

## Why isn't inclusive education widespread in Japan?

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### 1. There is one question that always comes to my mind.

When we talk about education for children with disabilities, a simple question always comes to mind.

After the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities was amended, the Act for Eliminating Discrimination Against People with Disabilities was enacted and implemented, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified, the number of students in schools or classes for special needs education was expected to decrease. However, it increased since the ratification of the convention, and it will continue to do so. Considering that the number of children and students has been decreasing nationwide, this growth is not normal.

This situation does not make sense at all. Although the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities aims to achieve "the realization of a cohesive society," segregation is in progress in schools. Why is this happening?

I believe that one of the reasons is an obstinate belief in "capability," which has been passed down since the educational system was promulgated in the Meiji era.

I want to share with you an unforgettable memory. It was Saturday, April 6, 2002, the first Saturday after the five-day school week was adopted. A TV program was featuring a cram school where children were studying because their schools were off and a public lower secondary school that was conducting a remedial lesson.

The expression "Yutori education," which originated from mass media, has spread in society along with the idea of a decline in academic ability, and public opinion has come to believe that children who are studying and living without cramming are lazy and should feel ashamed.

I cannot remove this from my mind because this was a symbolic event wherein the passion of reviewing education from children's point of view was overridden by the values of a merit-based system.

### 2. Market mechanisms have eroded the world of education.

Another reason why inclusive education is not more widespread is the market mechanisms that have eroded the educational world. Radical merit-based, evaluation-based, and performance-based systems, in which free competition was thought to solve everything, have spread throughout the educational world.

Needless to say, it takes a long time to raise a child. Schools are not factories, and children are neither products nor merchandise. No one will disagree about this. However, most people who nod in acceptance at these statements will claim that education needs

competition, scores are an easy way to judge children's academic ability, and there is nothing wrong with getting things done quickly and efficiently.

We have already accepted market mechanisms in the educational world and disseminate it day by day. Teachers, guardians, and children live in a global, liberal economic, capitalistic, consumption-focused society.

Evidently, the concepts of inclusive education and market mechanisms are totally different. These concepts do not need to compete with each other, and some fields, such as healthcare, welfare, and education, should not rely on market mechanisms or free competition.

You may be then wondering why inclusive education has spread in the United States, which is an extremely advanced country in terms of its economy, but not in Japan.

I think this is because there was already a culture of inclusion in the United States before the idea of a neoliberal economy was even developed. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (current IDEA) and the Americans with Disability Act were enacted in 1975 and 1990, respectively. These legislations were enacted after the United States experienced several civil rights movements to protest the spread of racism across the country (e.g., the civil rights movement in the 1960s by African Americans) and to protest the Vietnam War in the 1970s. These movements spread the idea of inclusion and equality.

In Japan, liberation movements protested the discrimination against Buraku people, females, and people with disabilities, as well as ethnic discrimination. In the field of education, education of children with disabilities and foreign residents, gender equality education and antiwar and peace education, have also been diligently address in Japan. Japan is now challenged and questioned whether the country would accept, disseminate, and radicate the idea of inclusion.

### 3. Japanese people breathed the "concept of eugenics" as if it were air and drank it as if it were water.

It has been reported that people with intellectual disabilities were forced to be sterilized under the Eugenic Protection Act. Although people with disabilities were forced to be hospitalized for sterilization, no one was accused of a crime, and both national and local governments encouraged this policy until 1996, which was just 20 years ago. This was happening all around the country, but most of us went about our daily lives without even thinking that such a thing was occurring.

This fact became public for the first time when people with disabilities themselves who were being forcibly sterilized reported this problem to the media.

We Japanese breathed the "concept of eugenics" as if it were air and drank it as if it were water.

The concept of eugenics, which is embedded in our lives, might have been the reason for the Sagami-hara stabbings, which were committed in Tsukui Yamayurien, a facility for people

with intellectual disabilities in Sagamihara, many sympathies to the perpetrators on the Internet, and supported issues about prenatal testing and legislation about death with dignity.

Before enrolling in elementary school, students undergo medical checkups. On the basis of the medical results, experts allocate children who are considered to have a disability to schools or classes for special needs education, and teachers recommend these children to go to schools or classes for special needs education. Underlying belief of these actions is the concept of eugenics after all.

It has been said that Japan has the largest number of mental hospitals in the world. The average duration of hospitalization for psychosis in Japan is 270 days compared with 28 days in other developed countries. More than 100,000 patients have been hospitalized for 5 years or more, and some patients spend most of their lives (30 or 40 years) in mental hospitals. Furthermore, some people with intellectual disability are forced into long hospitalizations. The segregation policy, which was implemented by the national government to avoid affecting economic development, was the underlying cause of this trend.

When people with mental disabilities are discharged from hospitals and try to live in a community, the local residents would usually launch an opposition movement.

Looking at the history and current situation in Japan with regard to disabilities, a single conclusion can be drawn.

#### 4. People with disabilities and their guardians are guided.

I often hear the statement "because people have a better understanding of special needs education" or "because the disabled person himself/herself or his/her guardians chose to go to a school for special needs education," which make it sound like children with disabilities have no choice with regard to education.

However, decisions should be made children with disabilities and his/her family, obtaining correct and sufficient information, deliberating on certain issues, and consultations. Is sufficient information being provided to people who need it?

I also hear many totally different stories, such as "I was told by an elementary school principal that this school was not for disabled children"; "I felt I was being implicitly refused when told by a teacher that there were no appropriate facilities or specialists for disabled children"; "the mood was becoming somber while talking to a teacher"; "it was recommended in a roundabout way to send my child to a school for special needs education"; "I cannot trust the school, and I am worried about sending my child to this school"; and so on and so forth. I can feel the conflict in their minds: the children and their guardians feel anxious, disappointed, and were forced to give up.

I believe that children with disabilities and their guardians are induced and forced to choose schools or classes for special needs education, not that "they have better understanding" and "choose".

## 5. Schools are essentially places for inclusion.

If you think this way, you may be able to understand that educational issues for children with disabilities are issues that also affect the whole culture of education in Japan. Inclusive education is not only a concept that can improve the education of children with disabilities but is also an important aspect in the education of all children.

Education reflects the era and the whole society. It is not too much to say that education is restricted by laws or ordinances and is affected by politics, the economy, directives of the national or local governments, and the leaders' way of thinking in specific situations.

Therefore, the educational system cannot be changed without discussing the issues of institutional reform, political reform, and the choice of government. However, once going back to the basic focus of educational activities, you would find that a school is a place where children meet other children and teachers and where teachers and guardians meet each other. Education is an essential act that directly involves people with each other. In other words, schools are essential places for inclusion.

The places where education is provided are always established by the involvement of individuals, although how the environment around education and schools changes. Therefore, such places, where people meet and become involved with each other, need to be inclusive.

Inclusive education begins with being together. If this is not achieved, inclusive education will never gain a foothold in Japan. I believe that on-site teachers have the power to bring about this change.