

# **Selected Models of Special Education in Japan**

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Special education in Japan has a history of about 120 years, dating back to 1878 when pioneering education for blind and deaf children was started (Misawa, 1994). Special education for children with disabilities was launched on a national scale after World War II, although some attempts had been made before the war. In 1979, education at schools for children with mental retardation, motor handicaps, and chronic diseases was made compulsory. This was landmark progress in special education and also signaled the beginning of nine-year compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 15.

## **Number of Special Education Schools and Pupils with Disabilities in Japan**

Table 1 shows the number of special education schools and pupils who were 6 to 15 years of age in May, 2001 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2002).

Table 1 Number of special education schools and pupils		
	Schools	Pupils
Schools for the blind	71	1,169
Schools for the deaf	107	3,499
Schools for the intellectually disabled	525	30,535
Schools for the physically disabled	198	12,173
Schools for the health impaired	95	2,913
Total	996	50,289

In Table 2, the number of children with disabilities in kindergartens, elementary, lower secondary and upper secondary departments at special education schools is shown (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2002). The number of children at home due to profoundly severe impairments was 147. Teachers

are sent to homes, hospitals, and institutions to offer guidance to these children. This so-called visiting or itinerant-teaching education is conducted nationwide to extend educational opportunities to as many children as possible (Misawa, 1994))

Table 2 Number of children with disabilities (May, 2001)

	Kindergarten	Elementary	J.H.*.	H.**	Total
Schools for the blind	239	698	471	2,593	4,001
Schools for the deaf	1,357	2,078	1,421	1,973	6,829
Schools for the mentally retarded, physically disabled and health impaired	127	26,170	19,451	35,494	81,242
Total	1,723	28,946	21,343	40,060	92,072

\* Junior High School    \*\* High School

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### **Curriculum**

Curricula at special schools are subject to various statutory regulations, and the curriculum outline is prescribed by the Ministry of Education's Council of Study. It is called "the Course of Study", or "Gakushyu-shido-yoryo" in Japanese. The Course of Study is amended as and when necessary. A curriculum has to be organized by each school in accordance with the conditions of the school and the community and student's needs. For this reason each school has considerable leeway in designing its curriculum. The Course of Study divides the curricula at primary and secondary schools into three domains: subject study, moral education, and special activities.

### **Jiritu Katudo**

Primary and secondary sections of special schools must have a special domain called "Jiritu Katudo" in Japanese, which may be called "Educational Therapeutic Activities" or "Activities for Living an Independent Life" in English. The Jiritu Katudo includes sensory-motor, orientation & mobility, social skills, auditory, and speech training.

### **Adapted Physical Education and Sport**

In special education schools, adapted physical education and sport are essential for maintaining and improving the physical fitness of children with disabilities. Adapted

sport and new games are developed and made available to children with disabilities, and these activities are a means of social participation and self-actualization (Nakata, 1998; Yabe, Kusano, and Nakata, 1994).

### **Individual Teaching Plan**

The Course of Study mandates development of individual teaching plans in specific areas for each child with a disability. Individual teaching plans are to be developed in cooperation with parents or caregivers (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2002).

### **Assistive Technology**

Assistive technology such as computers with voice output, and augmented and alternative communication tools is available to children with disabilities.

### **On-the-Job Teacher Training**

Efforts to develop teachers' qualities and abilities must be continued throughout their teaching career. Teachers are offered as many study opportunities as possible during their careers so that they may fully discharge their duties. The Board of Education at local governments carries out seminars and guidance for teachers, sends instructors to college, and takes other steps (Misawa, 1994).

### **Discussion**

Would it be possible for special school teachers in developing countries to make use of selected models developed in Japan? One model may be useful for special school teachers in developing countries, and another may fall into disfavor. A curriculum or task designed for children living in one environment may not be *ecologically valid* for children living in another environment (Baine, 1991). A curriculum designed for one environment may teach skills *not* required in another environment, and may fail to teach skills that *are* required.

As Baine (1994) has pointed out, a number of problems arise when curricula designed in developed countries such as Japan are adopted for use in developing countries. In order to solve these problems, joint studies conducted by researchers and professionals in Japan and developing countries are needed.

## References

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