at age two. I suppose most people today start their kids in some kind of program around three years of age...

Anyway when Kento turned four we tried to put him in a private kindergarten, but he had such trouble sitting still [*jitto shite rarenai*].

The kindergarten teacher said, “Well, you see... It’s just that...”

[*kochira dewa chotto to iu kanji*]

To get into the kindergarten you had to go through an interview. First the teacher took Kento and some other children into a classroom and had them do something or other. I couldn’t see exactly what they were doing. Then there were private interviews scheduled with a teacher, the parents and their child, but Kento was out of control. He really went on a rampage [*ōabare*] that afternoon so we gave up on the interview that day. They let us come back for another interview a few days later, but the kindergarten teacher was like, “Well, you see... It’s just that umm... [*kochira dewa chotto to iu kanji*].” Then the principal took over the interview. He suggested that we take our son for a visit to the city’s Education Consultation Office [*kyōiku sōdan-shitsu e itta hō i*].

The next week we did take Kento to Education Consultation Office. I think they had our son take some sort of psychology or aptitude test [*shinri tesuto ka nanika o yatta kana*]. It didn’t take too long. The thing is Kento was still only four at the time. The Education Consultation Office is concerned with where to place children when they enter elementary school so they told us it was really a bit too soon. They introduced us to a caseworker from city hall. Her name was Mimura. We had a long talk with Mimura-san and she said that if we searched around we might be able to find a private kindergarten that would consider taking our son. (Nervous laughter here.) But she thought that Aozora Gakuen would be best.

So we took Kento for a visit to see Aozora. For some reason he didn’t put up any battles like he had at the private kindergarten. In fact he seemed to enjoy Aozora from the very first day. Of course you know how Kento is always his mischievous self [*itazura mitaina koto wa itsumo no yō ni*]. When I was watching him that day, I was thinking to myself, “Can’t you be little quieter?” (Laughter here.) But anyway from the start he seemed to feel right at home at Aozora [*mō hontō ni sugu najinde ita*]. When I talked it over with my husband he was like, “This seems fine [*iiin jya nai*].”

So we started sending Kento to Aozora Gakuen. There is a special bus operated by the city that picks up the kids. For the first week or so the mothers attend with their children so that everyone has chance to get used to things. The Aozora teachers were quick to say that I could leave my son with them, but Kento didn't like that idea. When I tried to leave he threw a fit, crying for his life [*ōsawagi, ōnakisakebi mitaina*]. But a teacher took his hand firmly and waved goodbye to me... Of course, there were lots of chances for the mothers to visit the preschool, especially in the case of Aozora. At that point Kento was still in diapers, even though he was already four. He always resisted using the toilet, but somehow the teachers were able to get him out of diapers [*watashi ni teihō ga atta ga, aozora de omutsu totte moratta*]. During those two years at Aozora Kento settled down a lot and his vocabulary slowly increased. Around the age of five his language ability started to improve noticeably.

About once a month the Aozora teachers took the children to a daycare center so that they would have a chance to interact with mainstream kids. At first Kento participated with no problems, but on the third or fourth visit something must have happened. Suddenly he didn't want any part of those 'fieldtrips' to the daycare center, and he became really sensitive about where he was being taken [*basho mishiri mitai no ga hajimatte*]. When he started that I thought, "Oh no [*ge tte to iu yōna kanji*]." (Laughter here.) All through that first year at Aozora, Kento really resisted going on the trips to the daycare center or anyplace other than Aozora Gakuen. I'm sure there must have been some reason why he didn't want to go. The psychologist said this showed that Kento was being to understand things [*shinri no sensei ga sore wa 'wakatte kiteru' to iu koto dakara*]. But I just thought, "Well, I wonder..."

Anyway that was a big problem for us. It was like he became one of those compulsive people who try to live their whole life by strictly following some manual [*henna hanashi manyuaru-kun mitaina kanji ni nacchatte*]. Even today there is that aspect to his personality. Kento quickly gets a grasp of the regular schedule at school or wherever, but he doesn't do well when that schedule is altered [*ichinichi no nagare o tsukamu no ga hayai, tabun, kedo yahari itsumo to chigau to iu no ga yowai kana*].

They were pushing all the Aozora children into the protective school.

[kekkō kibishii, minna ga yōgo ni iku mitaina kanji]

We were concerned about where Kento might be sent for elementary school. There was this one teacher of the older children at Aozora, who was really strict. She was trying to push almost all the children attending Aozora into the protective elementary school *[kekkō kibishii, minna ga yōgo ni iku mitaina kanji]*. There were some children who were better adjusted than Kento, who could speak really fluently, who were being forced to go to the special education primary school. I was like, “What’s up with this *[nande]*?”

Now things have changed a little, but at the time most of the children who had somewhat more severe *[omoi]* disabilities, I mean kids that would be ranked “moderate,” were told to go to Yanagi Elementary.²⁶ Recently Yanagi has begun accepting children with less severe impairments. I think the program in the lower grades is now rather similar to the *fukushiki* track at Midorikawa, but a few years ago things were quite different. Also I had heard that there was very little contact at Yanagi between the mainstream students and the special needs kids. Even the annual Sports Day at Yanagi Elementary is held separately so we didn’t want send Kento there, and we weren’t going to let them send him to the protective school.

When the Board hands down its “special ed. verdict” its a real shock.

[yōgo to iu hantei ga deta toki, mā kekkō shokku da yo]

When I saw that so many children from Aozora Gakuen were being sent to Yanagi Elementary, I was sure that Kento would be told to go Tanba Special Ed.²⁷ If he was told to go there, well I thought that would be a little too much *[chotto ne, yahari kitsui no kana]*. I mean I had heard various stories *[uwasa]* about that school from mothers whose children had attended Aozora. They said that if we were not planning to send our son to Tanba Protective School then it was best to avoid observing any classes there. When the Education Board hands down its “special ed. verdict” its a real shock to the parents. *[yōgo to iu hantei ga deta toki, mā kekkō shokku da yo]*. Then you are faced with the realization of how your own child is viewed... Anyway I talked it over with my husband and we were determined not to send Kento to Tanba or any other protective

school [*yōgo in ireru ki wa zettai nakatta node*]. So we listen to the stories from the other mothers and decided to avoid attending the observation day at the protective school.

Since we were planning to steer clear of the protective school system we wanted Kento to get some exposure to mainstream kids [*futsū no kenjōji no naka ni irete*]. We thought this stimulation might precipitate some sort of a change in our son. I mean his language skills might improve or something. We tried to enroll our son in a regular public daycare program, but the director of the center said they couldn't possibly handle any more children. So that didn't go anywhere at all. We thought about trying a private kindergarten but they tend to have such an academic focus, which wouldn't work. So Kento ended up staying at Aozora Gakuen all the way through graduation [*kekkyoku sotsuen made ittan desu*].

By the time he graduated Kento had become a little more flexible [*chotto yūxū ga kiku yō ni*]. Now, for example, if we just tell him at bedtime about the next day's schedule, he usually accepts it and will not panic. But if we happen to forget to mention the next day's schedule and things are different from usual, that can still be a problem for him. (Light laughter here.)

When Kento was a *nenchō-san* [*highest age-grade*] at Aozora Gakuen he made friends with some of the younger preschoolers and even came to look after them [*kakawaru yō ni natta n desu*]. The *nenchō* children are given special duties to perform [*otōban ga aru*]. If we had sent Kento to a private kindergarten or a public daycare center, he wouldn't have been assigned these little leadership tasks. I mean in a mainstream program there probably would have always been someone looking after Kento. It's not uncommon for a teacher to ask one of the more mature mainstream children to take responsibility for looking after a disabled classmate [*osewa gakari mitaina ko ga tsuku bāi mo aru*]. We didn't want that...

In Aozora's little pool Kento learned to put his face under the water, and now he loves swimming class at Midorikawa... When I think back over all of these small steps I realize just how far Kento came by the end of preschool. He didn't quite catch up with his mainstream peers, but he did mature a lot by the time he turned six. In many ways Aozora was a positive experience for our son. In the end it was a good thing that we didn't move him to another school.

When it came time for elementary school we were sure that the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa would be best. I mean we realized that Kento was not ready to enter a mainstream classroom [*futsū wa zettai muri to iu no ga attē*]. My husband and I talked it over, and we both thought that our son just wouldn't be able to keep up in a regular class. If things went badly he might quickly become the target of bullying. The other kids might start calling him a "crybaby" [*heta ni ijimerareru to iu kanōsei mo aru, nakimushi mitaina katachi de*].

I concealed our true address and went to observe some classes...

[*gaku jya nai to iu no o kakushite, mini itta koto ga atta*]

I had heard from some other mothers that Ichikawa-*sensei* was a good teacher and so we came by to see a *fukushiki* class on one of Midorikawa's open school days. We live in the district so we could observe a few classes. Actually to tell the truth I also observed a special needs class at another elementary school... I tagged along with some of the other mothers from Aozora when Kento was in his last year of preschool. That school was in the next district so I had to conceal my true address [*gaku jya nai to iu no o kakushite, mini itta koto ga atta*]. The Education Board has this rule that you cannot observe any classes outside of your district [*gaku jya nai to dame to iu no ga attē*]. Isn't that crazy [*nande mitaina kanji*]? Anyway I didn't think much of that other school. So we decided in advance that Midorikawa Elementary was the best option. Luckily we happen to live close by.

We were determined that no matter what kind of recommendation the Board of Education might make, we would send Kento to Midorikawa Elementary [*toriaezu dō iu kekka demo koko ni ireru*]. You know the mainstream children are just assigned to the closest public school, but the children who are borderline or disabled must have an evaluation at the Education Consultation Office in the fall. The Education Board places an announcement about the date of these evaluation meetings in the local newsletter. The parents are the ones who have to set up an appointment with the Board. At the evaluation meeting children and parents are separated, but there are always some kids just won't leave their parents' side. Well the year that Kento was evaluated the Board allowed those parents to stay with their children for the evaluation. But I had heard that

the previous year the Board separated all the children no matter how much they cried or protested [*hitotsu ue no kotachi wa nakō ka, dōshō ka barabara da to kiite itan desu yo*]. Luckily Kento was okay. He went right into the evaluation room with no problem. I didn't even have time to say, "Are you okay [*ā ii no?*]?"

They never told us the results, no IQ number or any other score...

[*ichiō keido to iu hanketsu datta to omō kedo sūjiteki ni kiite nai*]

I guess they gave him a simple intelligence test [*chinō tesuto datta no kana*] ? But I have no idea exactly what they did because I wasn't in the room. Afterwards they said, "The results were more or less like this [*kekka wa daitai kono kanji deshita*]..." I think they may have let me glance at something or other [*nanika o misete moratta yōna ki ga suru*]. The representative said that the Board was thinking that the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa would be best for our son. That's what we were hoping to hear so it was all over and done in no time. I believe that they classified Kento as "mildly impaired," but they never told us a specific IQ number or any other score [*ichiō keido to iu hanketsu datta to omō kedo sūjiteki ni kiite nai*]... (There is a long pause here, over 15 seconds, as I wait to see which direction she will decide to take the conversation.)

I got all flustered and completely forgot (to ask my questions)...

[*sukkari maiagachatte wasurete shimatta*]

After coming to Midorikawa Kento was tested again, at the beginning of second term of first grade. I asked Ichikawa-*sensei* about the results, but he said that he wasn't involved in the testing.²⁸ So actually I no idea about those test results [*dō datta ka wakaranai*]. (Laughter here.) Later I heard somewhere that if the test result was adequate [*datō*] then the family was not contacted. As you might guess the district only contacted families when the test result indicated that the student should be pulled from the *fukushiki* track and sent over to a protective school [*yappari yōgo to iu bāi nomi ni renraku ga kita*]. We had a private follow-up consultation scheduled at the Educational Consultation Office so I was planning to ask the representative about Kento's test results, but once I arrived there I got all flustered and completely forgot to ask [*sukkari*

maiagachatte wasurete shimatta]. So I never did find out about those results. Ichikawa-sensei says that after first grade the city doesn't usually keep testing the *fukushiki* students, at least not regularly... I have a pretty good idea of Kento's strengths and weaknesses. He is able to do basic addition, but doesn't really understand the point of subtraction. He knows his *hiragana* (phonetic Japanese script), and he can now read and write some basic characters...

We didn't apply for a disability passbook...

[shinsei shinakatta kedo toremasu, kento dattara toremasu]

I heard that even Naoki-kun²⁹ got a passbook not too long ago. So Kento could absolutely get a passbook [*zettai toreru*], but my husband doesn't want to take it that far [*tada shujin wa soko made wa yada tte*]. I know that there are some advantages to having the passbook... If your child has one the city will supply some special supports, like limited baby-sitting services, etc. That might be helpful at times, but... Well, you know the Child Welfare Office [*jidō sōdan-shitsu*] is so far away and anyway the whole thing just became too troublesome [*mendōkusaku natte*]...

We don't get any clear information, just rumors...

[hakkiri shita koto wa nai kara, uwasa dake de...]

Kento is just starting third grade so it's really too early to say for sure, but if everything goes okay then when the time comes we want to put him in the *fukushiki* class at Yonemura Junior High. After that I don't know what will happen, and now there is all this talk about the special needs education system being completely reorganized in a year or two. At least that is what some people are saying... I have no idea what is going to happen. We don't have any clear information, just rumors, so there is a lot of uncertainty and worry among us mothers [*hakkiri shita koto wa nai kara, uwasa dake de, kekkō okāsan-tachi no aida kikikan ga aru*].

One of the rumors is that the *fukushiki* system will be abolished and all the children will be placed either in a mainstream classroom or sent to a protective school. Then the city is suppose to create some kind of new "coordinator" position to assist the children who need extra help. I am not against the idea of creating "coordinators"

because I think there are probably a lot of children in the mainstream classes who would be helped by that. But if the city wants to go through with this they need to follow regular procedures and hire some new teachers to fill those “coordinator” positions [futsū no yarikata wa soko de chanto jinzai kakuho shite]. Anyone who thought this through could tell you that abolishing the *fukushiki* class system is out of the question [futsū ni kangaeru to fukushiki seido o tsubusu to iu no wa chotto nai]. Still we have no idea what will actually happen.

The problem is that there are probably parents, even some parents of *fukushiki* students, who will support this plan [sansei to iu hito mo kitto iru]. I mean there are parents who think, “I want to put my child in the mainstream track [futsū ni iretai].” Those parents might support this new system. They might think, “Well, these coordinators will be there to help my child so that should be okay...” But look, if the city is serious about implementing this “plan” then there will be a lot of students who are going to have real trouble [kono hōshin de komaru to iu hito mo takusan iru]. If they abolish the *fukushiki* classes there will definitely be students who will suffer psychologically and emotionally trying to make it in the mainstream classes [fukushiki o tsubushittara seishinteki ni ochitsukanai yō ni naru ho wa kanarazu iru]. Someone said that those children would all be sent to the protective schools. But— [sore ga]...

This plan just shows that the authorities haven’t the slightest idea about what sort of children are actually participating in the *fukushiki* classes [jitsujō wa ima genzai fukushiki ni kayotteru kotachi ga dō iu kotachi ka to iu no ga ue no kata wa wakatte nai]. If they had a better grasp of the actual situation in the schools they would never have suggested this plan. Unfortunately it is difficult to see the importance of the *fukushiki* system until you have a child of your own who needs access to these classes...

The mainstream mothers are like, “*fukushiki*? What’s that?”

[tsūjō gakkū no okusan-tachi ni kīte miru to ‘*fukushiki*’ tte nani]

Now when I recall my own elementary school days, I think there was a student in our class who might have had some kind of learning disability. Of course no one used the word “disability [shōgai]” back then. We just thought he was a little different

[*chotto kawatta ko da na*]. As far as I know he wasn't the target of bullying or anything like that. Sometimes I think about that student now...

Midorikawa is a big school, and so I'm sure that if you asked the mainstream mothers about the *fukushiki* class, a lot of them would be like, "What's that [*tsūjō gakkū no okāsan-tachi ni kiite miru to 'fukushiki' tte nani*]?" A few of the mainstream classes do occasionally include one *fukushiki* student in some of their activities so the parents of those children might know about the *fukushiki* class, but most people don't. Of course the *fukushiki* students only visit their mainstream class every once in a while so even in those classes there are sure to be some mothers who do not know anything about the *fukushiki* system. On Sports Day the *fukushiki* students join their age-grade peers, but things are so hectic on that day that most parents wouldn't even notice them...

I think there are a number of mainstream students at Midorikawa who may still remember Kento from preschool because they attended the daycare center that Aozora Gakuen occasionally visited. That is helpful to us now. Kento is a third grader already, yet I don't think he really grasp his position within the school [*jibun no ichi ga yoku wakatte nai*]. I wonder if he even realizes that he is a *senpai* [upper classman] to the first and second graders. In just one more year he will be one of "big kids" at Midorikawa [*kōgaku-nen ni naru n desu ne*].³⁰ For my son one year is "forever," but as a parent I often find myself wondering, "Where did the time go?"

NOTES (APPENDIX H):

²⁶ Several informants reported that Yanagi Elementary had improvised a system that was quite unusual for a public primary school. Instructors and administrators at Midorikawa Elementary also confirmed the Yanagi Elementary was atypical. Yanagi was not a special education school [*yōgo gakkō*], yet it had numerous classes for "moderately" disabled children [*chūdo no ko*]. Informants tended to characterize these students as significantly or "heavily" disabled. The special needs classes were held in a separate building on Yanagi campus, and there was little or no mixing with the mainstream students at the school.

Although individual municipalities are allowed some latitude in establishing their own rules, the vast majority of public elementary and junior high schools in Japan are in

fact “local schools.” Eligibility to attend a particular school is usually based on residence within the school district. Thus in urban areas there is little need for school buses as nearly everyone attending lives within walking distance of the school. However, special education schools accept, and actively recruit, students who live at a considerable distance from the campus so these schools do sometimes operate a limited busing service. Yanagi Elementary was an unusual case because to a considerable degree it combined these two systems. For the mainstream students Yanagi Elementary operated as typical local school with a residence requirement, but the school also recruited disabled students who lived outside of the district; the disabled students were bused to the campus. It seems that the prefectural educational authorities were not entirely happy with the unusual innovations that had slowly evolved into a two-tier system within a single campus at Yanagi Elementary. In fact, toward the end of my fieldwork Yanagi Elementary stopped busing in disabled students and membership in its special needs class began to shrink. None of the *fukushiki* parents at Midorikawa Elementary had anything favorable to say about the system at Yanagi Elementary. The segregation of the special needs students from their mainstream peers was a common point of criticism.

²⁷ Tanba Protective School is a public special education elementary school that caters to children with moderate [*chūdo*] to severe [*jūdo*] physical and mental impairments.

²⁸ Periodically representatives from the Board of Education visit public elementary and junior high schools to individually test the *fukushiki* students. Mainstream students who are falling behind their classmates may also be selected for testing. The aptitude tests most commonly used in Japanese elementary schools are derivatives of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R, WISC III & WISC IV), which are verbal and performance based tests of intelligence. WISC was originally developed in United States during the late 1940s by David Wechsler as a means of measuring intelligence in children 6-17 years old. The *fukushiki* teachers typically knew very little about the contents of the test or their students’ results because the testing was managed and implemented directly by representatives from the Board of Education. *Fukushiki* parents often reported this to be a source of confusion and frustration.

²⁹ Naoki Furukawa was a sixth grader in Midorikawa’s *fukushiki* class when Kento was a first grader. Naoki was quite proficient at mathematics and he was able to master most of the characters students study in elementary school. Some of the *fukushiki* parents thought that Naoki could almost get by in the mainstream system.

³⁰ Activities and responsibilities at elementary schools in Japan are often organized by age-grades. The student body may be divided into two or three age-groupings: *teigaku-nen* (first through third grade) and *kōgaku-nen* (fourth through sixth grade) or alternatively, *teigaku-nen* (first and second grade), *chūgaku-nen* (third and fourth grade) and *kōgaku-nen* (fifth and sixth grade) groupings.

Appendix I

Interview with Furukawa Keiko (mother of Naoki)

Interview Location: Midorikawa Elementary school

Date: March 18, 2002

Names, Subheadings & Elisions

All names are pseudonyms. In order to make the narratives more accessible and inviting, I have inserted numerous breaks in the transcripts. These subheadings are quotes borrowed directly from the informants' discourse. Those places where I have made any elisions in the transcription are indicated with an ellipsis...

It couldn't have been good—just letting his fever go on and on...

[netsu ga tsuzuite itan desu yo, sore wa yoku nakatta jya nai kana]

Naoki was my first child. At birth he was slightly jaundice, but that soon cleared up... He was slow picking up language. At eighteen months he still couldn't say a word, not even "mama." I tried reading picture books to him, but he wouldn't look at them. I was still a first time mother so I didn't know what to make of it. People say that, "boys are slow" but still... At two and half he got the measles. I was just about to get him immunized, but he got those measles before I could get him his immunization shot so it was a really bad case. He had a 39° C fever that lasted for two or three days. Our doctor said that we didn't need to force the fever down, but it was so high for such a long time... Now sometimes I find myself thinking that it couldn't have been good to just let his fever go on and on like that. In the end his hearing was damaged by that case of the measles, but I didn't realize it right away. After the measles he kept getting inner ear infections. Naoki hated it so much when I would try to clean his ears, and sometimes I would forget to do it. After everything is done and finished you think of so many things that could have gone differently...

After his second birthday Naoki suddenly became shy of strangers. It wasn't just that he was shy; my son seemed to have developed some autistic traits [*chotto jiheiteki ni nacchatta n desu*]. He would try to stick very close to me [*watashi ni bettari shitē*], and he began to fixate on certain things. For instance, for some reason Naoki began to be really interested in ten thousand yen notes. He always wanted to have a ¥10,000 bill in his pocket, even when he attended daycare, but of course that was not allowed...³¹

At his two and half year health check a doctor at the city hospital told us that our son had some “autistic traits” [*chotto jihei keikō no aru oko-san desu ne*]. Of course, we already knew that he was particular about certain things... They told us that it was best for “this kind of child” to be exposed to group life as early as possible [*hō iu ko desu kara hayaku shūdan seikatsu ni haitta hō ga ii to iwaremashita*]. But Naoki wasn’t speaking much yet and the local daycare center was full.

If the doctor doesn’t write “*ijō nashi*” on the health card then your child can’t get into preschool^{sa} [*ijō nashi to kakanai to hoikuen ni hairanai n da na*]

You need for a medical doctor to attest to the fact that your child developing normally or else they won’t admit the child into public daycare. On the health check-up file it must say “nothing unusual” [*ijō nashi*] in the developmental notes section. If they don’t write that you can’t get in. Well, when Naoki was a little past three we took him in for a health check as we were planning to sign him up for daycare. I told the doctor of our plans so he knew that we needed him to write “*ijō nashi*” on the card, but he hesitated, brooding over it. Finally he turned away from me and spoke to the nurse in a hushed tone but so that I could hear all the same [*kosokoso de hanshite ita kedo, watashi ga kikoeru yō ni, marude watashi ni itteru yōna kanji de*]. He complained to her saying, “This child is past three yet he is still not talking; that’s not right [*sansai sugiteru noni kotoba ga denai no wa okashii desu yo*]. I thought, “Oh no! What am I going to do?”

So I asked that doctor directly, “Do you mean that my son can’t join the daycare program?” He said he wasn’t intending that... He wrote “*ijō nashi*” on my son’s card, but he added below, in characters so tiny that I might not be able to read them, “with autistic tendencies” [*jihei keikō ari to watashi ga mienai yōna chīsai ji de kaita to omō*]. I think that is what he wrote on the card. It was something like that, but I couldn’t get a clear look at it...

One day when Naoki was just a little past two and half he finally call me “mama,” but he said it in a really loud voice [*yatto mama to imashita kedo sore ga totemo ōkina koe de*]. Then I realized that he must not have been hearing what I was saying [*soko de wakatta, kitto kikoenakatta to omō*]. When Naoki was about three and half an opening at

the daycare center finally become available. It was a public daycare center so we had to have an interview with some city officials. They could see that my son's language was late, but fortunately that wasn't a problem for them. Naoki was allowed into the daycare program, but things didn't always go smoothly. For example, at naptime my son would insist on wearing his favorite pair of pajamas. When his daycare teachers tried to have him change into a fresh pair, he would throw a fit. I couldn't find that exact same design. Maybe things would have been better for Naoki if I had only explained things in more detail to his teachers [*sensei-tachi ni watashi ga motto setsumei sureba yokatta kamo*]...

Life in a group wasn't always easy...

[*shūdan seikatsu ga taihen datta na*]

Another difficult thing for Naoki at the daycare center was that all the children were expected to drink milk. Naoki couldn't drink milk at all. Often when I arrived at 4:30 pm to pick him up, the teacher would be sitting with Naoki at the little table trying to convince him to drink his milk. He was trying, but he just couldn't do it. Even when I showed up they wouldn't let him go home until he finished his milk [*nomi-orwatte nai kara kaerenai n desu ne*]. The teachers would be saying, "Try, try. You can do it [*ganbatte ganbatte*]." They were really pushing children who couldn't drink milk to somehow be able to drink it. Finally Naoki did manage to drink his milk without spitting it up, but when I think back on it now it seems so pitiable [*ima kara kangaeru to kawaiisō na koto ga arimashita ne*]. That was unfortunate...

I know it is odd to say that he might "return to normal," but...

[*'futsū ni modoru' to iu to okashii kedo, mā...*]

At some point when Naoki was still quite small we had an EEG done so that we could check on his brain wave pattern. The results came back as "normal." And my son was never officially diagnosed as "autistic." I know it is odd to say that he might "return to normal," but I wanted to think that there just might be some point when he would return to normal [*'futsū ni modoru' to iu to okashii kedo, mā 'futsū ni modoru' toki ga kuru to*]

omoitakatta shi]. I want to believe that ... Now when I look back at myself, well the whole situation seems so regrettable.

The group-life aspect [*shūdan seikatsu no men*] of the daycare was a little much at times, especially for Naoki. It was less intense at the private kindergarten where I sent my younger children. For instance, when Naoki was three he never would lie down for a nap at home. He just wouldn't get tired even in the late afternoon. But at the daycare center everyone has to lie down together after lunch. It doesn't matter if you aren't sleepy. That was really hard for Naoki. I was working part-time so I could have put my daughter in that daycare center, but we opted for a private kindergarten instead...

There was this program called the "Development Class" [*hattatsu kyōshitsu*] run by the people at the Education Consultation Office.³³ When Naoki turned four we started taking him there once a week. If parents were a little concerned about their child or if the child was clearly developmentally delayed, well you could take them to this special class. The mothers and the children would make various things together, like masks and so forth. There was someone for the city who led the class, and sometimes a *fukushiki* teacher would stop by to see how things were going. If you attended the Development class then every so often there would be an interview with one of the higher ups at the Educational Consultation Office. They told me that in Naoki's case he might just be able to get by in a mainstream class [*futsū gakkyū de nantoka ikettara ii desu ne*]. As a parent, of course, I wanted to place our son in a regular mainstream class and the teachers were saying that it might be okay...

So when it came time for elementary school we put Naoki in the regular track program, but as you might guess it was really tough going. The thing about Naoki was that he couldn't explain what he wanted to say. Of course, academically the mainstream track was quite hard for him, but communication is the more difficult problem. Even now he doesn't talk much. He just doesn't really know how to articulate himself [*itai koto ga ienai tokoro ga ima datte arimasu*]. That makes so many things difficult. When he was a first grader he didn't say much at all; he tended to hide within himself [*jibun no naka de tojikomu keikō mo atta*].

Naoki couldn't say, "Stop it!" so he became a target of bullying

[yamete to ienakatta node... futsū no ko ga ijimetaku naru]

We stayed in the mainstream system all the way through the end of fourth grade, but every year there would be some trouble. He was bullied from time to time. For instance on the way home from school one day some of his classmates took his swimming suit, towel and flip-flops and hid these in the top of a tree. When he got home he was able to tell me about it, but I guess he just couldn't tell those kids to "Stop it" *[yamete to ienakatta kana]*. I can imagine how it happens. On the way home from school all of his classmates are talking and playing around, but my son doesn't say a word. The regular kids can hardly resist teasing a child like that. They might tell themselves, "Well he doesn't say anything so it's okay" *[nanimo iwanai kara ii ya mitaina koto]*...

A couple of times he came home from school barefoot...

[hadashi de kaette kimashita toki mo atta]

Just between the two of us, his first and second grade teacher was pretty useless *[koko dake no hanashi dakedo ichi, ni nen no sensei wa amari...]*. Well he took various measures, but they all left me cold. Why couldn't that teacher look at things from Naoki's point of view or from the position of us parents? I mean really sometimes it was just pitiable what went on in his class. When I said anything to that teacher he would be like, "Well I warned the other children about that so..." *[chūi shimashita kedo]*, and that would be the end of it. When Naoki was in the third and fourth grades some of the other kids hid his chopstick holder and even his shoes. On more than one occasion he came home barefoot because his shoes were missing. He just couldn't bring himself to tell anyone at the school that his shoes had been taken.³⁴

But at least his third and fourth grade teacher was much more kindhearted *[shinmī]*; I was really happy about that. She was also a lot more understanding of my feelings as a parent. This teacher quickly realized that my son was not understanding very much. Just sitting there daydreaming the day away wouldn't do, so she decided to give him other tasks to work on. That was fortunate for us. It's no good to just let Naoki be lost in daydreams. If he doesn't have something to occupy himself with, he tends to start scratching himself, especially on the wrists and chin...

The hardest thing was that Naoki could not establish communication with his peers [*dōkyūsei to umaku komyunikēshon wa torenai kara nē*]. Of course, he is able to talk fine, but he just doesn't [*shabereru keredo hanasanai*]. Since he couldn't communicate with his classmates, he became an easy target for bullying...

I was never a big fan of Kumon;⁹⁵ however, when my son started falling seriously behind with his schoolwork, particularly in mathematics, their method helped a lot. Naoki learned his multiplication tables at Kumon rather than at Midorikawa Elementary.

I had always viewed my son as a “normal kid”...

[*futsū no ko to shite mite ita shi*]

In the middle of the fourth grade Naoki's teacher had a private meeting with me. She took a chance and said with some apprehension, “You know Furukawa-san, the *fukushiki* class has some advantages [*omoikitte ittan desu, fukushiki-san mo ii desu yo*]...” So I started thinking seriously about the *fukushiki* option. But it was not easy for me because I had always viewed my son as a “normal kid” [*futsū no ko to shite mite ita shi*]. I had never given a second thought to the *fukushiki* class. Of course I felt some internal resistance to admitting that he was not a “normal” child [*futsū no ko jya nai to mitometaku nai no mo arimasu yo nē*]. I had to deal with that problem. I talked it over with my husband, but as far as the kid's education goes my opinion is the one that counts. (Furukawa-san laughs at herself here.) I also discussed it directly with my son. He said, “Mom, I really don't understand what they are studying in class...” By that point Naoki could realize that he was falling behind [*chotto ototteru to jibun de wakatte kita jiki demo atta*].

I had to throw vanity and shame to the wind...

[*mie mo haji mo gaibun mo sutete...*]

The mainstream teacher said that if my son made the switch to the *fukushiki* track he was likely to learn more. I wondered if Naoki would really do better in the *fukushiki* class, and I'll tell you I had my doubts [*hontō no nobiru no kana to gimon ni omotte itan desu ga*]. I talked this over with my own parents, but... At the end of the day

I had to rid myself of vanity and shame, not giving a second thought to my family's reputation. The important thing was to think only of what was best for our son [*mie mo haji mo gaibun mo sutete, kodomo no seichō o kangaenakuchā to iu yōna kanji ni natte kita*].

Before entering the *fukushiki* class I would often ask Naoki, "How was school today?" His answer was always the same: "Fun," but he would say this in a voice completely devoid of joy [*tanoshikatta to totemo tanoshiku nasasō ni itte ita*]. Once he started in the *fukushiki* class our communication about school improved so much. The teachers write really detailed notes about what they are doing in class in Naoki's daily notebook [*renrakuchō*] so it is much easier for me to ask him specifically about what he is up to at school. And they match the academic content to Naoki's level of understanding so studying is now much more enjoyable for him. Thank goodness.

That leaves us with only one option: the protective school...

[*suru to yōgo ni ireru shika nai*]

Until the end of junior high school Naoki is still in the compulsory education system, so things are okay, but I am really worried about what might happen after that. What shall I do? Once I did go and observe a few classes at the special ed. school, but so many of the students there have really serious impairments... Of course to enter a mainstream high school you have to take and pass an entrance test. That means a lot of serious study preparation before the test [*juken desu ne*]. That would be really hard or impossible for Naoki. I wonder why is there is no middle ground [*nande chūkan no tokoro wa zenzen nai kana*]? But really it is obvious that my son won't be able to get into a regular high school. So where does that leave us? Shall he start working? The end of junior high school seems a bit early for that. He is still just like a little child [*osanai shi ne*]. So by a process of elimination that leaves us with the protective school. Well he could study there for three years and then we could see...

If we could just erase that name—*yōgo* (the "protective" school)...

[*yōgo to iu namae o nukimasu to tashō chigū to omō kedo ne*]

The problem with that is that when you go to look for a job you have to write on your resume that you attended a "protective school" [*yōgo gakkō de benkyō shita to*

rيرهكيشو ni kaku n desu ne]. If you do that people will probably say unkind things like, “You’re one of those *special ed.* kids, aren’t you [*omae wa yōgo da ne*].” If you send your child to the protective school there will always be some people who tease and bully him or her. One of the other mothers was telling me about her son’s experience at Tanba Protective School. It was a scary story to hear...

I wish they would just do away with the name “*yōgo*” [protective] school. If the name was eliminated I think that might help a little [*yōgo to iu namae o nukimasu to tashō chīgā to omō kedo ne*]...

NOTES (APPENDIX I):

³¹ At the time (in the mid-1990s) a ten thousand yen note had a value of a little less than one hundred US dollars.

³² In a medical context *ijō nashi* [異常無し] is often translated as “no abnormalities,” although “nothing unusual” is somewhat closer to the nuance of the Japanese expression, literally “nothing differs from always” or “not differing from normal.”

³³ Other informants refer to this program as the *Nobi-Nobi* [Grow-Grow] Program.

³⁴ In Japan students and teachers usually shed their outdoor shoes at the entrance to the school and change into clean, lightweight, indoor slipper-like shoes [*uwabaki*]. When the school day is finished the process is reversed. Outdoor shoes are kept in open cubby boxes just inside the school’s entrance.

³⁵ A highly successful private cram school chain that emphasizes drill work to increase students’ speed and confidence. Kumon mostly targets elementary age students.

Appendix J

Interview with Nakahara Kumi (mother of Kai)

Interview Location: Midorikawa Elementary school

Date: May 13, 2003

Names, Subheadings & Elisions

All names are pseudonyms. In order to make the narratives more accessible and inviting, I have inserted numerous breaks in the transcripts. These subheadings are quotes borrowed directly from the informants' discourse. Those places where I have made any elisions in the transcription are indicated with an ellipsis...

He never pointed at anything, like most babies do...

[*yubisashi demo shinakatta node hen da na...*]

Kai was always slow, yet I didn't immediately know what to make of it. He still wasn't crawling even after passing his first birthday so I thought something might be wrong. At about by sixteen months he suddenly began walking; we were so happy about that. But he never pointed at anything, like most babies do, so I thought something might not be right. When Kai reached his second birthday he wasn't talking at all, and he didn't seem to understand much. The doctors said we would have to wait until he turned three before they could say for sure if he had some sort of disability or not. Of course I also took him for periodic evaluations at our local public Health Office, and on the suggestion of district nurse [*hokenfu*] the two of us began attending the *Nobi-Nobi* Program. That was when Kai was still only 18 months old. The *Nobi-Nobi* teachers taught some basic *hiragana* to the children, and I remember the kids being given stickers to use to create pictures. They told us it was best for developmentally delayed children to get as much stimulations as possible so I made a point of taking Kai out quite frequently to various events.

The doctor said that our son's development was not "normal"

[*nōmaru dewa nai to iu iikata sarete*]

When Kai reached his third birthday he still wasn't speaking. At that point I think he still couldn't even say "mama." The city's Parental Support Office [*kosodate shien-shitsu*] introduced us to a local hospital that specialized in evaluating

developmental delays. The medical people there told us that our son's development was not "normal" [*nōmaru dewa nai to iu iikata sarete*].³⁶ I remember thinking to myself, "Oh, that must mean that he is mentally impaired." That is how I interpreted their words and things became more or less clear in my mind [*chiteki shōgai to iu imi nan da na to jibun nari ni kaishaku shite, fungiri tsuita*]. Soon after that we began taking Kai to a medical center in downtown Tokyo that had various programs for developmentally delayed children. About once a month Kai saw a physical and an occupational therapist. Sometimes he would see the therapist alone, and other times the two of us would meet together with the therapist.

When Kai turned four years old we began sending him to Aozora Gakuen, the city's preschool program for developmentally delayed children. He attended that program for two years. Aozora was a good experience for Kai, but we wanted him to have a chance to interact with some non-disabled children [*shōgaiji dake denaku kenjōji ni mo kakawaru yō ni shitakatta node*]. Just before his sixth birthday we tried to move him into the city's regular daycare program, but they turned us down flat. The principal of the daycare center said they were full and just didn't have the resources necessary to look after our son...

We gave up on that and began looking around for a private kindergarten that might accept Kai. We found one and so for his final year of preschool we transferred Kai from Aozora Gakuen to this other kindergarten. At Aozora all the children have some kind of impairment so they don't really try to interact with each other much [*otagai ni shōgai ga aru kara kakawarō to shinai desu yo*]. But at the regular kindergarten Kai was able to learn a lot of social skills. I mean, he learned about how to interact with the other kids [*hito to no kakawari ga mi ni tsuita*]. There was one little girl in particular who liked to look after Kai [*osewa suru onna no ko toka ita shi*]. Our son made a lot of progress that year.

We were told that a disability passbook was required...

[*shōgai techō ga hitsuyō da to iwareta*]

Let me backtrack a bit. When Kai was about three and a half he finally started to speak. That was great, but his pronunciation is still not perfect. For instance, when he

says “*sa, shi, su, se, so,*” it tends to sound closer to “*ta, chi, tsu, te, to.*” Also he stutters, don’t you think?... Speech Therapy? No, he has never really had any special speech therapy. I mean there was none offered at Aozora Gakuen or at Midorikawa Elementary. We did see that he got some motor skills therapy at that private hospital when he was still quite young. His speech seems to be improving quite a bit recently.

Yes, when Kai was four we applied for a disability passbook. I have heard that it is now possible to get into Aozora Gakuen without having a passbook, but at the time we were told that a passbook was required [*shōgai techō ga hitsuyō da to iwareta*]. When we applied for the passbook the city put him through some kind of test, an IQ test I think. But I don’t remember hearing about his score. They told us that he was “moderately impaired” [*chūdo kana to iwareta*].

At the protective school the children just run wild

[*yōgo dewa nobanashi jōtai*]

When it came time for elementary school the Board of Education declared that Kai should attend Tanba, the special ed. school. In this city if your child is ranked as having a “light impairment” then he or she is eligible for a *fukushiki* class at a mainstream school; however, if the child gets the “heavy impairment” label then the city says, “Here is your ticket to the protective school [*jūdo dattara yōgo gakkō e doxō to iwareteru*].” That’s the policy at the Board of Education. All of the children in this area are sent to Tanba. But the mothers were all saying that Tanba was no good [*zettai soko wa yoku nai yo ne to ohāsan-tachi no aida de hanasareteru*]. I mean the protective school just let’s those children run wild [*yōgo dewa nobanashi jōtai*]. I know they have a low student to teacher ratio at Tanba so the students can get individual help, but they just let the children do as they please. That wouldn’t work well for our son.

At the private kindergarten Kai picked up some social skills by interacting with the other healthy children, and I thought that if we sent him to Tanba Protective School we would be back at square one in no time [*kenjōji to majitta okage de shakaisei ga dekita noni asoko ni haittara moto ni modoru jya nai kana*]. In the summer months the disabled children at Tanba spend virtually all of their time in the pool; really that’s about all they

do... If the child has some ability, I suppose the teachers at Tanba might try to introduce a little studying, but in any case we were dead set against sending Kai there.

Yanagi Elementary also has a program for disabled children. I think they call it the Sunflowers class [*himawari kyōshitsu*]. There are several classes for disabled students, but they are completely segregated. The classrooms for the disabled children are in an entirely different building from the regular track kids. The other problem with Yanagi is that the whole program over there seems to have been created in violation of standing prefectural education policies [*ihan de tsukutta rashii desu yo*]. For the past twenty years there have been rumors that Yanagi's program will be abolished in the near future. So my husband and I had decided that the *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa would be the best option.

That was all just a smoke screen for probing our son...

[...*dakedo kekkyoku saguri desu yo ne*]

That's what we thought, but that's not what the Board of Education thought. The Board was trying to send our son to Tanba Protective School. When Kai was in his final year of preschool about once every week or so we took him to see some teachers at the city's Education Consultation Office. They said they were trying to help our son by determining what degree of impairment he was faced with, but really that was just an excuse for probing him [*dono gurai shōgai ga aru no ka o haaku shite kara dō suru ka o kangaeru tte, dakedo kekkyoku saguri desu yo ne*].

We told the Board that we had no intension of sending Kai to the special ed. school. The rule is that until the end of compulsory education the mother has discretionary power to determine which program her children will attend [*gimu-kyōiku desu kara okāsan no ishi ga tōru n desu ga*]; however, the Board also has to sign off. I mean it's the Board that sends out the letters informing the parents where their child is to report for school in the spring. Well, since we were battling with the Board they wouldn't send us the letter. It wasn't until the very end of January when Kai's letter finally arrived saying that he could attend Midorikawa, as we had insisted all along [*kekkyoku henji ga deta no wa ichigatsu no owari desu yo ne*].⁹⁷

The Board does not like mothers observing classes...

[*iinkai wa katte ni okūsan-tachi ga kurasu o mi ni kuru koto wa...*]

When Kai was still a preschooler we had heard that Ichikawa-*sensei* was a good teacher, flexible and easy to approach so we wanted to observe some of his classes at Midorikawa Elementary. The thing is the Board does not like mothers making their own arrangements to observe classes. They want everything to go through them [*subete o iinkai o tōshite*]. But by sheer luck my husband happened to be a former student of Midorikawa Elementary's principal, Suzuki-*sensei*, so he called up his old teacher and asked to come by for a chat. My husband explained about our son and asked if we could observe a *fukushiki* class at Midorikawa. The principal said that would be fine so we didn't have to go through the Board. Ichikawa-*sensei* welcomed us into his classroom and encouraged us to send Kai to Midorikawa Elementary...

Kai has really enjoyed his first year at Midorikawa. He still can't write any *hiragana* or even draw a picture, but we realize that it will take time. Our son has poor fine motor skills, especially in his fingers so writing is really hard for him [*tesaki ga nibui node kaku koto ga muzukashii*]. Ichikawa-*sensei* understands that writing is difficult for Kai, but he tells us, "We have time." This spring I have been having Kai practice unbuttoning his own coat, which is not easy for him. He tests the waters with me, saying, "Mom, are you going to get angry?" And I tell him, "Yes! I am going to get angry. If you don't try to do it, I am going to be angry." Only then does he really try to do it. Now finally Kai can unbutton his coat on his own.

Kai doesn't have any real friends [*tomodachi wa inai*]...

This past year our son occasionally joined the mainstream first graders for music class, lunchtime and fieldtrips. He loves to sing so every Monday after school I take him to a rythmique class [*ritomikku kyōshitsu*].³⁸ Still he doesn't have any real friends... I wonder if it will always be impossible for him to make friends [*tomodachi wa muri kana*]. After school there aren't any children around that want to play with Kai so I try to take him to some kind of class. If I didn't sign him up for something then he would spend all of his after school time only with me. I don't think that would be good... On Thursdays he attends a gymnastics class, where he is surrounded by normal, able-bodied people [*ippan no hito to magirete*]. (Here Nakahara-san gets a little teary eyed.)

Anyway we are so happy that we insisted on putting him in Midorikawa's *fukushiki* class. He loves coming to school. That's the most important thing at this point. As for his academic studies, we are no rush. I think that Kai now has a grasp of the numbers one and two, but he probably does not really understand the notion of three, four or more. Still he loves the bowling-math game they play in the *fukushiki* class.³⁹ Sometimes he even asks me to play that game with him at home. I think he is making some progress in basic math.

Suddenly Kai started saying, "I'm not going to school."

[*aru asa ni kai ga totsuzen 'gakkō ni ikanai' to iidashita*]

Everything went well these first two years at Midorikawa, except there was that one little problem with his classmate Hiroki. Did you know about that? There was a point late last fall when Kai suddenly started saying in the morning, "I'm not going to school [*gakkō ni ikanai*]." We asked him why he didn't want to go, but he couldn't explain why. We were left guessing. I talked it over with Ichikawa-sensei, but he wasn't sure what the cause might be. Then one day Kai said, "Hiroki is scary [*hiroki-kun ga kowai kowai*]." So I talked to Ichikawa-sensei again and he had a talk with Hiroki. Of course, I know that Hiroki has had a very difficult year [*mā kotoshi wa hiroki ni totte iroiro tsurakatta shi*].⁴⁰ When Hiroki gets too rough, I told Kai that he has to say clearly, "Ouch, that hurts [*ittai*]!" In retrospect I think it was great that Kai was able to articulate the problem. He was able to say, "Hiroki is scary." That was a big step for him. I think he is starting to understand human relations a little [*ningen kankei ga sukoshi miete kita to omō*]. Anyway he was able to solve the problem himself, and now he doesn't think that Hiroki is scary...

I have no intension hiding his disability...

[*watashi to shite wa shōgai o kakusu tsumori mo nai shi*]

In our son's case if you just glance at him you wouldn't think that he had a disability [*patto mite kono ko wa shōgai ga aru to wakaranai*]. I mean there isn't anything particular about his face or anything [*kao ni tokuchō ga aru wake demo nai shi*]. Sometimes when people don't realize he is disabled, it can cause problems so we decided

to make a badge for him. His name is on the front and on the back it says, “I have an impairment, but if you explain things slowly, several times I can understand [*shōgai ga aru kara nankai yukkuri setsumei suru to wakarimasu*].” Of course, not all the *fukushiki* mothers are of one mind about the badge. There are probably some mothers who would prefer not to have people think that their child is disabled [*shōgai o motteru to omowaretakunai okāsan-tachi mo iru darō shi*]. There are those who think that there is no need to broadcast the fact that your child is disabled [*shōgaisha to itte haru hitsuyō wa nai to iu kangae mo aru*]. For Kai we thought it was best to have this kind of badge, but we don’t use it much, only when he is venturing far afield. In any case I have no intension of trying to hide his disability [*watashi to shite wa shōgai o kakusu tsumori mo nai shi*].

I realize that few of the mainstream children, particularly the second graders, have any understanding of “disability.” It is pretty abstract. They probably just think, “That kid is a little weird or babyish,” something like that. Still if the mainstream teachers could just teach their students to be considerate toward their *fukushiki* classmates that would be great. Kai visits one of the mainstream classes every so often. I had a talk with the mainstream second grade teacher, who said Kai helped his students learn to empathize with, be considerate of and gentle towards other people. The experience was good for my son and also good for the mainstream second graders.

If you deviate from the norm you’re labeled as “weird”

[*heikin kara zureru to hen mitaina tokoro ga aru*]

I wish that the students at Midorikawa Elementary could come to realize that not everyone is the same. There are a lot of different kinds of children out there. In Japan—well there are the Ainu—but otherwise everyone is pretty much the same race [*nihon tte, mā ainu wa iru kedo, daitai jinshu wa hitotsu*]. So there is a strong feeling that everyone is, or should be, the same [*nihon tte, minna ga onaji jya nai to fuan ni naru keikō ga aru*]. People tend to become uncomfortable when a child seems to be a little different. If you deviate from the norm, you’re considered “weird” [*heikin kara zureru to hen mitaina tokoro ga aru*]. Those kids that are seen as a little different often become a target of bullying.

If they know our son, that will solve a lot of potential troubles

[shitteru hito nara... toraburu wa nai darō shi]

In my elementary school class there was a girl who had a mental impairment. We knew she was different because she was always writing in *hiragana* [the phonetic script] rather than using *kanji* [characters] like the rest of us. Our teachers often had that girl, Ko-chan, working on a simpler task so it was really clear that she was different from us, but the girls in our class all looked out for and protected her. We were like, “No teasing Ko-chan [*ko-chan ijimete dame da yo*].” We also tried to guide her when she was doing something wrong. We would say, “Ko-chan don’t do that!” Now I have forgotten a lot about my elementary school days, but I remember Ko-chan so clearly. I think that many students at Midorikawa Elementary may also remember my son for a long time. If they happen to pass Kai walking along the street some years after graduation I think they will probably remember him, and if they do remember him that will solve a lot of potential troubles [*suru to toraburu wa nai darō shi*]. I mean if something were to happen they will be like, “Oh, I know him [*nanika ga atta toki ni ā shitteru hito da na*].” That is what I am hoping.

The *fukushiki* system has been really good for Kai, especially the contact with the mainstream kids at Midorikawa Elementary [*futsū gakkyū no hōryū wa tokuni yokatta to omō*]. If possible we are hoping to send our son to the *fukushiki* class at Yonemura Junior High, although now there is talk about the whole special needs system changing. That worries me, but there doesn’t seem to be much we can do about it... High school is too far off to say anything for sure. But of course after compulsory education is over things get a lot more competitive, and Kai has no concept of competition, which is typically of kids like him [*kyōsōshin wa nai n desu ne, hō iu ko wa*]...

NOTES (APPENDIX J):

³⁶ Note that here Nakahara-san says the medical authorities used a negation of the transliterated English term “normal” to describe her son’s condition. She was left guessing at the doctor’s precise meaning.

³⁷ Typically parents receive these letters from the Board of Education in November informing them of the public school their children will be assigned to for classes that begin the following April.

³⁸ “Rythmique” is an educational approach that combines music, rhythms and symmetry to help children build confidence and find emotional balance. The approach, which is quite popular in urban Japan, is based on the work of the French philosopher and educational theorist, Marcel Jousse (1886-1961).

³⁹ To practice basic mathematics the *fukushiki* teachers would sometimes have the students set up bowling pins in the classroom. The students would be asked to count the pins and then add or subtract the pins that they knocked over. Everyone loved this game.

⁴⁰ This year Hiroki’s mother had an emotional crisis that eventually culminated in a divorce from her husband. Hiroki, who was a fifth grader at the time, could be a little rough with his younger classmates. His roughhousing got somewhat out of hand for a few months around the time of the divorce.

Appendix K

Kata for Pencil-Holding in Japanese Elementary Schools



Figure K.1: “How to Hold a Pencil—The Proper Posture for Writing”
(Source: Dr. Christine Yano, collected papers.)

Many of Japan's traditional arts initially emphasize the importance of correct form and the mastery of *kata* [patterned, stylized action]. This discourse on proper form is also influential in some areas of elementary school instruction.

Figure K.1 shows a typical handout used to teach pencil-holding. Note the attention to detail. The pencil should be gripped lightly and held about one centimeter from the sharpened tip. It is to be balanced between the forefinger and the thumb, which should be aligned with the thumb slightly bent. The students are instructed not only to sit up straight, but also to position their torsos equidistance between the front edge of the desk and the back of their chairs. When writing the children are to keep their eyes about thirty centimeters from their notebook and pencils are to be held at an acute angle. The little bear at the bottom of the handout seems to be almost in a panic as he pleads, "Do learn how to hold your pencil correctly!"

Scheper-Hughes and Lock argue that there is a physical component in all mental states and a mental component in all bodily states (1987, 6-8). This perspective has long been embraced in Japan, where the mastery of genre specific *kata* are seen as a crucial prerequisite to true understanding and mastery of many traditional arts and sports. Thus one's outer state is thought to be reflective of one's inner condition. Traphagan observes that the "physical and mental doing of something, and the way in which it is done, is considered an index of one's inner self, one's *kokoro* (2000, 158)." Kondo argues that attention to correct form, combined with individual perseverance contributes to a "disciplined *kokoro*," which is seen as a sign of maturity (1990, 100-101).

Being able to sit properly at one's desk and hold a pencil correctly are two basic *kata* that all elementary school students are expected to master in the first and second grades. For parents, who are anxious about their young child's success at school, pencil-holding skills are a serious business. To aid caregivers the Japanese publishing industry offers many manuals with detailed advice and practical tips on pencil-holding. One popular, illustrated text goes so far as to claim that proper pencil-holding increases children's brainpower.



Figure K.2
A Guide to Holding a Pencil Correctly: Developing Brain Power Through Pencil-work.
(By Ishida, Keiko. 2004. Tokyo: Popula Press.)

This concern with “correct” pencil-holding reflects a belief in the interpenetration of physical and mental posture. If a child's comportment is “incorrect” then it follows that his/her mental attitude may be in somewhat disarray. By the same token, molding the child's outer posture is seen as a practical way of improving inner poise. Yet this discourse on the deep

interconnections between outward form and one's inner mental state may encourage a rather narrow view of normalcy in Japanese elementary schools.

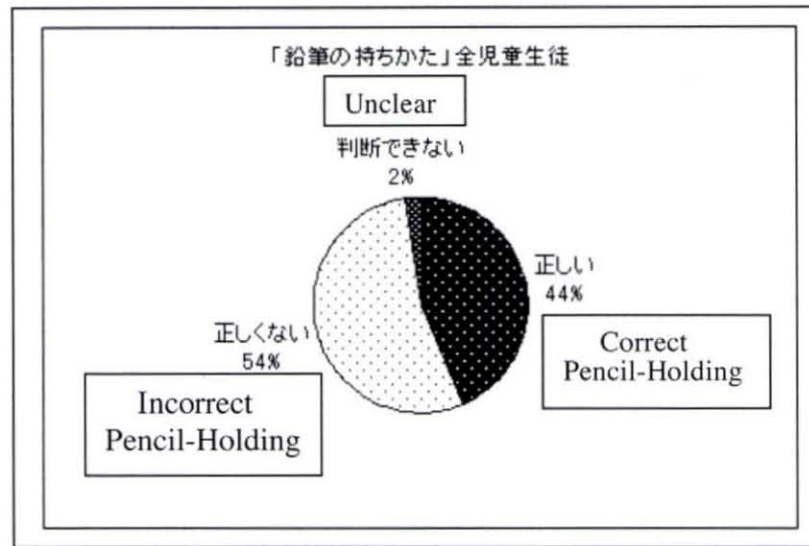


Figure K. 3
Survey of Pencil-holding in Gunma Prefecture's Protective Schools
Source: <http://www.center.gsn.ed.jp/gakko/toku/akgfujib/akac10-1.htm>
(accessed 30 December 2007).

Concern over "correct" pencil-holding appeared to be particularly intense within Japan's protective schools. For example, in 2004 Gunma Prefecture went to the trouble of taking a survey of pencil-holding abilities among the students attending several protective schools. The resulting report included many photos illustrating incorrect pencil-holding positions and numerous tables and pie charts comparing students based on sex and right or left-handedness (see Figure K.3). Poor pencil-holding was cited as an indication that children would be "unable to concentrate on the lesson." As we might expect, this survey found that a majority of the special needs students were unable to hold their pencils

(and therein themselves) correctly. Thus the angle of the children's pencils could, in a sense, be seen as an index of their normalcy.



Figure K. 4
Working on Pencil-holding in the *Fukushiki* Class
(Photograph by: Ōhashi Hitoshi; altered by Morisue Makiko))

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