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Rethinking the History of Inclusive Education in Japan:

Focusing on the Movement towards Inclusive Education in the 1970s

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Abstract

The aim of this working paper is to revisit the meaning of learning in traditional schools by reviewing the Kanai struggle, which was one part of the movement towards inclusive education in the late 1970s and the early 1980s in Japan. From the Kanai struggle, it is found that “Learning through Conflict” is essential in traditional schools in an age of diversity.

Section 1 will explain the social movement against special education and segregation by persons with disabilities in the 1970s. Advocators of this movement tried to change traditional schools, as well as the entire Japanese society. Section 2 will examine the Kanai struggle and explore how learning in traditional schools, and the schools themselves, were re-defined throughout the struggle. Throughout the struggle, supporters had achieved the idea of “Learning through Conflict” and they re-defined traditional schools as the place where all students can be present without fear of segregation or exclusion. In conclusion, we will discuss the current trends regarding the education of children with disabilities in Japan. To re-make traditional schools as an inclusive space, it is notable that learning in traditional schools must be changed.

Keywords: History of education in Japan, the 1970s, Inclusive Education, Exclusion from traditional schools, Learning in traditional schools

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Introduction

The purpose of this working paper is to revisit the meaning of learning in traditional schools by reviewing the Kanai struggle, which was one part of the movement towards inclusive education in the late 1970s and the early 1980s in Japan.

We are facing an age of “Inclusion” in education. Inclusion is a concept that has appeared since the 1990s in world organizations. In 1990, the UNESCO, World Conference on Education for All asked Member States to ensure the education of persons with disabilities. In response to this, the World Conference on Special Needs Education was held in Salamanca, Spain in 1990. The Salamanca Statement was signed. The Statement was the first time to present inclusive education as a universal goal to the world. At that time, children with special educational needs often went to special schools. Considering this situation, the Salamanca Statement proposed that those with special needs should have access to traditional schools. It demands an important reform of traditional schools.

In 2006, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted by the United Nations. CRPD emphasizes a universal goal of inclusive education. It was ratified by Japan in 2008. Article 24 of the convention is that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability. Also, it was stipulated that a Reasonable Accommodation of a persons with disabilities’ requirements must be provided. Inclusive education has caught global attention as a

universal goal.

While the western world has moved towards inclusive education, we have faced an age of special *needs* education in Japan. Special education (*Tokushu Kyōiku*) had focused on types and degrees of disabilities, whereas special needs education (*Tokubetsu Shien Kyōiku*) have focalized on educational needs of children with disabilities (Tsuge, 2013, pp. i - ii). The government’s policy changed to special needs education in 2007. Due to this, the statistical survey by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has found that the number of special-needs schools and special-needs classes has increased gradually⁽¹⁾. Recent investigations have demonstrated that special needs education is functioning as a separation system in education (Ishikawa & Takaoka, 2012, p.34). Moreover, some researchers have proposed that the development of special needs education conceals the exclusion of children with disabilities from traditional schools and classes (Kokuni et al, 2015, p.1).

On the other hand, some important contentions against exclusion from traditional schools were proposed in the movement towards inclusive education (the movement against segregation and exclusion from traditional schools) in Japan, which began in the 1970s. One typical example of the radical movement towards inclusive education was the Kanai struggle, which was held in 1978 and continued until 1983. Throughout the Kanai struggle, “learning” in traditional schools and “traditional schools” themselves were re-defined.

Previous Studies

From the 1990s, investigations from sociology (mostly in disability studies) have focused on the social movement by persons with disabilities against discrimination and segregation in the 1970s (*Shōgai Tōjisha Undō*). For example, Tateiwa (2003, pp.258-353) discusses *Aoi Shiba no Kai*, which was a radical movement against segregation by persons with disabilities. In recent years, some studies of pedagogy have focused on the Kanai struggle. For example, Kokuni(2016, pp.161-71) carefully examined the process of the Kanai struggle.

In contrast, most studies of pedagogy have not focused on the movement against exclusion from traditional schools, as well as the Kanai struggle. The reason why most researchers in pedagogy have missed the importance of the Kanai struggle and the movement against exclusion was that the movement was conceived as political strife, not as an educational movement.

1. The emergence of opinions toward Inclusive Education around the 1970s

The purpose of Section 1 is to examine the brief history of inclusive education in Japan as an example of the citizens' movement against making special schools compulsory for children with disabilities in and around the 1970s. This movement led to much debate between special education and inclusive education, which provides us a key to rewrite the existing history of special education in Japan.

During this time some people organized resistance against pushing children with disabilities into special schools. Although most people did not necessarily accept the idea, a few people embraced it.

1.1. Post-war Pedagogy, "Development" of Children and Special Schools

As argued by many researchers who support special schools, the 1970s was a significant turning point in the history of special education in Japan. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government decided to accommodate all children with disabilities who applied to special schools in 1974, and subsequently the Japanese government also decided to make special schools for disabled children compulsory by law in 1979. Most researchers and historians who approve of special schools have stressed the historical significance of making them compulsory from the point of view that they guarantee the right to educate children with disabilities (*Hattatsu-Hoshō Ron*).

The right for children with disabilities to receive education did not exist before 1979. Before special schools were made compulsory, there were a lot of children with disabilities who were rejected to attend either traditional or special schools. Under these conditions, most researchers and parents of children with disabilities in favor of the idea of special schools worked cooperatively to advocate the establishment of special schools. They considered making special schools compulsory to be clearly in accordance with the wishes of everyone (They also published periodical magazines named "*Minna no Negai*"). They naturally believed that there should be more emphasis on the social problems that resulted from the shortage of special schools. As already discussed, by the 1970s, children with disabilities had difficulty obtaining education, as they were granted special dispensations from attending traditional schools or because of the absence of special schools. In short, the Japanese educational system for disabled children was far

behind that of western countries.

Therefore most parents expressed their hope and desire to establish more and more special schools in order to educate and cure their children with disabilities. Specialists on special education, social welfare, and rehabilitation called on the government to establish more special schools in order to guarantee the development of children with disabilities' healthy minds and bodies. At that time, "development (*Hattatsu*)" was a keyword that was popularized by developmental science theories from Marxian theorists. Researchers being in accordance with these theories had assumed that teachers should protect children's life courses from industrial society and competitive society with their educational practices. These theories of developmental science were viewed as an important part of leftist educational practices of the time—the 'old-left'. From this point of view, special schools were important laboratories to apply scientific knowledge to children with disabilities. In addition to this, mainstream opinions had had an influence on the existing historical perspective of the popularization of special schools. In other words, the progressive view of history in education was dominant in post-war pedagogy.

1.2. The Movement against Special Schools and toward Inclusive Education on the 1970s

While post-war pedagogy emphasized the need for special schools, this historical view overlooked the importance of the opposite perspective of special schools that began to be asserted around the 1970s. Contemporary western countries saw the Disability Rights Movements, the Independent Living Movement, the Self-Advocacy Movement, and the Anti-Psychiatry Movement, which led to a citizens' campaign against the discrimination and

segregation of people with disabilities. Additionally, people with disabilities also insisted upon the right of self-determination in their life as opposed to being forced into managerial institutions such as isolation wards of hospitals and workshops for only people with disabilities (2).

In the case of Japan, the Disability Rights Movement covered a wide range of activities, such as the struggle for accessible infrastructure and transportation, the reform of medicine and hospitals, as well as the movement to alter traditional schools into inclusive spaces. The movement against special schools in the 1970s had a common purpose with these activities, with the goal of reforming children's learning in Japanese classrooms, which were said to be too uniform and regulated.

It was not until the 1970s that a few people launched the movement toward inclusive education. Advocators of inclusive education intended to educate all children in the same classroom and they criticized special education as dividing children by educating them in special schools. They were also critical of the fact that in special schools teachers and medical specialists forced support and assistance on children with disabilities, including heavy rehabilitation or painful physical training.

Actually, the phrase "inclusive education" had not been coined in the early days of this campaign. Instead they adopted the slogans "live and grow together (*Kyosei-Kyōiku*)" and "send every child to the same school (*Donoko mo Chūki no Gakkō he*)."² Under these slogans, some children with disabilities and their parents, as well as clinical psychotherapists, doctors, photographers and editors gathered together to start the movement by raising their issue with separating children with disabilities from non-disabled children in schools.

The people in the movement formed multiple small groups in schools or hospitals, in their local areas for the purpose of exchanging information, to sit collectively at the negotiating table with schools and municipalities, and to boycott health examinations for children entering school— which singled out children with disabilities and enrolled them in a compulsory special school. In the end, in order to build interregional and nation-wide networks, these groups joined the alliance of “the coalition against making special schools compulsory for disabled children in 1979 (*Gojuyonen Yōgo-Gakko Gimuka Kyoutou Soshi Kaigi*)” and “the national association to allow children with disabilities attend their local schools (*Shougaiji wo Futsu-Gakkyu he Zenkoku Renrakukai*).”

Although some teachers who regarded delinquent children or children of low academic achievement as nuisances in their classrooms took advantage of the system to put them in special school and classes, most children with disabilities were hesitant to attend special schools because of being separated from their friends and because of the narrow career options special schools allowed. Japanese culture places an importance on playing and growing together with friends on a social level and on an emotional level.

It was groundbreaking for children with disabilities to argue for their own rights in the Disability Rights Movements. A few people started to criticize special education as a system of segregation. They also denounced “care” and “support” as synonymous with management and control. Consequently, an argument between proponents of special education and proponents of inclusive education occurred in special schools, seminars for teachers, universities, and collages throughout the country.

Some people with disabilities who were confined to their homes in fear of being killed by relatives decided to leave and live by themselves with or without assistance. Graduates of special schools found that they had only a few choices to live (to go to work in places for the disabled or to be kept in isolation hospitals). Thus they conceived that these institutions were the goals of special schools. They thought that special schools were only a barrier to living independently in their communities. It seemed that attending traditional schools was an essential condition for participating in society.

In the 1970s, the voices of children with disabilities gradually emerged. They wanted friends in traditional classrooms and in their communities. These desires had a potentiality to change not only educational practices and classrooms in traditional schools but also the entire Japanese society.

2. Learning in “Chiiki no gakkō (traditional schools in local areas)”: Suggestions from the Kanai struggle

In Section 2, we will examine the Kanai struggle and explore how learning in traditional schools was re-defined throughout this struggle.

The beginning of the Kanai struggle was a wish of one little boy. His name was Kanai Kouji. He just wanted to go to the regular school in his local area – not a special school for children with disabilities. Nevertheless, the educational administrators did not accept Kouji’s wish to go to the regular school in his local area (Hanahata-higashi elementary school); therefore the struggle to assert his right to go to a traditional school started.

As we examined in Section 1, circumstances of social welfare and education in Japan had altered around the 1970s. The movement against segregation and

discrimination had immense influence on Japanese society. Furthermore, the movement demanding to attend traditional schools in their local areas had become actively in the late 1960s and the 1970s⁽³⁾.

First of all, we will explore how the Kanai struggle started and what the points of issue at the beginning of the struggle were. At first, the pursuit of the right to go to the regular school in Kouji's local area was ignored. At this time, the negative reaction from the educational administrators was denounced by supporters. Furthermore, teachers with aggressive attitudes in *Hanahata-higashi* elementary school were also criticized.

Second, we will examine how Kouji and his family (and also supporters) found the need for "learning through conflict" in traditional schools. We will show that the Kanai struggle suggests a new image of learning in traditional schools.

2.1. The discovery of "local area"- Against being forced to attend special schools

Kanai Kouji was born in 1969, and he grew up in Adachi-ku, Tokyo. He had Cerebral Palsy (CP), was unable to stand or walk by himself, and had a speech defect. In 1976, when Kouji was 6 years old, he began attending Jyôhoku special school (*Jyôhoku yôgo gakkô*). At that time, his parents accepted that their son would attend special schools.

A turning point for Kouji's parents was that Kouji's wish to go to the regular school in his local area (Kanai tousou kiroku henshu iinnkai, 1987, p.32-33). Since his brother went to *Hanahata-higashi* elementary school, Kouji hoped to attend the school with his brothers and his friends. In response to his wish, his parents decided to change his school in summer, 1977.

This request was not accepted by the educational administrators of Adachi-ku ward office. They did not grant Kouji permission to go to *Hanahata-higashi* elementary school. They persisted that Kouji was "not educable" at the traditional school. In addition, they also argued that Kouji should have physical training in Jyôhoku special school.

The negotiation with the educational administrators proceeded with difficulty. Because of the result of the negotiation, Kouji and his family started a struggle to assert his right to go to the traditional school instead of being forced to attend the special school for disabled students. The struggle started in 1978 when he was 8 years old. Kouji started going to the entrance of *Hanahata-higashi* elementary school every day with his family and supporters (*Jishu Toukou*).

At the beginning of the struggle, his parents and supporters envisaged that "some teachers in *Hanahata-higashi* elementary school would respect Kouji's wish if [they] continued going to the entrance for almost one month (Kusuyama, 1981, p.62)." Despite their optimistic view, two groups of opponents confronted to them. One group was the teachers in *Hanahata-higashi* elementary school. Most teachers in the school had given negative responses to *Jishu Toukou*, and argued that it was not appropriate for children with disabilities like Kouji to study in their school.

The other opponent was the parents of children attending *Hanahata-higashi* elementary school. Most Parents' concern was that the quality of education would deteriorate if students with disabilities like Kouji were integrated into the classrooms. Some parents even blocked the entrance to the school, so as to Kouji and his family would give up the struggle. In 1981, Kanai Ritsuko,

Kouji's mother, lamented parents' and teachers' lack of understanding of integration in traditional schools:

When you talk about "live with others (*Tomo-ni*)" and "in our community (*Chiiki-de*)," these words seem to be reminiscent of kindness; However, I [Kanai Ritsuko] was keenly absorbed in thought on difficulty and hardness of these words. ... Supporters [of the struggle] would understand the importance of integration, though people living in our neighborhood would hardly understand it because we have an interest through our children.

(Kanai, 1981, p.13)

Ritsuko's comments show how difficult it was for children with disabilities to live in the community without going to the regular school. Ritsuko realized that being excluded from regular school results in being excluded from the community too.

Kouji, his parents, and his supporters experienced the actual circumstances of their local area. At the beginning of the struggle, they used the regular school in Kouji's "local area" as a contrast to the "special school." On the other hand, they also found positive values of living in the community of their local area (*Chiiki-de*) throughout the Kanai struggle.

2.2. The voice to reform the "learning" in traditional schools

Finally, the nearest junior high school in his local area allowed Kouji to enroll in their school. Hence the struggle ended in 1983.

This long struggle brought up one important issue.

It was that they defined "What is learning?" The Kanai struggle suggests the need for "learning through conflict," which is different from learning in a homogenous environment, such as a traditional classroom. Quarreling or bullying happens every day at traditional schools. Interacting only with children who have the same social context might not always be good. Therefore, it was emphasized that traditional schools must become the place for gaining the knowledge to live with conflict, not just for getting test scores.

As we discussed in Section 1, "development" and learning in curricula were conceived as important conceptions in post-war pedagogy. In particular, learning in traditional schools tended to be trivialized to learning only the subjects. However, the Kanai struggle suggests that relations between friends would comprise a fundamental role in children's learning, and that learning in traditional schools would not be limited only to the subjects and curricula.

Conclusion

The goal of this study is to revisit the meaning of learning in traditional schools by reviewing the Kanai struggle. It can be clearly seen from this paper that the needs of children with disabilities may contain to spend their school lives among diverse friends. This point has one alternative as the possibility of rethinking a traditional school. In other words, the question has been changed to "What can be a traditional school in an age of diversity?" It is difficult to answer this question. However, we can gain a new image of a traditional school from the movement towards inclusive education, Kouji's case in specific, in the 1970s and early the 1980s in Japan.

Additionally, we will revisit a brief summary of the

later course of the education of children with disabilities in Japan. In 1979, the government made special schools compulsory for children with disabilities by law. After that, children with disabilities had had to attend special schools for a long time. In 2007, the government's policy about the education for disabled children has changed from special education to special needs education. However, separation system is still maintained, since special needs education is a system that divide children into disabled and non-disabled.

On the other hand, in recent year, global trends are making the transition from special education to full-inclusive education. Full-inclusive education is a system that every child could learn together in traditional schools. It is indispensable to consider the possibilities of full-inclusive education in Japan.

Notes

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(1)http://www.mext.go.jp/component/a_menu/education/

[micro_detail/icsFiles/afiedfile/2016/06/28/1373352_01.pdf](#), retrieved March 20, 2017.

(2) Some new left thinkers, doctors, and people with disabilities in Japan partly accepted these points from the foreign movement, while these points were still rejected by the 'old left' thinkers.

(3) For example, Yagishita Kouichi, who had Cerebral Palsy (CP) and being rejected to attend a school because of his disability, started a movement to attend a regular school (*Shūgaku Undo*) at first in 1967 when he was 27 years old. After Yagishita's action, the movement demanding to attend traditional schools by persons with disabilities had occurred all over Japan through the 1970s. On the other hand, it is suspected that the Kanai struggle was one of the few movement which children at their school age was the subject of the movement around the 1970s and the 1980s.

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