Perspectives of Education for children with visual impairment and deafblindness in Japan

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(ABSTRACT)
This article reports on the Japanese general education system and current situation of Japanese special education focused on the education for children with visual impairment and multiple disabilities. It submits the main features in the Japanese education for students with visual impairment. The data shows an increasing proportion of visually impaired children with multiple disabilities. In the case of deafblind, there are 334 children with deafblindness in the special schools and 85% of them have other disabilities. Based on the present situation and personal practical experience, it is argued that there is a clear need for making communicative relationship and social support.

THE GENERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM
It was in 1886 that the compulsory education system was started in Japan. In current the school organization system of education, six years of elementary school and three years of lower secondary school for a period of nine years between the age of 6 and 15 years old are compulsory for all children. Basic principles for education are provided for in the Constitution of Japan enacted in 1946 and the Fundamental Law of Education enacted in 1947. More specific provisions relating to the school system, educational administration, financial support and other matters are specified in The School Educational Law and many other education laws and regulations.

Subjects and courses of study for elementary and lower secondary school are prescribed in "The National Curriculum standards " what is called the course of study issued by Monbusho, that is Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. The course of study provides the basic framework for curricula and includes the aim of each subject and the learning objectives and content for each subject at each grade level. The course of study is just basic standards, and is qualitatively different from the National Curriculum of England. There is also the course of study for special education schools. In Japan, there are no national examinations for elementary and lower secondary school students.

After World War II, the educational system was reformed on the report of the US Mission on Education, legislation for compulsory education of disabled children was proposed. In 1956, the "Law Governing Special Measures for the Improvement and Maintenance of Public Special School for the children with Mentally, Physically disability and Health impairment. " was put to effect, resulting in an increase in the establishment of Special schools. The Complete compulsory system for school education was established in 1979, to ensure the opportunity of education for all disabled children including the multiply disabled children.

In fact, there was no administrative assistance for children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in most places before 1993. It was mainly left to teacher's or school's discretion and effort. The part time special class system, that is Resource room
system, is organized from this year as a national policy. However the Part time Special Class system and total integration has already been implemented in some cities in Japan, especially the western area, which started it in 1978.

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM
Disabled children who can hardly be expected to be appropriately educated in ordinary classes in elementary and lower secondary schools are provided with special educational provision in accordance with the kind and degree of their disorder either at special schools or special classes in ordinary schools (Monbusho, 1997). The current system of special education has mainly four faces.

1) Special education in ordinary class rooms
Children are allocated in ordinary class rooms. There is no legal provision for this system. However, team teaching and an extra class teacher system provide educational support for disabled children. It is usually organized depending on head teachers' efforts and decisions.

2) Special education in special classes (full-time)
Special classes in ordinary elementary and lower secondary schools cater for disabled children whose disabilities are not so severe. There are seven types of special classes; special classes for the partially sighted, the hearing impaired, the mentally retarded, physically disabled, health impaired, the speech disordered and the emotionally disturbed. Basically, education is provided in accordance with the National Curriculum Standards of elementary and lower secondary schools, but a special curriculum can be formed according to the conditions of the children.

3) Special Education in special classes (Part time)
This system was started from 1993 as a national system. In principle, it is for pupils and students with mild disabilities who are in ordinary class rooms and move to part time special classes depending upon their needs. They attend general subjects in ordinary class rooms and receive specialized training in part time special classes. The specialized training or lessons aiming for the children to improve and overcome their disabilities are incorporated in the curriculum of elementary and lower secondary schools.

4) Special education in special schools
There are schools for children with relatively severe disabilities. For children with severe disabilities who are unable to attend schools, the visiting teacher program is available where teachers will visit homes, institutions, and hospitals to provide education. In the Japanese special school system, there are five types of schools depending on the category of disability: for blind, deaf, mentally retarded, physically disabled, and health impaired. Recently, the number of children with severe and multiple disabilities has been increasing in most type of special schools.

The total number of special schools showed an increase, but just the number of schools for the mentally retarded is increasing. Other schools keep almost the same number. In the case of mentally retarded, in recent years, many upper secondary schools have been built. This is one of the reasons for the increase in the numbers. Figure 1 shows the trends of enrollment in Special Education. There were two big events in special education in Japan. The first was in 1979, the year when the compulsory system was enforced for school education of all disabled children including the multiply disabled children. This
policy facilitated enrollment of students with disabilities in special schools. However, the population and ratio enrolled in special schools were decreasing until 1993. And students enrolled in special classes also decreased. Where have these disabled students gone? It is rather easier to have an idea that some disabled children moved to ordinary classes of elementary and lower secondary schools. The second big event was the beginning of the part time special class system. This caused an increase in the ratio of the population enrolled in the special education system.

And, one more piece of information about the ratio of the population of children with long term absence. The number of long term absence, means the number of children who are absent from school more than 50 days in a year. This has increased dramatically. Most of them belong to the ordinary school. The report of a governmental committee stated that 37% of pupils with school phobia in lower secondary schools and 23%of primary schools have some problem of achievement in their schools. This is one of the big issues of Japanese education. It is revealed that a considerable number of children in regular classes were facing some difficulties in school learning. Ochiai's study suggested these relation between the number of long term absence and learning difficulty (Ochiai, 1996). Now in Japan, the argument over the necessity to establish educational systems for students with learning difficulties including learning disabilities has begun.

**THE FEATURES OF EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT**

Ordinarily, children who are totally blind are educated in schools for the blind which may be residential, the partially sighted received education in various forms because of the diversity of their educational needs which vary with the degree of visual impairments. Accordingly, the partially sighted requiring overall specific educational treatment are educated in schools for the blind. There are three main features in the Japanese education of visual impaired students. The aims and content of each subject in elementary and lower secondary departments are basically the same as those of ordinary schools, and we have lessons to overcome the various difficulties arising from visual impairment. These lessons were called "educational therapeutic activities" up until now, but the name of these lessons changed as recently as a few months ago. From now on, they are called "activities for independence".

This field of these activities is probably the first one of the main features. These activities include a number of additional curriculum areas that children with visual impairment need to access because their disabilities. The aim is to cultivate necessary knowledge, skills, attitude and habits to improve or overcome a difficulty originated from disabled conditions of the pupil or the student, and thus to build the foundations for a harmonious development of the body and the mind. And contents of this field are health of the body, psychological adjustment, recognition of the environment, motion and movement, and communication. We can arrange lessons based on these contents. For example, in the case of blind children, Instruction in orientation and mobility, Tactile discrimination, and so on. In the case of visual impaired children with multiple disabilities, Making mutual communication through play, Physical movement activities, and so on.

The upper secondary department includes a general course and a specialized course. The specialized course is the second one of the main features. This course includes
health-physical therapy, physiotherapy, physical therapy, music and a piano-tuning course, each aiming at social independence through vocational education. The skills of acupuncture, moxibustion, and massage were brought to Japan from China about 1,200 years ago. These skills continued to be taken up at schools for the blind for vocational education, and today these skill are the major occupations for the blind (kizuka,1990). In 1988, the law was amended to give licence by government.

The third one of main features is the experience of education for children with multiple disabilities. Before 1979, most children with severe and multiple disabilities were exempted or postponed from public school education. However, some schools for the blind had accepted such children and tried education for children with multiple disabilities. The commencement of it was three children with deafblindness. 1950 marked the beginning of education for the deafblind in Japan with the education of these three children at the Yamanashi prefectural school for the blind (Tsuchiya, 1992). This case encouraged other schools for the blind to attempt to teach visually impaired children with other disabilities. The results helped not only to clarify the teaching content and teaching means for deafblind children, but also provided a framework for the education of children with multiple disabilities in general.

CHILDREN WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND MULTIPLE DISABILITIES
The number of the children who entered school for the blind has decreased year after year with the peak in about 1960, and now it is about 4,200 including the infant department, elementary department, lower secondary department, and upper secondary department of all 71 schools for the blind in our country. The trend of smaller numbers of children is particularly noticeable in the elementary and lower secondary departments. In addition to such decreasing numbers of children, there is a trend of the condition of disability becoming more complex. That is, the proportion of blind children in the whole children of the school for the blind is about 40%, and that of the partially sighted children is about 60%. The proportion of the visually impaired children with multiple disabilities is increasing year after year. The proportion of them is about 27% now. Excluding pupils in the specialized course, it is about 50%. To look in detail, at present the proportion of children with multiple disabilities is about 50% in the infant and elementary departments, about 40% in the lower secondary department, and about 28% in the upper secondary department.

CHILDREN WITH DEAFBLINDNESS
In the last year, we took a national survey of deafblind children in special schools (Sugai & Tsuchiya, 1999). The results shows that the total number of children with deafblindness is 353 and the proportion is 0.4%(Table 2). And 96 children, that is 27% of all children with deafblindness are placed in the school for the blind. It is the most high rate in all five types of special schools. In all children with deafblindness, 15% children are just deafblind, and 85% children have other disabilities. Table 3 shows the curricula for deafblind students enrolled in special schools. The numbers of pupils on Interaction with another person and Enjoying movement activities were many. This survey suggests that many children with deafblindness are at an early stage or level concerning their communicative development.
EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP
I worked with a boy whose name is Nobu. He was visual impaired with other disabilities. I was his teacher and he was my student. He could not use verbal communication except a few words. He always became tense and had deep fear of the other person, even his parents. When I met him first, he rejected not only being touched by me but also being prompted to do something. And he never moved from a particular place. It was under the outside tree. Initially, I did not understand what to do for him. What I could do was only to stand by him, and sometimes talked to him in a gentle voice but not prompting him. For 2 months, he had been staying under the tree from the time he came to school in the morning until his mother took him home. And I also stayed there with him. At last, he allowed to me to touch his hair. Little by little, he opened his mind. One day, it was a beautiful autumn day I will never forget, I ventured to talk to him "Would you mind taking a walk?". His reply was, surprisingly and not surprisingly, "OK, go". This was the first time that he moved with me. 6 months had passed since I met him. After that, we made an effort to deepen our relationship, and now he goes to small workshop everyday. We often say it is important to accept the client. However, I feel in the case of this boy, it was more important whether he accepted me or not. Because, our relationship developed through a chance when he accepted my prompting. My concept of relationship has been widened thanks to him.

Making communicative relationships is the main area of education for deafblind children, and also for multiple disabled children. They should learn to communicate, and we should learn to communicate with them. Communication is a dynamic process where both partners should learn, and where both of them share feeling. Dr. Mcinnes (1993), one of the most experienced educators of the deafblind in the world, said "Communication is the one area of programming for children with multiple disabilities which takes more effort, more time, and more persistence than any other. Yet without communication all other programming is unlikely to be successful in the long run." From now on, we have to not only teach but also learn and share. We, disabled and non-disabled, as human being, need a variety of communications and relationships. We live in a world with diversity. It is necessary to proceed reform of educational system to the direction of integration or inclusion. At the same time, it is necessary to reform of individual's concept of educational relationship.

CONCLUSION
There are lots of issues in this field, early intervention, curriculum study, transition program, staff development, and so on. However, the present situation shows an increasing proportion of children with multiple disabilities, then consequently, it is desirable to prepare individualized curricula and carry out the individualized guidance, especially focused on making communicative relationships. And my view is that we need to explore, firstly in the micro cosmos like a mutual interaction between children and teacher, and secondarily in the macro cosmos like a social system including the educational system. When we meet a boy with multiple disabilities, we must learn the knowledge about multiple disabilities, and also the knowledge about him. And a social system means, in short, the accumulation of each relationship or the networks of each relationship. It needs
further practices aimed at making effective communication with each child and further support through which each child will step forth to the macro world in future.

References
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