

The Japanese Hands-Off Approach to Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education as a Form of Cultural Practice

Akiko Hayashi¹⁾

Arizona State University

Abstract

This paper explores the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) approach to curriculum policy in early childhood education. The Kindergarten Curriculum Guideline contains few directives or practical suggestions for teachers. The abstractness and indirectness of the MEXT approach to establishing curricular guidelines stands in stark contrast to the much more explicit and directive curriculum guidelines for early childhood education found in China, the US, many other countries. In this paper I suggest that the Japanese hands-off approach reflects a combination of structural features of Japanese early childhood education and implicit cultural beliefs and practices.

Keywords : preschool, Japan, mimamoru (見守る), MEXT

Corresponding author, ¹⁾ akiko.hayashi.1@asu.edu

Introduction

This paper explores what I call the “hands-off” approach to curriculum policy in early childhood education of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). My argument is first that early childhood education policy in Japan is less aggressively directed from above than it is in many other countries and second that this non-directive approach is consistent with core cultural beliefs of Japanese early childhood education including, especially, *mimamoru* (watching and caring).

In Japan, there are two main types of provision in early childhood education: *youchien* (kindergartens for children aged 3-6) and *hoikuen* (daycare centers for infants through six year olds). They are governed by different ministries (*youchien* by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, hereafter MEXT and *hoikuen* by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare) and have different mandates and guidelines. As Imoto (2007) points out, there is a distinction historically and structurally between *youchien* (幼稚園) and *hoikuen* (保育園). Ben-Ari (2005) suggests that *youchien* and *hoikuen* follow a similar curriculum even though there are differences in philosophy and style. Peak (1991) also finds that although *youchien* and *hoikuen* are controlled by different agencies, they provide a basically similar learning experiences for the child. Tobin (2010) argues that policy making, whether or not policy makers realize it or not, reflects the influence of socio-cultural factors. My paper follows in this ethnographic tradition of analyzing Japanese early childhood education policy. In this paper, I focus only *youchien*. For various reasons, including the fact that *hoikuen* deal with health and nutrition concerns of infants, their guidelines are more explicit than are those of *youchien*. My focus is on the “The Kindergarten Curriculum Guideline” issued by MEXT.

***Mimamoru* as cultural belief and practice**

In interviews with Japanese teachers and directors I conducted on teachers’ culturally implicit beliefs as an extension of and a follow up to Tobin, Hsueh, and

Karasawa's 2009 *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* study, I came to see the importance of *mimamoru* as a strategy that underlies many Japanese early childhood classroom practices. *Mi* literally means, "to watch;" *mamoru* means, "to guard." Together the words create a term that refers to a general Japanese pedagogical strategy of childcare I translate as "teaching by watching." In the preschool classroom this cultural logic of *mimamoru* takes the form of preschool teachers using a "hands-off" or low intervention approach to dealing with children's cognitive as well as social and emotional development.

An example of a *mimamoru* strategy teachers use with children is to hesitate to intervene in children's fighting, as described in a scene in *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* in which three girls pull and tug on a teddy bear and fall into a struggling heap on the floor. During this struggle, the only visible and audible reaction of the classroom teacher Morita-sensei is to call out from across the room: "*Kora Kora, Kora Kora!*" (which in English means something like "Hey"). When asked about this scene Morita-sensei explained that this is typical of her approach of watching children, and letting them know that they are being watched, but avoiding otherwise intervening, to give children the opportunity to experience complex social interactions and to work out their own solutions. By calling out "*Kora Kora*" during the fight Morita-sensei let them know that she was watching. Know that their teacher is watching them and that if the situation gets too rough or out of control the teacher is there to help them provides a sort of safety net for the children's interaction, providing the confidence and security they need to work things out on their own.

A preschool director I interviewed in Kyoto commented on Morita's strategy of watchful non-intervention when she watched the video: "She can wait because she has three years experience of working in a daycare center. A first year teacher can't wait like this. It takes a long time." Yoshizawa-sensei, Komatsudani's recently retired director, said: "You have to be a real caring professional to tell the difference between a real fight and rough and tumble play. It takes at least five years." The directors' emphasis on the time it takes for teachers to develop skill in using

mimamoru with children suggests that they use a similar strategy of *mimamoru* with teachers, watching but not overly intervening as teachers over time develop their ability to hold back and scaffold children's social interactions.

When I asked how teachers come to be able to employ a strategy of *mimamoru* with their students, a preschool director in Tokyo responded: "By meeting a mentor (*onshi*). This sometimes happens before coming to the field, sometimes right after graduating from school, or sometimes in the middle of their career. But either way, it's crucial for teachers to meet a mentor to develop their professionalism." This comment is consistent with a belief that directors need to take a long point of view on teacher development, giving each teacher time and space to develop in her own way at her own pace. Directors support this development through watching and waiting, and allowing young teachers to learn from their more experienced co-workers. This stance of directors towards teachers has much in common with the way teachers deal with the development of children's ability to handle social interactions. Morita-sensei explained her non-intervention in the fight over the teddy bear by saying: "It would be quick and easy if I intervened in their fight. But then, I would take away from children an opportunity to grow up."

My argument is that *mimamoru* is a core component of a Japanese early childhood educational approach that gives young teachers as well as young children space and time to work things out on their own. Where do preschool teachers and directors learn this idea? We might expect such a central pedagogical idea to be articulated in The Kindergarten Curriculum Guideline (幼稚園教育要領), or other documents produced by MEXT. But the Guidelines say nothing directly about *mimamoru*, or about how this approach can be operationalized either as a strategy of staff development or in the classroom. When I asked Japanese preschool teachers and directors where the idea of *mimamoru* comes from, no one mentioned directives from the government ministries or from the early childhood education reforms. More generally, in the interviews with Japanese teachers and directors conducted in the *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* study, there were scant mentions of the MEXT

Guidelines and no comments to suggest that MEXT or any other government agency or professional organization provides direct pressures or directives to guide *yochien* practice. This stands out in contrast to the frequent mentions by Chinese practitioners of the National Kindergarten Reform Guidelines and by US practitioners of directives from No Child Left Behind on one hand and NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice on the other.

By describing the MEXT approach as “hands-off” and “less directed from above” I do not mean to give the impression that the result is chaos or to suggest that MEXT provides no guidance to *youchien* or that MEXT allows Japanese teachers and directors to do whatever they want. MEXT provides a clear philosophy, workshops and professional development, and evaluation system, but a culturally appropriate approach that is consistent with their underlying philosophies.

The Guideline document issued by MEXT is neither ambiguous nor equivoquating. Just the opposite, it presents a consistent philosophy of early childhood education that has been articulated and re-articulated by MEXT for more than sixty years (Akita, 2010; Oda, 2004). Nakatsubo et al (2009) suggest that one of the characteristics of Japanese kindergarten education is that the national guidelines established by MEXT provide a clear direction. Unlike the US government's “No Child Left Behind” and the National Association of Early Childhood Education's “Developmentally Appropriate Practice,” MEXT does not give a name to their approaches. And yet the Guidelines present a consistent philosophy, one we can call child-centered and play-based and which Japanese preschool directors and early childhood education experts sometimes call *nobi nobi kyōiku* (“room to stretch” or “feel at ease”), *jiyu asobi* (“free play”), or “and.” The MEXT Guidelines from one iteration to the next provide a clear direction and a goal to reach for, but do not directly proscribe practices that should be employed to achieve those goals. The Guidelines do not provide specific standards or learning outcomes, as do the guidelines that govern early childhood education in many countries.

MEXT also give directors and teachers direction, in the form of workshops and

professional development (MEXT, 2009). This is much more common in public preschools than private ones, which means that MEXT has more direct influence over curriculum and pedagogy in the public preschools, where teachers are more professionalized than in the private ones where there is more rapid teacher turnover and where directors have more latitude to develop their own sometimes idiosyncratic approaches (Holloway, 2000; Tobin et al., 2009).

MEXT have a mechanism for evaluating the fidelity with which schools and teachers are implementing the goals of the Guidelines, but this is a self-evaluation system, not like in China, for example as Tobin et al (2009) point out, where preschools and teachers receive annual quality ratings from the government based on visits by outside experts, or in the United States where preschools' have periodic accreditation visits by outside evaluators (NAEYC, 2011). The approach from MEXT is not to force preschools to follow their guidelines but rather to encourage them to do so in their own way.

How we can explain this relative absence of direct, top-down direction and pressure in Japanese early childhood education? My hypothesis is that the government is doing a version of *mimamoru* with *youchien* directors and teachers, watching and waiting and giving them time and space to figure out their own solutions to best practice in preschools, much as directors do with teachers, and teachers do with children. This is an example of a deep structural pattern running through Japanese culture that can be found in the domains both of policy and practice in Japanese early childhood education.

The Kindergarten Curriculum Guideline; 幼稚園教育要領

The Kindergarten Curriculum Guideline issued by MEXT is a thirteen page document broken into three chapters: General Provisions, Aims and Contents, and Points for Consideration in the Formulation of Instruction Plans. For example, the section on "Language," in the Chapter on Aims and Contents, is two pages long, and includes three aims, ten contents, and four ways of dealing with the contents. The

entirety of the section on how to approach the contents reads:

It is necessary to note the following points with regard to dealing with content related to language.

- (1) Considering the fact that people are able to acquire language gradually through interacting, conveying their emotions and intentions, and listening to the responses of others, children should be encouraged to experience and enjoy exchanging words in their relationships with teachers and other children.
- (2) Teachers should gradually foster in children the ability to understand what people are saying and to communicate in words, by encouraging children to communicate their own thoughts in words and to listen to what teachers and other children are saying with interest and attention.
- (3) Teachers should encourage children to create rich images and develop an understanding of language by allowing them to fully experience the joy of relating the picture books, stories, etc., to their own experiences, using their imagination and creativity.
- (4) Teachers should encourage children to experience the pleasure and enjoyment of conveying thoughts and feelings through written words, and to develop an interest in and curiosity about written words in their everyday life.

This is as close as the Guideline comes to practical suggestions for teachers. Since it was first issued in 1947, the Guideline has been revised every 10 years. The first revision, in 1956, introduced six areas (health, social, nature, language, music/rhythm, and art/drawing/craft). The guideline was revised again in 1964, 1989, 1998, and 2008. In 50 years, across six revisions, the Guideline has not been changed dramatically, and remains abstract and indirect.

Method

The method I am using to study the MEXT approach is an extension of the video-

cued multivocal ethnographic interviewing method employed in the *Preschool in Three Cultures* studies. The video-cued multivocal ethnographic method was developed by Joseph Tobin and his colleagues for the study *Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China, and the United States* (1989). Here is how the method is introduced in the original book:

In the “Preschool in Three Cultures” method, the video’s function is neither for data collection nor as description, but instead the videos are used as rich non-verbal cues designed to stimulate reflection. The video is used to provoke reflection not just from the teachers videotaped, but also from their colleagues, their supervisors, and from educators in other cities and in other countries. The steps in the method are as follows: (1) we videotaped a day in a preschool; (2) edited the tape down to 20 minutes; (3) showed the edited tape to the classroom teacher, and asked her to comment and offer explanations; (4) held a focus-group made up of the preschool staff to create a discussion of the edited tape; (5) held focus-group discussions with the staff of other preschools around the country (to address the question of typicality); and (6) held focus group discussions with the staff of preschools in the two other countries in the study.

Specifically, I showed a Japanese MEXT official as well as a preschool director a video used in the *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* study, using the video as a jumping off point for a discussion of how and why MEXT employs such a soft and indirect approach to influences preschool curricular practices. Each interview took about an hour and a half and held in Tokyo in 2009.

Evidence of a strategy of mimamoru

I interviewed Kuroda-sensei, a MEXT senior administrator who served on the committee for reforming the kindergarten guidelines, and Takeda-sensei, a director of public preschool in Tokyo:

Hayashi: Why is the guideline abstract and indirect?

Kuroda-sensei: It is because the government should not intervene in education.

Hayashi: Why don't you write specific practical suggestions?

Kuroda-sensei: For early childhood education, we do have direction goals, not achievement goals. For example, language, we don't care if children become able to write letters or not. The goal is we want children to be interested in letters. Actually, the guideline is detailed and it follows the law.

Hayashi: Since it is detailed, isn't it possible to write them down more specifically?

Kuroda-sensei: MEXT believes that there are a lot of ways that teachers can develop, for instance, children's social development. MEXT, therefore, does not want to write specific things in the guideline. But we do have the books of cases, depending on areas.

Kuroda-sensei says nothing in the interview to suggest that the absence of strong guidelines reflects the cultural logic of *mimamoru*. In fact, he disagreed with this interpretation, saying that the absence of greater specificity is due not to cultural but to structural reasons such as "The government should not intervene in education" and "This follows the law." Where are the implications of Kuroda-sensei's rejection of my cultural interpretation? Do policy insiders need to be aware of such deeper patterns for them to be plausible explanations of their actions? What would count as evidence of *mimamoru* at the policy level?

Hayashi: Do you think that preschool teachers and directors are satisfied with these abstract and loose guidelines?

Kuroda-sensei: Well, they might be happy or they might not be happy. They might be confused. Therefore, there are a lot of books about how to interpret the kindergarten curriculum guideline. It is difficult to understand the Guidelines.

In this interview, Kuroda-sensei admits that the brevity and lack of specificity of the Guidelines may confuse some teachers, and yet he does not argue for the need or appropriateness of MEXT providing greater clarity or direction. In the paper, "Current Challenges of Kindergarten (*Youchien*) Education in Japan," Oda and Mori (2006) suggest that there has been as struggle from the beginning between those who

wanted Guidelines more like elementary school guidelines in being specific about learning outcomes and broken down by content areas and those who argued for less specific guidelines that would emphasize child development over content knowledge and skill, an approach championed by Kurahashi, a founding father of Japanese early childhood education:

Some, at that time, argued that the guidelines should be called *Yochien Gakushu Shidou Yoryo* (“Kindergarten Course of Study”)†. The title, however, was not adopted. The term *Youchien Kyoiku Yoryo* (Kindergarten Curriculum Guideline) was used, reflecting the belief that because young children develop differently from one another, and because of their incomplete development, practice should emphasize their natural, everyday lives (Oda, 2004, p.79).

Oda and Mori (2006) point out with regret early childhood educators’ increasing desire over time for more subject matter-oriented curriculum:

Early childhood educators moved away from Kurahashi’s education philosophy of constructing a curriculum that guided children based on play and theme-based activities. Early childhood educators began to view the six areas as subjects and to emphasize providing specific activities designed to help children acquire specific knowledge and skills. Although kindergarten educators still paid lip service to stressing children’s everyday activities, reducing the curriculum into six areas essentially converted the everyday life-oriented curriculum into the subject matter-oriented curriculum of the elementary school (p.2).

While Oda and Mori’s paper does not explicitly support my hypothesis that Japanese early childhood education policy makers employ a strategy of *mimamoru* with practitioners, their argument is not inconsistent with this hypothesis, as they emphasizes the need for early childhood education policy makers to resist demands from teachers and directors and politicians for more explicit, elementary school like

† In November, 2010, after I wrote the first draft of this paper, MEXT changed the translation of *Yochien Gakushu Shidou Yoryo* to “the course of study about early childhood education and care.”

directives and for issuing a “course of study” for kindergartens.

The interview I conducted with preschool Director Takeda-sensei provides a director’s view of MEXT’s non-directive policy approach:

Hayashi: What do you think about the national curriculum guideline for kindergarten?

Takeda-sensei: It follows the law, therefore, it’s short.

Hayashi: Are you happy to have that short curriculum guide?

Takeda-sensei: I think the short curriculum means that MEXT is saying to us, “Please follow at least these things, and the rest is up to you.” (or “and for the rest, we rely on you”). Compulsory education is almost the same everywhere but early childhood education is highly varied. The guideline is in a way a “Bible” that Directors and preschools interpret on their own.

Her explanation implies that by giving only minimal guidance, MEXT gives preschool directors and teachers latitude to develop their own approaches and as a result to take more responsibility for implementing the spirit of the guidelines and this approach is more effective than attempting to legislate and enforce directives from above. This explanation is consistent with my *mimamoru* hypothesis.

The non-directiveness of the guidelines allows each preschool to develop its own culture and gives the directors and their staff the ability to develop curriculum approaches that make sense for their local communities. Ishigaki (1999) emphasizes kindergartens’ autonomy: “Each kindergarten should maintain its originality and make suitable adjustments to its curriculum in accordance with the law and the guidelines, re-responding to the mental and physical development of children, and the conditions of the kindergarten and local community (p. 26).” The non-directiveness of the Guidelines both supports and reflects the strength of preschool directors. The majority of Japanese preschools are private programs (MEXT, 2009), with strong, long-serving directors who also often own the preschool. In public preschools, the power of directors comes from the fact that they are government employees with job stability, who while moving over their careers from school to school, stay in the field for many years. In both types of programs the loose

guidelines empower directors and in this way allow for stability and for resisting panicky calls from politicians and parents for a more pushed down academic curriculum.

Mimamoru is two sided, as to function it requires the participation of the person who is being watched and waited for as well as the person (or agency) doing the watching and waiting. Therefore, if *youchien* directors say that MEXT is doing *mimamoru* toward them, this would be strong evidence for the cultural nature of this policy practice, even if it is not the explanation offered by the policy makers. Policy is not only a top down practice. It is also a larger cultural set of beliefs and practices that tie together policy makers with those, like preschool directors, who are charged with implementing policy.

The fact that there are specific guidelines for primary (elementary) schools in Japan raises the question of why not for preschools? One possible explanation is that *mimamoru* is a cultural belief and practice that while found across many domains of Japanese society, is particularly well suited to *youchien*, which historically and in the present day see their mission as primarily one of children's social and emotional development. Tobin et al (2009) write that Japanese preschools' central goal is to make Japanese children Japanese. This goal is seen as best achieved through "natural" means, providing a natural environment, which means creating/building a social world where children can experience the kind of social complexity missing for them in contemporary Japan.

Oda (2004) and Akita (2010) suggest the Japanese early childhood education curriculum reflects core ideas that can be traced back to the influence of Sozo Kurahashi (1882-1955), the founder of the "everyday-life-oriented curriculum." His slogan was, "For children's everyday life, in children's everyday life, and to children's everyday life," and his central message was that early childhood educators should carefully observe children's everyday lives. His philosophy emphasized the importance of cultivating young children's feelings, interests, and motivations by providing children with a supportive, stimulating environment.

In their 2006 paper, Oda and Mori emphasize the significance of the choice by

Japanese early childhood policy makers to use the term “guideline” (*yoryo*) rather than “course of study” (*gakushu shidou yoryo*). (*Gakushu* means learning and *shidou* is teaching.) While most early childhood practitioners and policy makers reject the term *gakushu shidou yoryo* which they feel is too (elementary) school-like, they are comfortable with the term *kyoiku*’s, which is usually translated into English as “education,” but which, like the original meaning of “education,” carries a meaning that goes well beyond schooling and the acquisition of academic knowledge. As a preschool director in Kyoto explained to us:

The term “*kyo*” in *kyoiku* refers to education. But it is important to remember that *kyoiku* also has within it the term “*iku*,” which means “to cultivate.”

The decision by MEXT to use the term *kyoiku* (教育) rather than *gakushu sidou* (学習指導) for the kindergarten guidelines reflects an acknowledgement that the central goal of early childhood education in Japan is social and emotional development, and not only education narrowly defined. Preschool in Japan is seen primarily as a site for Japanese children to become happy, socially well adjusted, and Japanese. It is difficult to have specific curriculum guidelines or directives for reaching these goals. Countries often have explicit education guidelines, but not explicit guidelines for enculturation. Top-down policy directives are usually about how to achieve mathematics and literacy goals and hygiene standards, and not about such “softer things” as enculturation, social and emotional development, and the development of the self. Some countries have national guidelines for early childhood education that emphasize preschool as a key site for fostering young children’s identity and the development of self. The early years curricula in England and Australia include a focus on social and emotional development, and on the development of the self (DCFS, 2008; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). For example, one of the five desired outcomes in the new national 0-5 Australian curriculum is that “Children have a strong sense of well being” and another is that “Children have a strong sense of identity”. National policies and guidelines for early childhood education sometimes state broad goals for “softer” domains of

development, but it is not common for such guidelines to offer a clear scope and sequence for these softer domains, as they more often do for mathematics and reading and for hygiene and safety standards.

A related cultural explanation for my observation that we can find *mimamoru* operating in *youchien* policy as well as in practice would be that there is a metonymic linking at work of Japanese early childhood education with Japanese childhood. There is a strong cultural value in Japanese early childhood education on “child-likeness” (*kodomo rashii*), and the idea that children should be free to be childish, which means free to play, to experience emotions, and to explore things (Tobin et al., 2009). *Yochien* (幼稚園) has a Chinese character meaning “garden.” The notion of a “children’s garden” carries with it in Japanese, as in the original German term “kindergarten,” the notion of a place that is free and natural. Just as kindergartens should be natural and free and allow children to explore, ministries regulating kindergartens should allow kindergarten teachers and directors a similar freedom.

Another cultural explanation would be that Japanese culture and society is vertical, but not top-down, and therefore that there is a strong cultural tradition that can be found in many domains of supervisors giving those under them latitude to make their own decisions and to operationalize general directives in their own ways. Studies have suggested that a characteristically Japanese management style is for bosses to not give specific directives and instead to put responsibility on their employees to search for creative ways to implement institutional goals (Rohlen, 1989).

Conclusion

In each of above speculative explanations I see the workings of what Tobin et al (2009) call “unmarked beliefs and practices (p. 242).” The boss not give specific directions to his employees; the kindergarten teacher hesitating to intervene in her students’ disputes; the kindergarten director giving her teachers latitude; and MEXT being non-directive with preschools all can be seen as examples of the same implicit

cultural logic: the belief that by not being too directive, directors, teachers, and students are encouraged to find their own solutions, not individually but collectively. When teachers, supervisors, and policy makers hold back, and use *mimamoru* (watching and waiting), rather than using a heavy-handed, directive management style, students, teachers, and directors take more responsibility and are more motivated.

Tobin (2011) writes “beliefs and practices that are implicit are less open to scrutiny, criticism, and reform efforts than are beliefs and practices that are mandated in government documents, written down in textbooks, taught in schools of education, given a formal name, and otherwise made explicit (p.24).” The strategy of *mimamoru* is not written in the MEXT kindergarten guidelines or in teacher education textbooks; rather, as I have argued in this paper, *mimamoru* is a deep structural pattern that can be found in the domains both of policy and practice in Japanese early childhood education.

In his paper on class size in Japan (1987), Tobin et al report that when they asked *youchien* administrators the reason for having high student/teacher ratios, most said the explanation was economic, and that even with twenty-five children per teacher, *youchien* were struggling to make a profit. But Tobin et al. argued that such pragmatic justifications are not adequate, as they pointed out that preschools in the US also struggle financially, and yet early childhood educators in the US consider ratios of eight children per adult to be very high. Tobin et al. conclude that even if Japanese early childhood educators are not aware of the workings of cultural factors, that Japanese *youchien* policies and practices reflect cultural beliefs and practices. My argument is parallel to Tobin’s: Because *mimamoru* as belief and practice is largely implicit, when I asked Kuroda-sensei and Takeda-sensei why the guideline is so loose, their first response was, “Because this is the law.” But an anthropological approach would be to look for deeper cultural beliefs beneath the laws. Laws, like curriculum guidelines, are surface features of a culture that need to be connected to deeper cultural beliefs and logics.

References

- Akita, K. (2010). Recent curriculum reform in Japan: The future of everyday-life-oriented curriculum, presented at The International Conference of KSECE in Pusan.
- Ben-Ari, E. (2005). Formal caring alternatives: Kindergartens and day-care centers, in J. Robertson (Ed.) *Companion to the Anthropology of Japan*, 247-259. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Commonwealth of Australia. (2009). *Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments.
- Department for Children Schools and Families (DCFS). (2008a). *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage*. Nottingham, UK: DCSF Publications.
- Department for Children Schools and Families (DCFS). (2008b). *Practice guidance for the early years foundation stage*. Nottingham, UK: DCSF Publications.
- Holloway, S. (2000). *Contested childhood: Diversity and change in Japanese preschools*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Imoto, Y. (2007). The Japanese preschool system in transition, *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 2(2), 88-101.
- Ishigaki, E. (1999). New perspectives of early childhood teacher education in Japan-concerning new revisions of guidelines and the Juvenile Welfare Law-, *Educare*, 20, 21-34.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2008). *Youchien Kyoiku Yoryo* (The Course of Study about Early Childhood Education and Care).
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2009). *Youji Kyoiku Jitsutai Tyousa* (The Survey of Early Childhood Education).
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2009). *Youji Kyoiku no Genjyou* (Heisei 21).

- Nakatsubo, F., Minowa, J., Akita, K., Sunagami, F., Yasumi, K., & Masuda, T. (2009). A study of the involvement of Japanese early childhood teachers in Clean-up Time, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 3(1), 69-85.
- NAEYC (2011). <http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation>, The National Association for Young Children.
- Oda, Y. (2004). Tracing the development of Japanese kindergarten education-focusing on changes of contents and curriculum, *Bulletin of National Research Center of Educational Policy*, 133, 77-84.
- Oda, Y. & Mori, M. (2006). Current challenges of kindergarten (Youchien) education in Japan: Toward balancing children's autonomy and teachers' intention, *Childhood Education*, 82 (6), 369-373.
- Peak, L. (1991). *Learning to go to school in Japan: The transition from home to preschool life*. University of California Press.
- Rohlen, T. (1989). Order in Japanese society: Attachment, authority, and routine, *Journal of Japanese studies*, 15 (1), 5-40.
- Tobin, J. (2010). Socio-cultural perspectives on policy making in early childhood education: Policy lessons and implications from the preschool in three cultures studies, *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 16(2), 9-26
- Tobin, J. (2011). Implicit cultural beliefs and practices in approaches to early childhood education and care, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in early childhood education*, 5(1), 3-22.
- Tobin, J., Hsueh, Y., & Karasawa, M. (2009). *Preschool in three cultures revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tobin, J., Wu, D., & Davidson, D. (1987). Class size and student/teacher ratios. *Comparative Education Review*, 31(4), 533-549.
- Tobin, J., D. Wu, & D. Davidson (1989). *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China, and the United States*. New Haven: Yale University Press.