

Development of the Japanese Inclusive Education System: From Special Schools to Curriculum Modification for Special-Needs Education in Regular Schools

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ABSTRACT

This literature review examines the development of the inclusive educational system in Japan. It traces the history of accommodation for children with disabilities from 1947 to 2017, using reports, notices, and statistics on special needs education from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The Japanese system began with special schools designed according to the disabilities of the students. The paradigm shifted to special-needs classrooms within regular schools and, later, to ensuring access to regular schools for children with disabilities. Currently, the 2017 revision of the Japanese system seeks to ensure a common curriculum to secure continuity among a diverse range of learning settings. This revision also focuses on teaching students with learning difficulties in a regular school setting and adapting the curriculum according to their disabilities. Nonetheless, some flexibility in choice of setting remains with the parents and children involved. The ultimate goal of the Japanese inclusive education curriculum is independent living and the social participation of the individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as other disabilities. Over time, the focus of the inclusive education system has shifted from the location in which classes and support are offered to students with disabilities, to the content that best meets the needs of students with disabilities of every type.

***Keywords:** Japanese inclusive education system, curriculum modification, subjects for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, jiritsu-katsudo*

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2015 the United Nations initiatives agreed to promote the implementation of inclusive education toward 2030 to realize “fair and highly sustainable education” (UNESCO, 2015). The inclusive education as the process to create the education system that caters to various needs of all children is a common global challenge (UNESCO, 2005; 2015). Since the Salamanca Statement in 1994, modifications had been required to the regular education curriculum to make it more responsive to various needs by including content and methods for the children with special educational needs (SEN) (UNESCO, 1994; 2005). Legislation in the United States and England required that children with disabilities be granted access to the regular education curriculum, based on the recognition that teachers can cater to individual needs by changing and adjusting some of the content and method in accordance with the

characteristics and condition of each child (Browder, Wakeman, Flowers, Rickelman, Pugalee, & Karvonen, 2007; Noguchi & Yoneda, 2012). Some researchers, however, expressed doubts about the expectation of social inclusion in education and have questioned the feasibility of setting goals unique to special needs education and the essence of the subject being learned (e.g., McLaughlin, 2010).

Common issues in discussions of inclusive education systems in developed countries are the expansion of roles and the clarification of responsibilities on the part of regular schools in regions where children with disabilities live. However, “what is learned” (i.e., possible changes to the common content), “how to learn” (diversification of educational methods) and “the level of understanding required” (establishing content and achievement levels, and diversifying evaluation

methods) should be considered the most important points.

This study aims to examine the reform of special-needs education in regular schools to develop a Japanese-style inclusive education system. It also aims to examine Japanese curriculum modifications for students with disabilities in regular schools and special schools.

2. METHOD

Literature review was the main method chosen here for examining the special-needs education issues considered in councils and committees and revising the study course for 2017 for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The review covers reports, notices, and statistics on special-needs education from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), along with other organizations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Foundation of Special Education as Part of the General School System

The School Education Act stipulates two special learning settings for children with disabilities: special schools and special classes in regular schools.

The current education system of Japan traces its roots back to the School Education Act established in 1947. This law, which governs the entire school system in Japan from kindergarten to university, with free compulsory education—six years of elementary school and three years of junior high school—as the backbone, overhauled the nation’s school system following World War II. Chapter 1, General Provision Article 1 of the School Education Act, states that “schools” refers to elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, universities, schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, schools for children with other disabilities, and kindergartens. Thus, schools for children with disabilities (called “special schools”) were already explicitly included in the Japanese school system, with the law recognizing special education as part of the general school system. The idea was that children with disabilities should receive a school education with the same goal as those without disabilities and that special education should include methodological considerations for disabilities (The Ministry of Education, 1978). Children with disabilities were specifically mentioned as the target of special education. For this reason, special education in the post-war era was called “education for children with disabilities.”

The important thing here is that Japan’s educational system has never excluded children with disabilities. The School Education Act stipulates two special learning settings for children with disabilities who require special methodology for their education: special schools and

special classes in regular schools. In practice, however, a system including school attendance for all children with disabilities was not completed until the mandatory implementation of school education for children with disabilities in 1979.

Attempts to solve the institutionalized paradox of the mandatory implementation of the special school education for children with disabilities in 1979.

Until the implementation of a mandatory special school education system for children with disabilities, such children had been allowed to attend regular schools. Paradoxically, the new mandate resulted in a situation wherein children with disabilities were forcibly transferred to schools only for children with disabilities (Shinohara, 1979). Various attempts have been made since 1979 to solve this problem or to help bridge this institutional gap.

The Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act prescribed a mechanism by which children with disabilities can choose their school (Table 1). Prior to 2002, this ordinance required that those with a certain level of disabilities attend special schools. No exceptions were allowed. However, its revision in 2002 launched the authorized school attendance system, which meant that in exceptional cases, students could be authorized to attend a regular elementary or junior high school instead of a special school under certain circumstances, such as the provision of appropriate facilities and/or equipment by the regular elementary or junior high school. In other words, local governments were given the flexibility to decide where to place children with disabilities. After this revision, the number of disabled children attending regular elementary schools or regular junior high schools increased (Figure 1).

The implementation of a mandatory education system for children with disabilities resulted in a situation in which children with disabilities, who had been allowed to attend regular schools until then, were forcibly transferred to schools for children with disabilities due to their disabilities (Shinohara, 1979). There have been various attempts to solve this problem, or help bridge this institutional gap, following the 1979 implementation of mandatory education for children with disabilities.

The Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act prescribes a mechanism in which children with disabilities choose their school (table 1). The ordinance, prior to 2002, required that those with a certain level of disabilities attend special schools. No exceptions were allowed. However, its revision in 2002 launched the authorized school attendance system, enabling such students as authorized ones, as exceptional cases, to attend a regular elementary school or a regular junior high school instead of a special school if there is a special circumstance including where such a regular

elementary school or a regular junior high school has appropriate facilities and/or equipment. In other words, local governments were given the flexibility to decide the placement of children with disabilities. Since this revision, the number of those disabled children attending regular elementary schools or regular junior high schools increased (figure 1).

Table 1. Criteria for admissions into special-needs schools: Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, Article 22 (3)

Category	Degree
Persons with visual impairments	The individual has a vision of roughly 0.3 or below in both eyes or has a serious vision dysfunction other than their eyesight, which prevents them from or gives them extreme difficulties in visually recognizing such things as ordinary written letters and diagrams, even while using magnifying glasses or something similar.
Persons with hearing impairments	Individuals with a hearing level of roughly 60 decibels or higher in both ears, which prevents them from or creates extreme difficulties in comprehending spoken words even while using a hearing aid or similar device.
Persons with intellectual disabilities	1 Individuals that demonstrate a delay in intellectual development, which creates difficulties communicating with others and who as a result require frequent assistance with daily living needs. 2 Individuals with a degree of delay in intellectual development that is not of a level described in Type 1 but who have difficulties adapting to social life.
Persons with physical disabilities	1 Individuals with a degree of physical disability that prevents them from or causes difficulties with performing basic bodily movements required in daily life such as ambulation, writing. 2 Individuals with a degree of physical disability that is not on a level described in Type 1 but who require constant medical attention and guidance.
Persons with health impairments	1 Individuals with a persistent and chronic case of a respiratory illness, kidney disorder, neurological disease, malignant neoplasm or other illness and who require medical care or a regimen. 2 Individuals who have a persistent constitutional weakness and require a regimen.

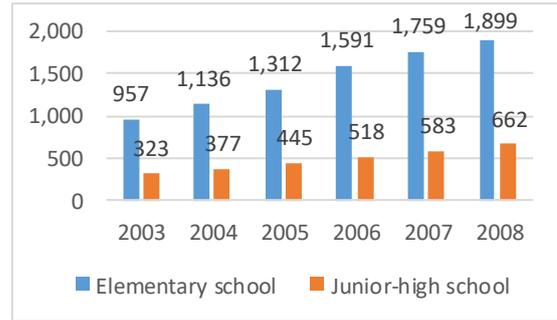


Figure 1. Nationwide Number of regular school children those who regarded as falling under the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, Article 22 (3)

Source: SNE Division, ESE Bureau, MEXT, 2009

A New framework of school selection in which schools for children with disabilities are selected.

This institutional endeavour by the Japanese government was intended to build an inclusive education system to meet the requirements of Article 24 from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The Japanese government promotes special-needs education by seeking to ensure continuity among regular classes in regular schools, resource-room instruction in regular schools, special-needs classes in regular schools, and special-needs schools as it attempts to establish an inclusive education system.

With respect to school selection, the Order for Enforcement of the School Education Act was revised in August 2013 to alter the conventional framework of school selection. Previously, it had stipulated that children with disabilities who fell under the school attendance criteria must, in principle, be enrolled in special needs education schools. The new framework of school selection specified that schools for children with disabilities should be selected in comprehensive consideration of the specifics of the disabilities; the educational needs for children with disabilities; the opinions of children with disabilities and those of their parents/guardians; the opinions of experts in education, medicine, and psychology; and the conditions of the schools and communities. Then, opportunities for hearing the opinions of parents/guardians and experts were expanded. Subsequently, it was decided that schools would be selected by education committees after respecting the opinions of the children with disabilities and their parents/guardians.

As a result, regular school became the default selection in placing all students. However, local governments were given the flexibility to decide the placement of children with disabilities. In addition, children who attend special-needs schools are now regarded as students of “certified special-needs schools.” The previous criteria set forth in the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, Article 22 (3)

have become part of the conditions that children must meet when applying for special-needs schools.

Children who fall under this Ordinance are subject to examination/screening by the municipal board of education as candidates for elementary schools/special-needs schools (first-year students under a new system). Of these children, about 30% have consistently chosen to attend regular public elementary schools (Table 2). Thus, enhancing special-needs education in regular schools is becoming a greater challenge so that all of the children who choose to attend regular schools can receive an appropriate education.

Table 2 Public schools chosen by those regarded as falling under the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, Article 22 (3) (first-year students)

School Year	Special-needs school	Regular elementary school
2009	6,087 (67.4%)	2,927 (32.4%)
2010	5,916 (67.9%)	2,774 (31.8%)
2011	5,471 (70.6%)	2,242 (29.0%)
2012	5,954 (72.0%)	2,293 (27.7%)
2013	6,190 (73.2%)	2,230 (26.4%)
2014	6,341 (73.3%)	2,274 (26.3%)
2015	6,646 (65.8%)	3,420 (23.8%)
2016	6,704 (68.2%)	3,079 (31.3%)
2017	7,192 (70.0%)	3,055 (29.7%)
2018	7,429 (72.1%)	2,817 (27.3%)

Source: SNE Division, ESE Bureau, MEXT, 2010; 2011; 2012; 2020

Development of Special Needs Education in Regular schools

The findings resource room instructions as a new part of special support services in regular schools.

The School Education Act (1947), which has regulated school education in Japan since the end of World War II, allowed special classes to be established in regular schools. Students with mild to moderate disabilities were to be taught in a special class (now called “special-needs class”) according to their disabilities (low vision, hard-of-hearing, physical/motor disabilities, health impairments, speech/language disorders, emotional disturbances, and IDD) and based on their intellectual development, using special curricula and teaching methods. However, simply placing students with mild to moderate disabilities in self-contained special classes did not solve the problem of how to provide quality education.

In March 1969, the Special Education Comprehensive Research Cooperation Council released a report on basic measures regarding special education.

For special education in regular schools, the report proposed (1) establishing an instructional structure and (2) promoting the establishment of special classes.

With respect to establishing an instructional structure in regular schools, there was a provision for children with disabilities who were able to attend regular schools and study with other children for a certain amount of time under special instruction. The provision stated that the necessary facilities should be established in regular schools, in accordance with the type and degree of the children’s disabilities, and that specialist teachers should be assigned to these children. It also stated that, depending on the school location or the condition of the children, specialist teachers should visit schools within a certain district regularly to provide special instruction. Thus, this report pointed out the necessity for tsukyu (special classes—i.e., resource room instruction), in which children with disabilities receive special instruction for a certain period of time while being enrolled in a regular class, a system that was subsequently established.

In 1978, the Research Committee on Special Education released a report on school education for children with slight disabilities. Special education during the compulsory educational stages, particularly for children with slight disabilities, should be taught in either separate classes especially created for them or in regular classes under careful supervision. Regarding instruction in regular classes, the report specifically mentioned children with disabilities who require only part special instruction but regularly. It is desirable, according to the report, that these children receive resource room special instruction at the school where they usually attend or other schools (including various special schools) during designated time periods. In other words, this report suggested either resource room special instruction via special classes or special schools as specific measures to provide assistance to children with disabilities enrolled in regular school classes. Subsequently, the National Council on Educational Reform released a third report on educational reform in 1987 and a report on curriculum improvements for special schools in 1988. These reports also pointed out the necessity for making efforts to create or enhance instructions at resource rooms.

Subsequently, the National Council on Educational Reform released a third report on educational reform in 1987, as well as a report on curriculum improvements for special schools in 1988. These reports also pointed out the necessity of attempting to create or enhance instruction in resource rooms.

In 1990, the Ministry of Education established the Research Group Conference Regarding Instruction in Resource Rooms, the findings of which were presented in a report titled “Strategies for Improving Special Needs Support in Resource Rooms (Conclusion of the Conference).” The study found that as of October 1,

1988, 12,793 students across the nation, though not officially enrolled in special classes, were receiving some instruction there. This total included some 7,536 students who were enrolled in different schools.

The report explained that students obtaining instruction in special classes, even though not enrolled there, tended to have the following disabilities: speech/language disorders, hearing difficulties, low vision, and emotional disturbances. "Instruction in Resource Room" was defined as students' receiving "education regarding school subjects in a regular class, while receiving special instruction according to their specific physical and mental condition in a special class or other equivalent class." Another appropriate way to provide special-needs support via resource rooms, according to the report, was for a special-needs teacher to go to the school where the child is enrolled to provide special instruction.

In addition, the report stated that the appropriate targets for resource room instruction were those who would be best served by attending regular classes but who required some special instruction according to their disabilities. These disabilities, according to the report, were speech impairments, hearing impairments, weak-sightedness, emotional disturbance, physical disabilities, and health impairments or physical weakness. As for IDD, which are characterized by overall developmental delay, the report stated that those with such conditions, in principle, should be taught in special classes.

Meanwhile, some "children with learning disabilities" experience a significant delay in specific skills in comparison with their overall cognitive abilities. They also require special instruction. The report stated that ways to accommodate such children would be the subject of ongoing discussion because much has not been defined concerning their situation or the criteria for their problems.

In response to these reports, on January 28, 1993, the Ministry of Education issued an "Ordinance on Partial Revision of the Regulations to Implement the School Education Act" (Ministry of Education Ordinance No. 1), which systematized the special-needs service in resource rooms at the beginning of the next academic year (April 1, 1993). The special-needs support in resource rooms was deemed to be suitable for educating students with speech/language disorders, emotional disturbances, low vision, hearing problems, and students with other difficulties.

Extended the target range of special needs support services in resource rooms: LD, ADHD, HFA.

In October 2001, the Research Group Conference on the Future Direction of Special Needs Education was held, and a final report titled "The Future Direction for Special Needs Education" was issued in March 2003. This final report included a definition of both attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and high

functioning autism (HFA), as well as a tentative proposal on how to recognize these conditions and techniques for teaching students who had them. It established standards for determining whether students who were having difficulties in regular classes had LD, ADHD, or HFA, as well as procedures to provide appropriate support for them. In March 2003, the MEXT released the results of the "National Survey of Pupils in Regular Classes having Special Educational Needs". These results indicated that around 6.3% of all students in regular classes have special educational needs because of such conditions as LD, ADHD, or HFA. In January 2004, MEXT published a proposal titled "Guidelines to Develop a Support System for Elementary and Middle School Pupils with LD, ADHD or HFA."

Because various situations had now been investigated and concomitant adjustments made, the "Ordinance on Partial Revision of the Regulations to Implement the School Education Act" (MEXT, Ordinance No. 22) was issued on March 31, 2006, effective the following day. This ordinance included students with LD and ADHD as examples of the types of students with disabilities for whom special-needs support in resource rooms is considered appropriate. It indicated specifically that students with autism, which had formerly been included in the category of emotional disturbances, could also be taught in the resource room. Since 2006, the number of students with autism taught in resource rooms has been recorded separately from the number of students with emotional disturbances.

Paradigm shift and Promoting Special Needs Education for developing a System of Inclusive Education

From disability-specific needs to individual needs.

The partially amended School Education Act was enacted on April 1st, 2007. With this amendment, "education for children with disabilities" shifted to "special needs education." In special needs education, children with LD, ADHD, and HFA—who were not traditionally targeted to receive special support—are to receive special support based on the fact that they have specific needs as well. Its aim is to identify the educational needs of each "child with special educational needs" who has difficulties in school and in everyday life because of disabilities. Its goal is to help each child reach his or her fullest development by providing support through appropriate education so that the child can fully participate in schools and in everyday life, as well as helping the child to participate in society (Special Needs Education Research Committee, 2003).

The paradigm shift from "education for children with disabilities" to "special needs education" moves the emphasis from providing educational service *corresponding to various disabilities* to that *based on the needs of individuals*. There are three main reasons for this shift: (i) To meet the educational needs of students with severe or multiple disabilities studying at special

schools for the blind, schools for the deaf, and schools for children with intellectual disabilities, physical/motor disabilities and health impairments. (ii) To meet the educational needs of students in regular schools struggling to cope with school and daily life. (iii) To develop a system of certifying teachers that ensures special-needs teachers have the expertise and specialist skills to respond to children’s special needs.

Approach to Creating a Learning Environment: Continuity among a Diverse Range of Learning Settings.

In December 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted the CRPD and called for an “inclusive education system” under which students both with and without disabilities would study together. The goal is to strengthen respect for human diversity and enable persons with disabilities to develop their abilities fully for effective participation in a free society. As part of an effort to ratify the treaty in Japan, the Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities was revised August 2011. Furthermore, in July 2012, the Central Council of Education’s Elementary and Lower Secondary Education Subdivision released a report on promoting special-needs education to build an inclusive education system that would form a symbiotic society.

The report called for revising a mechanism that required children with disabilities to attend special-needs schools, as already mentioned above. The report reveals Japan’s stance toward inclusive education: “In an inclusive education system, in addition to pursuing a system in which students are able to learn together in the same setting, it is important to put in place a diverse and flexible system that provides guidance for students with individual educational needs, and that meets the educational needs of the individuals in the most appropriate manner at the time the guidance is provided. The ultimate goals are the independent living and social participation of the individuals. There is a need to create a diverse range of learning settings that possess continuity, namely regular classes at elementary and lower secondary schools, special-needs services in resource rooms, classes for special needs education, and schools for special needs education (Figure 2). The system’s general aim should be to enable children with disabilities and those without disabilities to learn in the same setting to the extent that it is possible. Whether each child is able to understand the course content, truly feel that he/she is participating in the learning activities, feel a sense of accomplishment and in doing so make the best of their time in the classroom and develop the ability to live—these are essential in achieving that aim and there is a need to create an environment for accomplishing those things.” (Central Council for Education’s Elementary and Lower Secondary Education Subdivision, 2012)

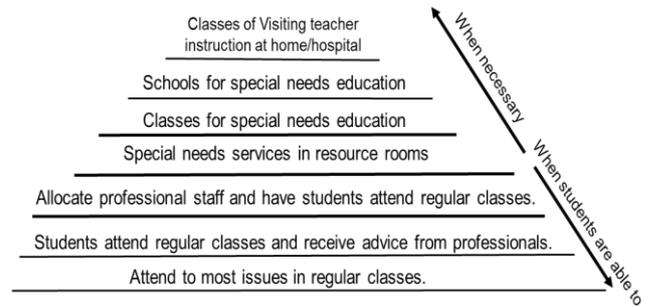


Figure 2. Continuity among a Diverse Range of Learning Settings

Source: Central Council for Education’s Elementary and Lower Secondary Education Subdivision, 2012, Translated into English by Author

Special Needs Education Curriculum Framework: Curriculum Modification for children with disabilities

Curriculum modification according to the degree of learning difficulty caused by disability.

The educational curriculums in Japan are based on the guidelines (i.e., course of study) established for each type of school. Elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, and special-needs schools each have their own curriculums. However, broadly speaking, these curriculums are divided into two categories: regular school and special-needs school.

The curriculum for a special-needs school is composed of “academic and non-academic subjects” and other instructional domains taught at regular schools, as well as instruction in “independence activities (*jiritsu-katsudo*),” which are unique to special-needs education. The objective of *jiritsu-katsudo* is for individual children with disabilities perform activities aimed at their independence; develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and habits necessary for proactively overcoming the difficulties involving their studies or daily lives; and to build a basis for the harmonious growth of mind and body (MEXT, 2018a; 2018b). In special-needs schools for children with IDD, academic/non-academic subjects taught in regular schools are replaced by proprietary subjects. These are subjects designed to educate children with IDD (hereinafter, “subjects for children with IDD”). The curriculum is composed of “subjects/domains” and *jiritsu-katsudo* (MEXT, 2018a; 2018b;2018c).

Children with disabilities enrolled in regular schools are, in principle, subject to the regular curriculum in such schools. However, a special curriculum may be created for children who have learning difficulties caused by disabilities. In such a case, the guidelines for special-needs schools will be used as a reference. The 2017 revision of the curriculum guidelines for elementary schools and junior high schools explained

the procedure for creating special curriculums for children with disabilities as follows:

(1) Instruction through special-needs support services in resource rooms: Provide instruction by determining specific goals and content in reference to those of *jiritsu-katsudo*, as shown in the curriculum guidelines for special-needs schools. This is a clarification that special-needs support services in resource rooms must consist of instruction regarding *jiritsu-katsudo* (MEXT, 2018d).

(2) Special-needs classes: (i) Incorporate the necessary instructional content for *jiritsu-katsudo* by referring to the curriculum guidelines for special-needs schools. (ii) Apply the content for the relevant grade or lower grades according to the learning status of each subject and the items that have already been learned. (iii) If (ii) is too difficult, consider using subjects for children with IDD. (iv) Consider the skills/abilities that should be developed by graduation and meticulously determine the educational content to provide during enrollment. (v) Organize the curriculum based on the objectives of each subject and the integrity of the content (MEXT, 2018d).

Under these circumstances, an important point in the revision of the 2017/2019 curriculum guidelines was the visualization of continuity between the curriculums for elementary, junior high, and high schools, and the curriculum for special-needs schools. In the 2017/2019 curriculum guidelines for special-needs schools, the objective and the content of the subjects for educating children with IDD (hereinafter, “subjects for IDD”) in elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools were organized, including the development of desirable character traits and three pillars of skills and abilities to be fostered: (i) knowledge and skills; (ii) ability to think, judge, and express oneself; and (iii) ability to learn actively. Here, the content of each subject and each stage for children with IDD was carefully examined to ensure their correspondence with each subject and each grade of regular schools. The integrity of each subject and continuity with regular subjects were emphasized (MEXT, 2018c). For example, in mathematics for children with IDD, content ranging from eight-month-old children up to fifth grade was included for the elementary through high school divisions of special-needs schools.

Flexible curriculum had always been permitted, based on actual situations, to help children with severe learning difficulties caused by multiple disabilities. The main features of the previous program included the following: (i) content could be replaced with that of lower grades or divisions; (ii) content could be replaced with that of subjects for children with IDD; and (iii) subjects could be replaced mostly by *jiritsu-katsudo* instruction. In addition to these features, the latest revision includes the following for children with IDD: those who have learned either the content of each subject or the foreign-language activities for stage 3 in the

elementary-school division of disability education may adopt either a portion of each subject taught in regular elementary schools or the objective of foreign-language activities. Those who have learned the content of each subject for stage 2 of the junior high school division and have achieved their goals may adopt a portion of each subject taught in regular junior high schools or elementary schools, or the objective of foreign-language activities (MEXT, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c)

In an attempt to guarantee continuous learning, compatibility of content has been achieved between the curriculum of regular schools and that of special-needs schools as gauged by the accomplishment of the students.

Characteristics of the subjects and teaching methods for children with IDD

The aim of education for children with IDD is to cultivate their social skills and achieve their social independence. Thus, educational goals are the same as for regular schools in that they seek to promote student growth into well-rounded individuals and maximization of their potential. However, the learning characteristics and educational needs of children with IDD gives rise to a slightly different emphasis: nurturing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward desirable social participation.

Pioneers of education for children with IDD sought to make schools truer to life by organizing learning activities that strongly reflected actual life situations. Curriculum designers believed that learning is for the purpose of solving various life challenges and that the content of the school subjects would be acquired throughout the entire process. Thus, learning outcomes were evaluated according to student behavior.

Given these parameters, education for children with IDD was regarded as different from that in regular schools, as for them, the emphasis was on acquisition of the necessary skills to gain independence and participate in society. Thus, curriculum guidelines for special-needs schools allowed for a relatively high level of originality within the goals and content of each subject. Education for children with IDD included content for the undifferentiated developmental stage of around one year old. Thus, some of the instruction was more basic than in regular education. Other content went beyond regular school subjects—e.g., including practical skills that students might find useful in life.

Subjects for children with IDD have been organized by developmental level rather than by grade in consideration of the children’s intellectual, physical, motor-skill, and emotional development; life behavior; sociality; and occupational abilities. There are three levels in the elementary school division, two levels in the junior high school division, and two levels in the high school division (Table 3; MEXT, 2018c). Thus, current education subjects for students with IDD inherited the emphasis on life education contents.

Levels of IDD differ greatly among individuals during their growth period, even if they are in the same grade. Their academic skills, including the ways they learn, also differ. For this reason, creating different levels and providing an overview of each level tends to conform better to individual children’s actual situations than presenting general instructional content for each grade. Teachers can provide more effective instruction when they are free to choose the contents of each subject. Therefore, this approach, as shown above, has been adopted.

In providing instruction, each school must establish its own specific content that is directly life-related life and in accordance with the levels of the children’s IDD and experience. In some cases, different subjects are combined/integrated for teaching, and in others, each subject is taught separately. Efforts must be creative so that children can engage in experiential activities in a realistic setting. Each child should be encouraged to study eagerly with expectations.

Teaching each subject separately involves creating separate time slots for individual subjects, moral education, foreign-language activities, comprehensive learning (this does not apply to the elementary school division), special activities, and independence activities. Combining subjects for teaching means that not only the content of each subject is combined/integrated but also the content of each domain.

Because of the great differences in levels of development and conditions of disability among children with IDD, a teaching method for combining/integrating all or some of the subjects has been allowed. This approach means that group instruction can be designed to cater to individual differences based on these children’s general learning characteristics, according to the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, Article 130 (2).

As a matter of fact, among children enrolled in regular public elementary schools and junior high schools who fall under the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, Article 22 (3), many have IDD. As of May 1, 2017, 11,399 students (74.1%) were enrolled in special-needs classes for those with IDD in elementary schools; 594 students (3.9%) were enrolled in regular classes in elementary schools; 3,789 students (72.7%) were enrolled in special-needs classes for those with IDD at junior high schools; and 227 students (4.4%) were enrolled in regular classes in junior high schools (SNE Division, the ESE Bureau, MEXT, 2018).

Therefore, it is urgently necessary to promote understanding regarding education for children with IDD in regular elementary schools and junior high schools as well, and to provide an education that matches the learning characteristics of children with IDD and meets their needs.

Table 3. Levels and contents of subjects for children with IDD

Level	Content/Purpose
Elementary school division level 1	Children experience, notice and pay attention, gain interest, and steadily acquire basic actions, with direct help from teachers.
Elementary school division level 2	Children imitate teachers’ actions and movements, play, take action with a purpose, and acquire basic socialized behaviour, with direct help from teachers through the use of language.
Elementary school division level 3	Children notice their situations and its order, proactively engage in activities, and acquire behaviour suitable for social life.
Junior high school division level 1	Students engage in activities in a proactive manner, use what they have experienced, consider the order of things, and learn the basics of daily life and social life.
Junior high school division level 2	Students acquire the basics of daily life, social life, and occupational life for the future. Students engage in activities in a proactive manner, make choices in accordance with a purpose, creatively deal with various situations, and acquire skills with a view to future work life.
High school division level 1	This stage mainly involves students’ family life, social life, and work life after graduation according to their age and based on the contents of level 2 of the junior high school division, as well as their life experience so far. Students will learn proactively, acquire basic life habits, social skills, and professional abilities with a view to life after graduation.
High school division level 2	This stage, based on level 1 of the high school division, targets students whose disabilities are relatively minor. It offers practical and developed contents that consider family life after graduation, social life and work life. Students will learn proactively, acquire basic life habits necessary for life after graduation, social skills, and professional abilities.

Source: MEXT, 2018c

In particular, in teaching children with IDD in regular classes, it is necessary to adapt the study tasks. Teachers must develop a common understanding of how study tasks for children with IDD relate to those pursued by their classmates. The following curriculum adoption

process is useful for task adaption: (i) Learning the same task using the same material, (ii) learning the same task using the same material but with easier steps, (iii) learning the same task using different materials, (iv) learning the same theme but with a different task, (v) learning a different theme and different task (Project CHOICE/Early CHOICES, n.d.). A common understanding is also needed regarding these levels in regular classes at which children with IDD can participate.

Number (iv) above, which involves learning the same theme but using a different task, presents a case wherein different subjects may be combined for teaching. Creativity is needed for using the same learning material so that group dynamics can be leveraged to overcome huge differences in individual abilities. This method of education for children with IDD may be useful in special-needs classes in regular schools because such classes have children from different grades with varying developmental stages. In addition, ideas associated with education for children with IDD could be applied to creating inclusive lessons in regular classes.

Discussion

For achieving inclusive education and responding to the diversity of learners (UNESCO, 2005), various countries worldwide are exploring curriculums, teaching methods, and support systems that would allow children with diverse needs to study under the same school system (Agran, Calvin, Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2006).

The United States has implemented measures under the assumption that all children should have access to and study under a regular education curriculum, regardless of whether or not they have any disabilities (Noguchi and Yoneda, 2012). Under this line of reasoning, learning outcomes also should be evaluated according to the standards of regular subjects. McLaughlin (2010) pointed out a tension between fairness and equality in the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, noting that introducing a standards-based individualized education program would obscure the ultimate educational objective for all children, even as the need for responding to the unique needs of individual children with disabilities is being acknowledged. Certainly, careful examination must be made of whether the outcome of special-needs education leads to an equal and fair education if evaluated by the standards of regular education, and how educational content based on the standard of regular education can contribute to independence and social participation of children with disabilities.

In developing countries, inclusive education has been introduced from the outside without giving local governing bodies a chance to implement their own special-needs education, practice integrated education,

or accumulate knowledge based on such experience. Thus, such education is being implemented without fully guaranteeing the quality of education for children with disabilities or, for that matter, children without disabilities (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou 2010). When inclusive education is attempted in a country where a multi-track educational system has not been developed, “inclusion” might become an overriding concern and may result in education that is not effective (Shirogane, 2015; Uehara, 2007).

Japan has introduced a system wherein special-needs schools are places of continuous diverse learning. The current system rose out of special schools (now special-needs schools), which had been providing meticulous instruction based on the type of disability and accumulating a high degree of specialty. Now in Japan, principally, children with disabilities are placed in regular classes in regular schools, though the option of providing a special place of learning is preserved if the children need it to accommodate their particular disabilities. This should be recognized as a form of inclusive education system where nobody is left behind. In order to secure a place of learning that has continuity, the curriculum in each place of learning must also have continuity. Japanese special-needs education has been providing a multi-track curriculum that consists of three courses—regular subjects, subjects for children with IDD, and independence activities—depending on the degree of disability-related learning difficulties. It is especially important for the curriculum of the special needs school to be translated into the regular school setting for special-needs education.

4. CONCLUSION

This research has confirmed that the discussions concerning inclusive education in Japan have been shifting toward content and away from a focus on where such education should occur. The current discussion on curriculum content rather than location constitutes what Wehmeyer (2006) has called a new stage of reform in inclusive education.

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