

<Brief Note>

Inclusive Education for Foreign Students with Special Needs in Japan:

An Approach by the Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy

Norimune KAWAI* · Nagako MATSUMIYA* · Midori OTANI**

Noriko KAWATANI*** · William J. WARD****

Abstract

The purpose of this manuscript is to introduce the practice of Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy, a private educational facility that provides education for disabled foreign children in English, in Japan. The number of children in need of special education in Japan continues to increase. In addition, the number of foreign national children who need Japanese language instruction is also increasing. From this situation, it is not difficult to imagine the increase of foreign children with disabilities; however, the actual number is not clear yet. In the future, schools will be required to handle children who need both Japanese and special needs. Hoping that the practice introduced in this study will help to consider the way of support in Japanese schools, the report of the authors' observation at Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy and the interview with the teachers there are introduced. Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy values "Playful learning," which offers music, arts, crafts, and movement in addition to academic learning throughout the day, for those who like to move about on a regular basis. A wide variety of manipulative are also available, and their uses are three-fold: addressing sensory needs, kinesthetic/ tactile learning reasons.

Keywords: inclusive education, alternative education, English language education

I. Introduction**1. An overview of the special education system in Japan**

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted at the 61st United Nations General Assembly session held in December 2006 and came into effect in May 2008. Japan signed this convention in September 2007 and ratified it in 2014. One of the objectives of the CRPD is to create a convivial society, which refers to a society where people with disabilities, who conventionally were not necessarily in an environment where they could fully participate in the society, can actively participate and contribute to the society. According to the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (2012), Japan has made the decision to aim

at forming an inclusive education system for building a convivial society, which is an all-citizen-participating society where everybody respects each other's personality and individuality, supports each other, and accepts the differences among people. In order to create an inclusive and convivial society, it is necessary for the Japanese Government to set up the Inclusive Education System to cultivate diversity among school-age children to accept their differences; however, the current Inclusive Education System in Japan is biased towards Special Needs Education.

According to the report of the Special Committee on the Future Direction of Special Needs Education of the Subdivision on Elementary and Secondary Education of the Central Council for Education (2005), the Inclusive Education System refers to "a system that enables children with and without disabilities to study together under the aim of developing respect for the differences in people and maximally developing the mental and physical

* Graduate School of Education, Hiroshima University

** Graduate School of Education, Shimane University

*** Shimane University Affiliated School

**** Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy

abilities of children regardless of the presence or absence of disabilities, and to realize a free society in which every person can effectively participate.”

In the current system, children with disabilities who formerly were persuaded to enroll in special schools gained alternative choices for educational placements (Forlin, Kawai, & Higuchi, 2015). Although an education board of each municipality determines school enrollment, it must respect children's and guardians' opinions as much as possible (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), 2013). Overall, the school reform towards inclusive education was promoted rapidly in 12 years after the long history of segregated education in Japan.

2. Challenges of Inclusive Education

There are challenges to conducting inclusive education even though the special needs education system was established. For example, Han, Kohara, Yano, and Aoki (2013) points out that separate education and inclusive education are coexisting, and the human and material environment has not been fully developed. Miyoshi (2009) argues that although this system is based on the concept of normalization, actual practices in schools differ from the concept, and segregated education continues. In fact, according to the MEXT (2018) report, there were 1,135 special needs schools and 60,190 special needs classes at the elementary and secondary levels. The number of students enrolled in these schools or classes has been increasing even though the total number of students in compulsory education has been decreasing year by year, and this is a retrograde phenomenon towards inclusive education (Institute for Global Education and Culture, 2007).

3. The population of non-Japanese children who do not have enough Japanese language skills

The number of non-Japanese children at public schools who do not have enough Japanese language skills and who need remedial lessons has reached a record 40,485 as of May 2018 according to the latest survey by MEXT (2019a). One of the biggest challenges for them is their education (Yamamoto & Li, 2012). The number, up 17.9% from the previous annual survey conducted in 2017, accounted for

42.9% of the 80,119 non-Japanese children at public elementary schools, high schools and other public facilities across the country, according to the survey. The survey looks at children who cannot hold simple daily conversations in Japanese and/or those who have difficulty learning at school due to poor secondary language skills. Of the 40,485 children, 79.3% take additional Japanese language lessons. Recently, MEXT (2019b) found that 19,654 (15.9%) of foreign children who are eligible for Japanese compulsory education do not attend elementary or middle schools. Because the multicultural population is to keep growing, the role of education in Japan needs to shift from providing education to accommodate an exclusive and homogenous society to a system of education where it can meet the complex and sensitive needs of ethnic minority youth (Saki, 2018).

As Yamamoto and Li (2012) suggest, foreign family members struggle with the Japanese public education system. Some of them may go to international schools if they are rich enough or their employers fund them the tuition to send their children there. Specifically, it is difficult for foreign children to find good resources if they have disabilities. Of course, there are 1,135 special needs schools, 60,190 special needs classrooms, and 5,283 schools locate resource rooms (MEXT, 2018) so that parents can consult these schools, classrooms, and/or resource rooms. However, due to language and/or cultural barriers, many parents who have children with disabilities or special needs hesitate to bring their children to Japanese schools because they and their children do not have enough Japanese language abilities and feel exclusive to Japanese society (Saki, 2018). An ever-growing multiethnic population in Japan creates many challenges for such new multicultural families in the present state of Japanese society.

4. Current situation to support foreign children with disabilities

As already mentioned, the number of children who need special support is increasing, and the number of children who need Japanese language instruction is also increasing. Since these two numbers are increasing, it is natural to imagine that

the number of children who need both special support and Japanese language instruction is also increasing. However, the actual number and situation of foreign children who need such special supports have not been clarified. For this reason, also the needs of schools providing support are not clear and so is the needs of parents of those children.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to study about the situation of those children and also the issues of the school-side on how to support those children. As a first step to the future study, we introduce the implementation of a private institute called the Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy (MPIJ IA) which provides education for children with disabilities in English, in Japan. At the moment, since the support system for foreign children with disabilities at Japanese public schools is not fully developed yet, private educational facilities play important roles in foreign families in Japan specifically those who have children with disabilities. Although these facilities are not free of charge, their tuitions are much cheaper than international schools in Japan, they provide after-school programs for those who go to Japanese public schools, and they provide flexible learning environments for diverse learners. For example, they create student-centered environments that are easily accepted by children with disabilities or special educational needs. However, the detail information such as the curricula, qualifications of teachers, students' backgrounds of these facilities has not introduced in academic papers in Japan.

5. Purpose

The purpose of the current article is to provide descriptive information on one of the private educational facilities in Japan, the MPIJ IA, based on the authors' site visits and interviews for teachers there. The reason for choosing the MPIJ IA in the current study is because it is one of the oldest private educational facilities that provide education in English for foreign students and returnees with special needs in Japan. This research note will become a hint for Japanese public schools to find out a better way to accept foreign students by considering their diverse backgrounds.

II. About the MPIJ IA

1. An overview of MPIJ IA

(1) The mission and vision

MPIJ IA, originally called MPIJ at the time of foundation, was founded in 2008, and the passion for learning and fun his students show, through the smiles on their faces, continues to grow every year. The mission of the MPJ IA is to grow the academics and social potential of children who learn and think differently from "neurotypical" children. Their mission is to offer an environment that fosters teaching each child according to his or her unique learning style, realizing that one method of teaching doesn't "fit all". This school year, there are four students, with some attending full-time, and some attending part-time. All the students enjoy one-on-one attention, as needed, and a principal and an assistant teach every weekday, Monday to Friday, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm.



Figure 1 Reading and writing activities of a student with autism

A typical school day is academics and social games each morning, with a snack around 10:00 am or so. Lunchtime is 11:30 am, followed by daily adventures in a nearby park. After the park activity, academics and games continue, with frequent breaks and “tricks,” interspersed between the lessons to maintain attention spans and energy levels. The students help guide the direction and intensity of their learning, with the bench-mark on how the day is going being the glow of their smile and the warmth of their laughter (Figure 1).

(2) Teachers and staff’s ways to look at their students

Teachers and staff at MPIJ IA understand that not all students learn in the same way, and some social skills come easier to some children than others. Therefore, they offer an environment where students are taught according to their potential abilities and at their own pace. They look at a child with a developmental disability is not developmentally incapable, he or she is more intelligent than current or previous academic output that has been demonstrated so that MPIJ IA teachers and staff never perceive their students’ errors and mistakes negatively and try to fit their needs and difficulties.

2. Accommodations and modifications provided by MPIJ IA

Learning is not restricted to traditional classroom settings with the implementation of online learning (Peng & Jen, 2018). Therefore, the ideas of accommodations and modifications are important to promote an inclusive learning environment and have students celebrate individual differences. In order to promote accommodations and modifications, MPIJ IA provides small class sizes with a student-to-teacher ratio of 4:1, special accommodations for students who just need to “take a break,” pastoral care for students and teachers, such as counseling, to address issues and concerns, and nontraditional classroom settings in which children can move around as they learn, if needed.

3. Promoting an active learning environment.

Some students have social, sensory, and academic learning challenges. For those students, it is necessary for teachers and staff to understand

sensory processing issues and work around them enable the best learning environment, and to provide additional support for learning in a “non-traditional settling” so that they will simultaneously be supported to develop their academic skills, social competency, and pragmatic language. MPIJ IA encourages students to self-advocate to grow in themselves-awareness, build themselves-confidence, and improve their ability to communicate in today’s global world.

III. Programs of the MPIJ IA

1. Academic Programs

MPIJ IA is currently aligning with Clonlara School, which is an accredited school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. This school was founded in 1967 to support students who were looking for an alternative approach to learning. Clonlara School is fully accredited, a worldwide Home-Based Education Program. The on-line path will lead to a High School Diploma from a Clonlara School Certified On-Line Program, which will satisfy American college application requirements. Table 1 shows Clonlara School’s subject Areas, courses, and the number of academic credits required to obtain a high school diploma. Their mission and philosophy, offering a tangible framework that empowers each learner to take charge of their own education. The model is applicable at all age levels and is inclusive of all students regardless of learning style and differences. As reading the following descriptions of each step in the process, please note that they do not necessarily have to occur in order, depending on the step that is most relevant to a student’s learning at the time. Students choose a topic and then they brainstorm what they want to learn or explore. It is important to consider their curiosities, interests, strengths, goals, challenges, passions, talents, and needs.

Table 1 Subject Areas, Courses, and The Number of Academic Credits Required to Graduate (Clonlara School, n.d.)

Subject Areas	Required Courses	Number of Credits Required
English	English	4.0
	Speech	0.5
Social Studies	American History	1.0
	American Government	0.5
	Geography	0.5
Mathematics		2.0
Science		3.0
Physical Fitness		1.5
Electives		9.0
Total Academic Credits		22.0

(1) A description of the Full Circle Learning

Clonlara School (n.d.) introduces the following 10 steps to nurture students' lifelong learning (Figure 2): The first step is Pre-Search. Pre-Search involves the further exploration of the topic to fine-tune the study. Create a 'guiding question' that their study will focus on answering. The second step is Research. Research is the identification of resources, a mentor, and the amount of time to be spent on the study. It is the laying of the groundwork for the proposal, the determination of how to dig deeper into the topic and how to approach the topic/project. It also includes setting the end goal of the study. The third step is writing a proposal. A proposal is a document that outlines the proposals made for the improvement, alteration of or addition to an existing system of education. Although it is usually created by administrators and teachers, students also need to actively think about what they want to discover, how they learn, what resources they use.

In order to promote active learning, it is important to consult with mentors. The Mentor can be a parent, teacher, tutor, community member, family member, another student or an expert in the subject. By working with a mentor, a student will have more chance to learn better than do everything by him/herself. Fieldwork is the step in which the student progresses from a simple knowledge base to the discovery of new content or greater skill. Fieldwork can be conducted in any environment such as a library, a trip, a classroom, or a group. A summary is the record of students' learning experiences. It includes a listing of the resources

used, the discoveries that students made, and the student's experiences during the study.

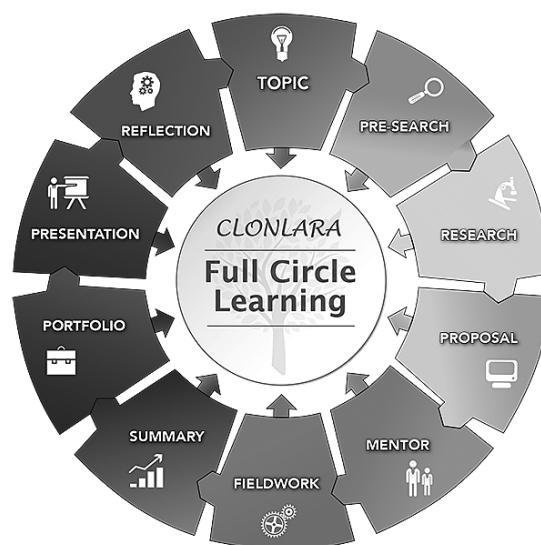


Figure 2 A description of the foundation for lifelong learning (Clonlara School, n.d.)

The Portfolio is a completed product that shows students' learning experiences. A portfolio is a basket of assets that can include stocks, bonds, commodities, currencies, cash equivalents, as well as their fund counterparts. The Presentation may be an exhibit, a demonstration, a performance, a speech, or a meeting with a support team to discuss the learning progress by sharing skills and knowledge that are obtained through the previous steps. It may be completely oral or written materials with visual displays. The final step is Reflection. The Reflection process address questions such as: "What did you

discover about how you learn?” “What worked and what didn’t?” This may be shared in multiple places, including the summary, portfolio, and/or presentation.

2. Other Program and Activities

In MPIJ IA, children with any special needs (6-18 years old) such as ADHD, Dyslexia, Down syndrome, Autism are accepted. Play Attention is a computer-based program to improve attention skills. Students wear an armband that reads brain activities and gives them the opportunities to control the games by their mind alone. Focusing their attention moves the screen characters and changes their attention and results. Play Attention is a series of games that were created in 1994 and currently holds five American patents. It is being used in thousands of learning centers, doctors’ offices, after school programs and schools. Play Attention started in Japan in 2015.

In addition to academics, MPIJ IA offers music, arts, crafts, and movement throughout the day, for those who like to move about on a regular basis. A wide variety of manipulative are also available, and their uses are three-fold: addressing sensory needs, kinesthetic/ tactile learning reasons, and having fun with teachers and other students. Playful learning is one of the feathers of MPIJ IA’s school day. Specifically, younger students or those who have difficulty with sustaining their attentions visit a nearby park to engage in outdoor gross- motor fun, including sandbox time, choice of two slides, swings, jungle gym/monkey bars, rope walking horizontally, fort-imagining.

Students have the freedom to learn and complete coursework at their own pace, ensuring them the flexibility to work whenever and wherever fits their busy schedules. Students can start the program at any point in the year and receive guidance from teachers who help set their educational goals, support and monitor their progress, and assist them in the development of a self-designed course.

IV. Discussions

In MPIJ IA, caring teachers and stimulating

curriculum and teaching material nurture each child’s motivation of learning. They work hard to celebrate students by encouraging exploration, emotional growth, fostering positive learning experiences, and fun. Teachers who are keen on special needs education and inclusive education sometimes forget about what core values of education are. If teachers only rely on an extensive amount of knowledge and experience, they could look through colored spectacles and never look at children’s potentials. Teachers need to observe their students humbly and earnestly and plan on what they could do best for their students.

Special needs children require specific attention and care to develop children’s skills and creativity. Finding the right schooling for their children is always a challenge, regardless of where families are based. However, when children with disabilities or special needs struggle with learning and/or social aspects and they live away from their native country with limited access to the local language, this may easily become an overwhelming task for them and their family members. Therefore, MEXT needs to plan on allowing foreigners to become teachers for students from different cultures. It is also important for them to learn such educational facilities for foreign students to promote a truly inclusive environment for any students including non-Japanese, Japanese, students with disabilities or special needs, and those without disabilities or special needs.

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(2020. 2. 14受理)

日本の特別なニーズのある外国籍生徒のためのインクルーシブ教育

The Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy による取組

川合 紀宗

広島大学大学院教育学研究科

松宮奈賀子

広島大学大学院教育学研究科

大谷みどり

島根大学大学院教育学研究科・教職大学院

川谷のり子

島根大学附属学園

WARD, William J.

Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academy

日本の公立学校への入学を希望する外国人の子供は、国際人権規約およびその他の協定に基づいて無料で受け入れられる。しかし、こうした子供たちへの教育は義務ではない。文部科学省（2019）は、日本の義務教育を受ける資格のある外国人の子供の19,654人（15.9%）が小学校や中学校に通っていないことを明らかにした。彼らの一部は、家族が十分に裕福である、または、両親の雇用主が子供たちをインターナショナルスクールに送るための授業料に資金を提供している場合、インターナショナルスクールに行くことがある可能性がある。具体的には、障害のある外国人の子供の場合、良いリソースを見つけることは困難である。もちろん全国には1,135の特別支援学校や60,190の特別支援学級、それから5,283校に通級指導教室が設置されており、保護者がこれらの学校、学級、教室に相談できるようになっている。しかし、言語や文化の壁により、障害や特別なニーズのある子供をもつ多くの親は、子供を日本の学校に連れて行くことをためらう。したがって、The Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academyのような私立の学校や教育施設は、こうした家族に対して特に重要な役割を果たしている。本稿では、留学生に対する日本の特別支援教育制度の現状を紹介する。次に、The Maximizing Potential in Japan International Academyによるアプローチを紹介する。最後に、障害や特別なニーズのある外国人の子供に質の高い教育を提供するための在り方について述べる。

キーワード：インクルーシブ教育、オルタナティブ教育、英語教育