Comparison and Analysis of Special Education in the United States and Japan

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COMPARISON AND ANALYSIS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
IN THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN

By

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A Thesis submitted to the
Department of Childhood Education, Reading and Disability Services
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2007
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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who has never given up on my education. She is my perfect role model as a mother, an independent woman, and an educator. I would never have been able to have such academic achievement without her emotional, psychological, and financial support, and her unconditional love.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Bruce Menchetti for all of his help, guidance, encouragement, and patience. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephanie Al Otaiba and Dr. Barbara Edwards for their support. I learned a lot from them, and they are my educational role models. I will treat and support students in the future like they treated me.

I wish to express appreciation to the staff members of the FSU Students Disability Resource Center (SDRC). I was able to have the first-hand experience of receiving service and support as a student with special needs in the United States. This experience taught and inspired me to be a future professional who engages in special education.

I would also like to show many thanks to my friends for their emotional support. They listen to me when I am lost, make me laugh when I am down, and even though they are working in different fields, their active, motivated attitudes towards their lives and careers always stimulate and encourage me.

Thank you very much to my great English tutor and friend, Jacqueline Ahl. She has helped me for many years of my student life in the United States. Without her help, my English would not improve and this thesis would not have been completed. I always trust and admire your professionalism.

I wish, finally, to thank my beloved family: my mother, father, and brother. I would never have established self-confidence without their unconditional love. I might have been a strange child and had difficulty adjusting to the school environment or acquiring academic achievement. However, I was able to seek my own way because I always felt strong support from them, anytime and anywhere. I am the luckiest person in the world being my parents’ daughter and my brother’s little sister.
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ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental right that should be extended to all people. Until recently, however, children with disabilities have not always enjoyed this right. In the last several decades, the progress of special education has accelerated at a global level due to increased knowledge about disabilities, the evolution of perspectives of disabilities, and the empowerment of those with disabilities. It is important that educators have a global view of education to contribute to the further improvement of special education and increased opportunities for those with disabilities.

This paper will examine the differences and similarities between the United States and Japan from a variety of aspects; historical, cultural, political and economic background, and the policies and practices of special education. In addition, this paper will compare each nation’s views of disabilities and those with disabilities and how these views have impacted the history and development of special education.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right that should be extended to all people. Until recently, however, children with disabilities have not always enjoyed this right. The United Nations recently drafted a resolution called the Treaty to Ban Discrimination Against People Who Have Disabilities (Christy, 2006), which aims to protect the rights of those with disabilities. The general principles under the United Nations Draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) are: (a) respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons; (b) non-discrimination; (c) full and effective participation and inclusion in society; (d) respect for difference and acceptance of disability as part of human diversity and humanity; (e) equality of opportunity; (f) accessibility; (g) equality between men and women; (h) respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities. In particular, education is approached as one of the critical and independent issues under this draft convention. Inclusion is one of the key principles under the Draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is discussed as a means of enabling and protecting basic educational rights. In other words, the United Nations demonstrates that enabling and protecting educational rights is directly connected with the idea of inclusion.

Due to increased knowledge brought about by globalization, the evolution of new perspectives regarding the rights of individuals with disabilities, and empowerment of those with disabilities, special education has been given increased attention. It is important that educators look not only at education in their own countries, but also at educational circumstances in other countries, learning from each other by searching out information and exchanging opinions at the global level. New information and perspectives from other countries might be surprising, but encouraging. Educators who have broader views and increased knowledge would contribute to the further improvement of special education, and benefit students with disabilities.

Therefore, it is important to understand how different cultures and counties provide education for children with disabilities. The paper will examine such differences by comparing and contrasting the United States and Japan, addressing: (a) the fundamental differences in
history and culture, (b) the views of disabilities and those with disabilities, (c) the history of special education, and (d) policies and practices of special education. Due to the differences in compulsory education and the relatively homogenous population of Japan, special education for minority and gifted students is excluded from the discussion.

Research Questions

The paper will seek to answer the following research questions: (1) how do the sociopolitical factors of geography and philosophical and religious belief impact culture in Japan and the United States? (2) how have Japanese views of disability evolved over time? (3) how have views of disability in the United States evolved over time? (4) how have Japanese perspectives on disability shaped/influenced their special education policies and practices? (5) how have perspectives on disability in the United States shaped/influenced their special education policies and practices? and (6) how do the special education policies and practices of each nation differ?
CHAPTER 2

SOCIOPOLITICAL FACTOR

The differences between Japan and the United States are significant and rooted in their historical and sociopolitical background, including geography, ethnicity, philosophy, religion, and national character. The United States is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation, while Japan is a largely homogeneous nation. The United States is a large continental nation, whereas Japan is a small island nation. Each country has a representative national characteristic: individualism in the United States and collectivism in Japan. Christianity in the United States and Buddhism in Japan also shape the national character. Each nation has developed a distinct identity, based on these varying characteristics. Table 1 illustrates the major sociopolitical and cultural factors and characteristics associated with the United States and Japan.

Table 1
Sociopolitical and Cultural Factors and Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Sociopolitical and Cultural Factors</th>
<th>Japanese Characteristics</th>
<th>United States Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Small island</td>
<td>Large continent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Largely homogeneous</td>
<td>Multiple ethnicities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and philosophy</td>
<td>Predominantly Buddhism</td>
<td>Predominantly Christianity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on nature</td>
<td>Emphasize on “God”</td>
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<td>Sociality</td>
<td>Totalitarianism/Collectivism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interdependent</td>
<td>Independent</td>
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How Geographical Factors Affected the History and Culture of Each Nation

Impact on Japanese History and Culture

Due to Japan’s small size and island geography, the country has experienced a unique course of development. First, Japan is one of the oldest homogeneous nations in the world. The history of its culture and civilization, first called Yamato, started in about the fourth century (Brown, 1955; Murakawa, Egami, Yamamoto & Hayashi, 1991). In addition, due to its geographic isolation from other nations, there was little influence by other ethnicities. In contrast, the United States was established and structured by immigrants from various nations. Even though Japanese history dates from the 4th century, most of the current population in Japan is still native Japanese. Second, due to its relative isolation and small dimension, Japan was forced to make due with limited land and resources. This is the fundamental factor in Japan’s status as an agricultural nation (Brown, 1955; Embree, 1945). Throughout the whole of Japanese history, almost all of the Japanese population has engaged in agriculture, especially rice production (Brown, 1955; Embree, 1945).

Due to the influence of geography and agriculture, the Japanese fundamental cultural philosophy was based upon coexistence with nature rather than domination. Yamamoto (1979) explains the traditional Japanese philosophy of accepting nature and adjusting ourselves in response. According to Yamamoto (1979), the essential law is following nature, so anything seen as “against nature” is unnatural, and being unnatural is viewed as a sin. Yamamoto (1979) referred to this traditional Japanese belief as 自然神教 (Shizen-shinkyo), which respects nature above all, as the origin of everything. Individual personality developed from nature, and the cosmos appeared as a collective of these personalities. In short, the cosmos occurred spontaneously, and was not created by divine intent. From the Japanese perspective, everything on the earth including trees, rivers, and mountains are considered to have a spirit, and people respect these spirits. Respecting these spirits is, in part, characterized by following nature’s rules. Thus, because being “natural” is the fundamental law of Japanese thought, the “unnatural,” which includes conditions such as mental and social disabilities, is rejected or avoided (Yamamoto, 1979).

As well as respecting nature above all, the Japanese people have been rooted in the same geographic location, living with severe conditions. Communities were forced to be united to help each other. From this background, the idea of harmony originated. Harmonious interdependence
cooperation, solidarity, a “feeling of oneness” (Lebra, 1976, p.25), and social conformity (Frager, 1970) can be identified as representative Japanese characteristics. When combined, these sociocultural characteristics can be called totalitarianism or collectivism. The Japanese feel secure when they are well integrated into their community because it leads them to believe they might achieve harmony. In other words, as scholars have pointed out, the Japanese are afraid of separation, exclusion, and sanction from others (Frager 1970; Lebra, 1976).

The pursuit of harmony has both positive and negative effects. In its extreme, valuing harmony might lead to discrimination; the Japanese people do not value something different, new, and/or unfamiliar. Those who are not like others in their community are not welcomed; moreover, they become the object of discrimination. In most cases, unfortunately, those who are discriminated against are people with disabilities.

**Impact on History and Culture in the United States**

Compared to Japan, the United States is a huge continental country, and its relatively short history as a nation began with the discovery of the land by Columbus in 1492. His exploration during the age of geographical discovery was led by innovations in navigation systems and nautical design. During this period, European countries such as Spain, England, and Portugal were investigating new sources of income, so this huge continent offered promise.

Because the nations that colonized this new country were based upon Christianity, the United States evolved as a predominately Christian nation. The United States perspective on nature is one of the representative differences in contrast to Japanese culture. Western cultures emphasize respect for God, and regard nature and human beings as creations of the divine, while nature is the origin and source of everything in Japanese thought. This is a significant difference between the cultures.

As well as the different perspective on nature, diversity influenced the sociality of the United States. The New Continent was not conquered by only one nation. Rather, multiple nations landed and created their own communities. Even though most of the nations responsible for structuring this new country were predominantly Christian, their cultures were otherwise different. Therefore, the history of the United States reflects this diversity. Diversity might have contributed to the sociocultural character of individualism. Markus and Kitayama (1991) referred to representative cultural characteristic of the United States as the “independent construal of the self,” (p.226) while the Japanese are the “interdependent construal of the self.” (p.227)
Summary

While the Japanese fundamental sociality comes from the respect of nature due to geographical features, western culture is more influenced by the respect of God. Geographical natural circumstances formed the Japanese as agricultural and this agricultural background, in turn, formed Japanese collectivism. On the other hand, a diverse origin and the necessity to negotiate and explain a diversity of perspectives formed the United States establishment of individualism.

The concept of the relationship between self and others is therefore significantly different (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In the United States, due to the history of a variety of ethnicities and cultures, tolerance to individual difference has been established. In Japanese culture, the other who does not mirror the self presents a threat to collectivism. In this way, the rejection of difference due to a desire for harmony affects those with disabilities.
CHAPTER 3

THE VIEWS OF DISABILITIES AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

The Evolution of Japanese Views of Disability

Modern Japanese society is based upon the common recognition that every human being is valued equally, regardless of the presence of disability. However, like other nations and cultures, the history of disability in Japan is one of discrimination and bias. At a time when human rights were not yet established, those with disabilities were viewed as inferior.

In pre World War II Japan, there was a perspective called *Haijinkan* (廃人観) (Hirata, 2003). In Japanese, each *Kanji*, or Japanese styled Chinese character, has a specific and clearly represented meaning. Sometimes these characters indicate and communicate discrimination, and are considered inappropriate today due to their direct, harsh meaning. The Japanese-Chinese character 廃 (pronounced “hai”) means “cracked” or “ruined,” and 人 (pronounced “jin”) represents “man”. In short, *Haijin* (廃人) is “cripple.” A Haijin is person who has a mental and/or physical dysfunction; accordingly, it is considered that he/she can not live independently due to his/her sickness and/or disability. 観 (pronounced “kan”) means “perspective” or “perception.” Therefore, “Haijin-kan” is directly translated as a perspective upon “cripple.” As represented in these Chinese characters, it might already be apparent how those with disabilities were treated. This idea of Haijin-kan has two outcomes: one effect is to treat those with disabilities according to the sense of charity, and the other is to view those with disabilities as an object of hate.

Interestingly, even though the predominate attitude toward disability equated it with disharmony, there was also a traditional concept called *Fukugo-Densetsu* (福子伝説), stating that domestic and familial harmony would actually increased with the presence of a child with disabilities (Ishikawa & Nagase, 2005, Yamamoto, 2005). In other words, the presence of a child with a disability was thought to be fortunate. Because the family would have to make a life-long commitment to caring for the child, it was believed the familial bond would strengthen. This was one example of a positive view of disability.

During the pre-modern period, there were relief works in Japan. Those with disabilities were exempt from civic duty such as paying taxes. There were several asylums for those with disabilities such as *Hiden-in* (非田院), which was predominantly a residential facility for elderly,
and Seraku-in (施楽院), which was predominantly a medical facility (Yamamoto, 2005). Those asylums were founded by the government and/or temples based on the Buddhist philosophy of charity. They provided food and medication for those with disabilities, and their presence suggested a public attitude of benevolence and assistance, but also pity. Even though there was a Buddhist sense of charity, there was another prevalent attitude, influenced by pity, the value of “harmony,” and Japanese economic status.

The most important Japanese value is harmony. That which disturbs harmony is always forbidden and rejected. The ancient Japanese perspective upon disability might be rooted in the sense of “discomfort,” which is caused by recognizing the unnatural. As explained, “unnatural” could be used as a synonym of “different,” “unusual,” and/or “unfamiliar” in the Japanese language. Moreover, being “natural” might be referred to as suiting the majority. Suing the majority maintains harmony. Because disability was viewed as an unnatural difference, and due to the Japanese traditional perspective of harmony, people treated those with disabilities differently. Therefore, those with disabilities usually became an object of hate, neglect, and/or a condescending pity. They were not viewed as equal human beings by the “natural” Japanese society.

Because those with both mental and physical disabilities need supplemental support to survive, and because they usually have difficulty with physical productivity, they were considered useless, and called Goku-tsubushi (穀潰し), which can be translated as “good-for-nothing” or more literally “waste of food.” Because Japan’s economy is based on agriculture, those who have difficulty engaging in agricultural labor due to physical disabilities were considered useless. There was a strict rank system in Japan, much like the caste system in India, during the pre-modern period between 1600’s to 1860’s, called the Edo-era (Brown, 1955; Embree, 1945; Murakawa et al., 1991). The lowest rank, even lower than a common citizen, was called Eta (えた) and/or Hinin (ひ人) (Embree, 1945). Hinin is written 非人 in Kanji, and means “not human.” Therefore, Hinin were forced to obey segregation laws. They were not allowed to have social contact with those of the upper ranks, not allowed to wear clothes made from the same materials as those of the upper ranks, and forced into a limited selection of occupations such as leather production and sanitation. As meat eaters, they were also separated by diet (Embree, 1945; Saito & Ohishi, 2005). Usually, those with disabilities were automatically considered “useless.” Therefore, physical disability was directly linked to being Hinin. There were several
resulting restrictions upon those with disabilities. As they were not viewed as human beings, they were forbidden to inherit fortunes and excluded from inheriting family businesses (Namase, 1999). Even if one was at higher rank, if he/she had a disability, he/she was excluded from the status that allows the inheritance of family fortune. This restriction applied to both mental and physical disabilities. In short, those who had difficulty in making independent lives due to mental and/or physical conditions were labeled “useless” and stripped of humanity.

In addition to mental and physical disabilities, having a certain disease ranked one as “not human.” For example, most of those who were considered “disabled” during this pre-modern era were people affected with Hansen’s disease (Yamamoto, 2005). Hansen’s disease (or leprosy) was considered synonymous with disability at that time. Because the disease was contagious and causes physical disfigurement, and because of the lack of a cure, people feared and detested those afflicted with the disease. Therefore, those who suffered from Hansen’s disease were expelled from their families and communities, and forced to be Hinin. This historical fact has influenced current social practices, such as the exclusion of those with Hansen’s disease from hotel rooms in 2003, and the issue of Hansen’s disease is still controversial in current Japan.

On the other hand, while most of those with mental and/or physical disabilities used to be the object of hate and/or pity, those who were blind were treated more favorably. Those who were blind had a specifically established social status in pre-modern Japan, and made their lives as professional musicians such as biwa minstrels (Yamamoto, 2005). The biwa is a Japanese traditional string instrument, similar to a guitar or lute. Those who were blind established an association, similar to a union or guild, called Tohdo-za (当道座), and had an exclusive privilege to perform biwa.

Evidence of a more negative perspective on disabilities appears in Wakansansaizue (和漢三才図絵), a picture encyclopedia written during the Edo era (1603-1867). In one entry, “deaf” and “stutter” are introduced as synonyms under “speech impairment” because both deafness and stuttering were recognized as communication disorders (Yamamoto, 2005). The definition of “deaf” in Wakansansaizue includes the phrase “this causes pity.” In this entry, people with speech impairments, especially those who are deaf, were also illustrated differently from those who were blind. In most cases, those who were blind were illustrated as playing an instrument, which leads readers to think they play the biwa or other instruments for a living. On the other hand, those who
were deaf and/or afflicted with speech impairment were illustrated as begging. In other words, begging was introduced as occupation of those who are deaf and those with speech impairments. In fact, during this period, begging was recognized and permitted as one of the occupations for those with disabilities (Namase, 1999; Yamamoto, 2005). Allowing begging was one financial remedy for those with disabilities, who often lost their ability to live with their families and communities. However, begging was absent of established social status. This difference in illustration of occupation indicates a difference in the attitudes of respect and rejection.

Public perspective of disabilities did not change dramatically in Japan until the end of World War II. There was a gradual movement toward establishing human rights and empowering people with disabilities, beginning with the establishment of the Constitution of Japan in 1946, which ushered in a democratic society that ensured equality. Federal legislations regarding people with disabilities were enacted soon after, such as the Law for the Welfare of Physically Handicapped Persons in 1949, and the Law for the Welfare of Mentally Retarded Persons in 1960. Despite legislative change, however, public fear toward disability remained. An example of this fear was the Eugenic Protection Act of 1948. The purpose of this act was to prevent birth of defective offspring. Those with mental retardation and mental disorders were the targeted population of eugenic sterilization. This law lasted until 1996 when it was renamed the Therapeutic Abortion Act. This new law focused more on the protection of the mother’s body, and eliminated eugenic sterilization and the discrimination of people with disabilities based on eugenics (Yonemoto, Matsubara, Nudeshima, & Ichinokawa, 2003).

Like the change of the Eugenic Protection Act, the public view of disabilities has also changed in recent years. The United Nations’ International Year of Disabled Persons, which was an international campaign for people with disabilities held in 1981, impacted public opinion of disabilities in Japan. This world-wide campaign conducted by the United Nations focused on equal opportunities for people with disabilities, and resulted in the establishment of the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons 1982, implemented during a ten year campaign from 1983 to 1992 (Nakano, 2000). Normalization has increased public recognition of disabilities since the 1970’s. According to the Poll about People with Disabilities by the Cabinet Ministerial Secretary Office in 2001, the recognition level of normalization was 21.7%, compared to 15.6% in 1997. In addition, this poll demonstrated that 81.7% of Japanese citizens, who were familiar with normalization, believe it is natural that people with disabilities live in their
community, compared to 78.3% in 1997. Overall, this change in perspective indicates the gradual transition from pity, charity, and neglect, to integrated harmony, which considers those with disabilities to be part of society.

**The Evolution of Views of Disability in the United States**

As in other countries, the perspective upon disability in the United States did not begin with full understanding and full acceptance. Just as the philosophy of Buddhism influenced the approach to disabilities in Japan, the European approach was also influenced by religious thought, specifically Christianity (Cruickshank, Morse & Grant, 1990). Both religions advocate charity and pity, but in doing so, recognize difference. The public view toward disability in the United States can be explained by the concept of “deviancy” (Wolfensberger, 1980), and is historically characterized by a rejection of difference. According to Wolfensberger (1980), social response toward disabilities can be divided into four characteristic historical categories: the urge to destroy deviancy, to protect non-deviant people from deviant people, to protect deviant people from non-deviant people, and to reverse deviancy.

Prejudice is often the most common result of negative feelings towards disability. This kind of negative emotional reaction results from several factors, such as social customs and norms, child-rearing practices, fear or anxiety of disability during childhood, and discrimination-provoking behavior by people with disabilities (Gellman, 1959; Linveh, 1982). Prejudice may also arise from the supposition of the biological inferiority of people with disabilities, and the fear of violating cultural norms (Hahn, 1988). In the nineteenth century, people with disabilities, especially those with mental retardation or mental illness, were institutionalized and ostracized. They were gathered and placed in residential institutions such as hospitals, asylums, and colonies, and separated from society (Nakamura, 2005).

The negative perspective and image of disability is observable in the history of the United States, particularly in mass media and literature. Many scholars focus on how the media affected the public’s feelings and perspectives toward people with disabilities (Bogdan, Biklen, Shapiro, & Spelkoman, 1990; Connor, & Bejoian, 2006; Farnall & Smith, 1999; Larsen & Haller, 2002; Olney, 2006; Longmore, 2001; Ruffner, 1990; Safran, 2001). People with disabilities were often illustrated as victims, burdens on friends, family, or society (Farnal & Smith, 1999), and illustrated as dangerous and criminal (Bogdan et al., 1982; Longmore, 2001). These negative
images appeared in movies, TV dramas, comics, and even newspapers. In extreme cases, people with disabilities were pictured as monsters and objects of fear. Bogdan et al. demonstrate how those with disabilities were presented as monstrous objects which scare and connote danger, and arouse public prejudices. For example, *Freaks* (1932) evoked audiences’ fear of deformity (Bogdan et al., 1982; Larsen & Haller, 2002), and *Psycho* (1960) illustrated the link between murder and mental illness (Bogdan et al., 1982). Films were once a source of information for the public, and served as one of the only sources of information about disabilities. Because people with disabilities were segregated from society, the public rarely received first-hand information. Therefore, these films, which illustrated disability as evil, fostered the public’s prejudice toward disability.

Besides movies that provided negative images of disability, other types of media such as advertisements and literature have affected public perception. Ruffner (1984) pointed out that mass media once presented the side of need and dependency of those with disabilities, resulting in the public’s tendency toward pity and charity. Moreover, Brolley and Anderson (1986) pointed out the concern of fundraising campaigns, which used to emphasize dependency and/or special treatment for the “needy.” Even in the educational setting, there are factors that provoke negative images of disability, such as discussing Down’s syndrome as an example of abnormality in science class (Connor & Bejoian, 2006). They also pointed out that even though literature used in school has many characters with disabilities, these texts rarely address the experience of disability itself.

In addition to provoking discomfort, fear, and pity, disability could also be the object of ridicule or the subject of humor. Cassell (1985) studied how disability became the subject of humor, called “disabled humor.” He discussed its origin in how laughter is made and how ancient philosophers examined humor. For example, according to Cassell, Plato thought that “most laughter was a response to the misfortunes of others” (p.151), and Aristotle thought that the typical humorous response came from seeing deviation from an aesthetic norm (Cassell, 1985). Thus, disability was illustrated as being ridiculous and the disabled as “laughingstock.”

However, those perspectives have changed in recent years, since public knowledge about disability has increased. For example, the movie *The Elephant Man* (1980) is one pioneer film that suggests disfigurement and/or physical disability is not related to danger or mental dysfunction, but perhaps even pureness and intelligence. The link between disability and
pureness or honesty is also seen in movies such as *Forest Gump* (1994) and *I am Sam* (2001). Movies such as *Radio* (2003), *Gaby: A True Story* (1987), and *The Other Sister* (1999) also explain an equal entitlement to happiness and social acceptance.

The emergence of the idea of normalization in the 1970’s also made a significant impact on the history of disability. Normalization was first advocated by Bank-Mikkelsen, head of the Danish Mental Retardation Service in the mid 1900’s, and introduced to the United States by Bengt Nirje. His idea was to allow people with mental retardation to have a normal life. Normalization originated with the concern for those with mental retardation, but now applies to any kind of disability. Normalization is also the fundamental principle in the later movements of mainstreaming and inclusion. Generally, increased recognition about disabilities resulted in the establishment of federal laws that granted increased opportunities to live in society, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, Education of All Handicapped Act (renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)), the Rehabilitation Act, and the Architectural Barrier Act.

Following the movement and empowerment of people with disabilities, the public has reached a new perspective. The current view of disability in the United States is represented by the “natural perspective.” The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 clearly define the natural perspective: “Disability is a natural part of life and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to live independently, make choices, contribute to society, and pursue meaningful careers.” This excerpt is representative view of disabilities in the United States, which has changed from charity, pity, fear, and hate, to the recognition of disabilities as natural and part of one’s individual uniqueness.

**Comparing Views of Disability between Japan and the United States**

Japan and the United States have experienced a similar evolution of the perspective on disability. This perspective evolved from discomfort and/or unpleasant sensations regarding one who is different. This can be common in any culture. However, the evolution of the perspective in the United States experienced an independent, rapid change from hate and charity to acceptance of disability as a “natural” state.

Due to its origin as a nation of various races and cultures, the United States might posses more tolerance to difference than Japan. While the Japanese representative characteristic is restraining individuality to maintain harmony, representative characteristic in the United States is
articulating individuality to provoke change. Because the average citizen in the United States has coexisted with others of different cultures and perspectives, they might have had to speak up to explain, negotiate, and protect their rights, thus acquiring the skills of presentation and listening to others. Even though there were many kinds of discrimination in the history of the United States, this freedom to show the self might have allowed the spontaneous empowerment of minorities, including those with disabilities.

In Japan, due to expanded knowledge and recognition of disabilities, the postwar perspective is significantly different. There has been a gradual change toward the perspective that disabilities are part of one’s uniqueness, and not defect or fault. However, there is still a clear distinction between those with disabilities and those without, due to the presence of laws regarding disability. For example, the Fundamental Law of Disabled Persons presents the definition of disability, and the principles and responsibilities of the state and local public entities, but the features of this statement are somewhat different from the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992. While the United States now views disabilities as a natural part of life, not defect or disadvantage, Japan has yet to establish a similar statement that is legally codified. In Japan, the Fundamental Law of Disabled Persons states that people with disabilities experience considerable social and professional restriction due to physical disabilities, mental retardation, or mental illness. This statement can give an image that people with disabilities suffer from significant restrictions. Therefore, by this definition, the reader would perceive that disability negatively influences one’s life. Even though this law guarantees the basic human rights of those with disabilities, the statement seems to emphasize the disadvantages of having a disability, while the United States emphasizes disability as a natural state.
CHAPTER 4

THE HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

How Japanese Perspectives on Disability Shaped/Influenced Special Education Policies and Practices

The Japanese attitudes regarding nature, harmony, and religion have influenced perspective on disabilities, and accordingly, special education. Because Japan is a small island, it has been easy to be isolated from other countries and western culture. For example, Japan closed its doors to westerners for a long time in the Edo period, under the Tokugawa administration from 1639 to 1853 (Brown, 1955; Embree, 1945; Murakawa et al., 1991). During this period, international trade was limited, so western cultural influence was not significant. However, the absence of cultural influence changed by contact with the United States. Japan’s first official contact with the United States was the visit of commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry in 1853, which resulted in the closure of this period of seclusion (Embree, 1945; Murakawa et al. 1993). Since Japan was first opened to the world, its citizens experienced rapid modernization and westernization.

The past 400 years of Japanese history can be roughly classified into three periods: the pre-modern era, the modern era, and the present day; post World War II. The transitions between these periods are directly linked to the level and nature of contact with other countries. The Japanese pre-modern era was characterized by feudalism under the Tokugawa Shogunate, which lasted more than 250 years. The modern era began following the end of the Tokugawa administration and the Restoration of Imperial Rule in 1867 that predominantly resulted from the United States first contact in 1853, and ended with the close of World War II. During this period, called the Meiji Restoration and Taisho Democracy, Japan experienced rapid modernization and westernization. Then, after World War II, Japan reformed its administration to create an independent democratic nation.

In general, education policy reflects national movement. Accordingly, special education is influenced by the transformation of economic situation, public opinion, and relationships with foreign countries. Like the three historical eras of Japan mentioned above, the history of special education can also be categorized into three eras: the pre-modern era, the modern era, and the
present day. In other words, Japanese special education has been directly affected by Japan’s contact with other countries, and the resulting political and social change. Table 2 illustrates the historical landmarks related to special education in Japan and the United States.

**The Pre-Modern Era: Early 1600’s to 1860’s**

The pre-modern era in Japanese history began with the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603 and lasted until 1867, following the end of seclusion and the transition to an opened, modern nation. During this era, children with disabilities such as hearing impairment and/or visual impairment were accepted and educated with other children without disabilities at private schools called *Terakoya* (寺子屋), the earliest form of formalized education in Japan (Hirata, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1984). Teachers admitted students with disabilities according to their parents’ requests. According to Ototake’s study in 1929 (as cited in Hirata, 2005), 8.6% of Terakoya in Japan during the 1850’s accepted students with disabilities. Because those who did not have the ability to perform physical labor were considered useless, the parents of children with disabilities sent their children to these private schools hoping for their children’s future independence. These students were educated in inclusive classrooms, and the teachers devised and modified the traditional instruction and materials according to their needs (Hirata, 2005).

Interestingly, the special education practice of inclusion started in pre-modern Japan is close to the present of practice of inclusion in the United States. Since formal education was not mandatory at this time, and due to the relative poverty of most families, children who could receive quality education were few. The limited numbers also meant that teachers had more flexibility and freedom in the classroom practice, however. The limited class size might also be one of the reasons why this form of inclusion could be easily practiced.

**The Modern Era: 1860’s to 1945**

The modern era began with the end of the seclusion era around 1860, and lasted until the end of World War II in 1945. Regarding Japanese special education, this era can be divided into two phases: the first from 1860 to 1900, and the second from 1900 to 1945.

**The early modern era: 1860’s to beginning of 1900’s.** In Japan, the establishment of education for students with disabilities appeared early on with the formation of Terakoya, the earliest form of formalized education. However, the quality and content of the curriculum varied widely depending upon disability. Even though special education in Japan
started with an inclusive setting, the educational environments have changed since Japan has increased contact with other countries. Accommodation, teaching style, and setting were clearly distinguished from disability to disability, and this distinction significantly affected later and even current special education development. Japanese special education was classified according to the types of disabilities: sensory disabilities such as deafness, blindness, difficulty hearing, and visual impairment; mental retardation; physical disability and health impairments such as invalidity and fragility; and emotional disturbance. Education for these different types of disabilities has been developed separately.

Since Japan’s door was opened to the world, access to western countries became easy. Like intellectuals such as seekers, gurus, philosophers, and prophets went forth to seek knowledge, many educators and pioneers of special education in Japan traveled to western countries such as the United States and European countries such as England and France to learn special education practices.

In 1866, Yukichi Fukuzawa, an educator and a member of the first Japanese delegation to the United States, introduced a European-style asylum for those who are deaf, blind and those with mental retardation in “*Seiyo Jijo (Western Matters)*”*(西洋事情初編)* (Hirata, 2003). Since there was an increased number of contacts with other countries, especially western cultures, Japanese attitudes about disability and education shifted. Concurrent with the establishment of the Japanese Ministry of Education in 1871, Yozo Yamao submitted a statement to the government making specific mention of the importance of education for those who were blind and/or deaf and those with speech impairments (Hirata, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1984). Yamao requested the establishment of schools for these students. In the following year, a law called Educational System *(学制)*, the first regulation of modern education in Japan that modeled a western school system, was established. In this legislation, there was a sentence that touched on special education, giving recognition and asking to establish schools which provide education for those with disabilities (Hirata, 2003; Ministry of Education, 1984).

According to Hirata (2003), two perspectives upon special education appeared. The former perspective that viewed those with disabilities as useless and needless, and excluded them from education, was called *Muyo-ron* *(無用論)*. The new perspective, which emphasized the importance of education for those with disabilities to make them “useful,” was called *Yuyo-ron* *(有用論)*. These opposing perspectives were held by the government and the public, respectively.
The government held *Muyo-ron*, which led to a passive attitude toward special education, and the public held *Yuyo-ron*, which took an active attitude toward special education.

Like other nations, Japan’s education for those who were deaf and/or blind came first, perhaps because those disabilities are more visible, and those who were deaf or blind could contribute productive activity unaffected by their sensory deficit. S. Shimizu (2003) referred to these disabilities as “traditional disabilities.” During the 1870’s and 1880’s, several private educational institutions for those who were deaf and/or blind were established. Henry Falls, a Scottish missionary doctor and the director of Tsukiji Hospital, founded Rakuzenkai (楽善会) in Tokyo in 1875, an organization of a philanthropic society. This organization later established an educational asylum called the Rakuzenkai Educational Institution for the Blind (Rakuzenkai Kun-mou-in 楽善会訓盲院), first appearance of separate institutions that focused on education for those with disabilities in 1880, and began to provide practical vocational training for students in 1881. Kumagai, who was blind from Nagano prefecture, opened a private school for the blind in Tokyo in 1876.

Tashiro Furukawa, one of the important pioneers of Japanese special education especially for deaf, initiated education for the deaf in Kyoto around 1875. Furukawa was a Terakoya teacher. He began teaching students who were deaf, and he presented the possibility of education by demonstrating the effectiveness of his teaching methods. Furukawa was the father of Japanese sign language and the pioneer of speech therapy. A Training Institute for Blind and Dumb ("Mou-a-in" 盲亞院) was established in Kyoto in 1878, which was established as a private school by Furukawa and Norimi Tohyama. The school then became a public educational institution in 1879 (京都府立盲亞院). Their fundamental educational philosophy was based on humanitarianism and equalitarianism. Tohyama stated that all human beings are equal, regardless of disabilities such as deafness, blindness, or other disabilities in a statement for the establishment of the school (Hirata, 2003). In addition, Furukawa thought that the inability to perform like others without disabilities contributed to discrimination, but argued that those with disabilities are able to perform if appropriate education is provided. In other words, absence of education for those with disabilities accounted to the societies’ and educators’ neglect of duty.

With respect to legal regulations, special education also experienced new changes. A conflict arose between the government and the public regarding special education. Several educators and pioneers in the field of special education took the active position (Yuyo-ron)
opposite to the passive government position (Muyo-ron). In 1879, the Educational System was abolished, and instead, the Legislation of Education (教育令) was established, which clarified the standards of compulsory education. The following year, the Legislation of Education was revised, and a standard of school enrollment was enforced. However, this law also stated that disabilities could be the reason for exemption from enrollment. Then, a significant law in Japanese education, called the Legislation of Primary Schools (小学校令) was issued in 1886. Japanese compulsory education was established with this law, and the exemption of students from compulsory education was specified for the first time. Even though this law did not state that students with disabilities were not allowed to attend school, if the child had a disability, parents interpreted it as an authority-powered recommendation. Because of the implied order, cultural differences created a climate of exclusion. In short, the state of exclusion from education of children with disabilities was intentionally created by the government (Hirata, 2005). Thus, even though there were many educators who devoted their lives to special education and advocated the importance of education for people with special needs, the government retained a passive attitude toward special education. Therefore, the positive long-term aspirations of special education advocates were neglected. This caused later passive and even negative attitudes toward special education in the public population. Because the government had cast aside education for those with disabilities, educators were forced to work with little official financial support or raise funds through private charities.

Due to the increased number of students with special needs, the availability of education for special educators also increased. In response, the law of Regulation of Public Schools and Private Schools such as Preschools, Libraries, Schools for the Deaf and Blind, and Other Primary Schools (幼稚園図書館盲亜学校其他evice学校ニ関ケ各種学校及私立evice学校等ニ関スル規制) was enacted in 1891. This is the first regulation regarding certification for teachers of special education, specifically those who are deaf and blind.

During the gradual development of special education, especially for students who are deaf and blind, the knowledge and materials imported from western countries were modified through pioneer efforts. For example, Braille was adapted to Japanese in 1890 by Kuraji Ishikawa of the Tokyo School for the Deaf and Blind, established in 1887. It was difficult to apply to the Japanese language because Japanese has a completely different system of orthography. In addition, the Tokyo School for the Deaf and Blind purchased a Braille printing machine from the
United States in 1893. Due to the combination of the establishment of Japanese Braille and technical innovation, the opportunities for those who were blind to access knowledge increased.

There was a significant gap between education for those who were deaf and blind and those with other disabilities, however. While the education of those who are deaf and/or blind was developed early on and with great effort and consideration, the education for those with other disabilities has been slow to materialize. This gap continues to affect current policies and practices in special education.

Education for those who experience academic underachievement due to an invisible disability appeared only after the first significant movement of education for students who were deaf and blind. Due to the improvement and establishment of the Japanese elementary school education system, the presence of underachievers became more visible. Such students might have had ADHD, learning disabilities, and/or other disabilities. The establishment of a special classroom structure for those who have not succeeded in a traditional academic setting could be considered the origin of modern special education for those who enrolled in general school settings. In response to recognition of more “invisible” disabilities, a special class for underachievers was established at Nagano Prefectural Matsumoto Elementary School (長野県松本尋常小学校) in 1890. This class was formed based on individual competence. Following this event, similar special classes were established at institutions such as Nagano Elementary School (長野県長野尋常小学校) called Banjukusei-Gakkyu (晩熟生学級) in 1896 and Gunma Prefectural Elementary School (群馬県館林尋常小学校) in 1897. Even though there still might have been a confusion between those who were underachievers and those with mental retardation, these classrooms were considered the origin of special classroom accommodations in Japan.

Other than special classrooms for students with learning difficulties, education for populations with mental retardation and/or cognitive development problems has been developed through welfare or charity, and not considered a separate educational field. Ryoichi Ishii opened a school for girls with mental retardation called Kojo-Gakuin (孤女学院) in 1891. This was the first institution for those with mental retardation. This school later became Takinogawa-Gakuen (滝乃川学園) in 1896. In the following years, other institutions for those with mental retardation were established, such as Shirakawa-Gakuen (白川学園) in 1909, Momoka-Juku (桃花塾) in 1916, and Fujikura-School (藤倉学園), which was originally Nihon-Shinikuen (日本心育園), in 1919. However, they were not considered primarily educational institutions, even though their purpose
implied and included an educational approach. Due to the lack of active financial federal support, these facilities were managed by the pioneers’ own efforts.

**The late modern era: Early 1900’s to 1945.** In 1902, due to the improvement and establishment of elementary school education, the rate of the population attending school exceeded 90%. Accordingly, in the educational environment, the increased presence of underachievers, some with ADHD, learning disabilities, or mild mental retardation, necessitated the establishment of special classrooms. In addition, according to the positive effects and outcomes of previous special classrooms at the end of the 1800’s, more special classes were opened. Classes for more specific special needs were established for underachievers and/or those with mental retardation at Iwate Normal School (岩手師範), Himeji Normal School (姫路師範), Fukuoka Normal School (福岡女子師範), and Tokyo Advanced Normal School (東京高等師範). However, those classes disappeared shortly after, except for the Advanced Normal School, due to lack of support from the Ministry of Education and financial strains (Hirata, 2003).

Since the door for education was opened to those with disabilities, the number of schools that educated students who were deaf or blind increased. In 1897, only four such schools for those with disabilities other than deafness and/or blindness existed in Japan, but the number increased to 38 in 1907. Accordingly, a training course for special education teachers was established at the Tokyo School for the Deaf and Blind (東京盲唖学校) in 1903, due to the increased number of special schools. Therefore, there was an increased number of educators with knowledge of special education, and this resulted in the division of the special education environment.

Students who were deaf or blind used to be educated within the same facility. However, education for the blind and deaf was divided due to increased recognition that those disabilities carried completely different needs. This movement resulted in the establishment of the Tokyo School for the Blind in 1909 and the Tokyo School for Deaf and Mute in 1910, following the closure of the Tokyo School for the Deaf and Blind. Concurrent to this movement, authorities enacted two separate laws, a Regulation of the Tokyo School for the Blind, and a Regulation of the Tokyo School for the Deaf and Mute. Since then, there has been a complete separation, distinction, and segregation of schools for those who are deaf and those who are blind.

Besides education for students who were blind, deaf, or had cognitive disabilities, increased attention was focused on those with physical impairment or sickness. Because such
students suffer from unhealthy environments, residential institutions similar to sanatoriums called "Kyuka-Shuraku" (休暇集落) were opened in rural areas (Hirata, 2005). The first classes were conducted in 1900. The "Rinkan-Gakko" (林間学校) sanitarium was established by "Hakujushi-kai" (白十字会), which was an association for the prevention of tuberculosis, in 1917. This was the first appearance of a permanent institution for physically weak children. Education for those with physical disabilities, rather than conditions such as asthma or heart disease, began in 1918, with the establishment of "Yume-no-Rakuenn-Ryoyojo" (夢の楽園教療所) by Kenji Takagi. This was the first institution established for those with physical disabilities, and it focused on medical and therapeutic treatment and education. This institution trained students to be independent citizens, which was a new perspective. Even though this institution possessed an educational aspect, it was still not recognized as an educational institution by the government, in part, because of the lack of public recognition for education of those with physical disabilities.

Just as education varied according to one’s documented disability, there was a distinction between those with physical disabilities and those with fragility. In 1921, the first special classrooms for those who were invalid and/or fragile, called "Yogo" classrooms (養護学級), whose direct literal translation is “nursing classrooms,” were established in elementary schools in Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, and Fukuoka. By 1934, there were 146 schools housing this type of classroom and 8028 students served.

After the first phase of special education ended around 1900, the second phase began during the "Taisho democracy", following World War I. During this period, there was an increased number of special education classrooms in major cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, and Nagoya. During this period, organizations for the education of people with disabilities were founded, such as the Japan Deaf and Mute Education Association (日本聾啞教育会). Accordingly, the authorities began to pay more attention to special education. The Ministry of Education offered financial and philosophical support to the education of those who were deaf and/or blind in 1924, and a Regulation for Encouragement of Education of School Aged Children (学齢児童就 学奨励規程), which included remarks about the importance of special education, was enacted in 1928.

According to the progress and spread of special education, educators and authorities realized the need for more detailed and reliable data, such as the overall incidence of disabilities, in order to provide advanced and improved education. Thus, several formal studies on
populations with special educational needs were conducted. In 1930, the Tokyo City Education Bureau (東京市教育局) conducted an Investigation of Students with Certain Levels of Bone, Joint and Muscle Disorders that Allowed Exemption from Gymnastics. Due to a critical relationship between disabilities and disadvantaged financial background, Investigation of Students who are Deaf and Mute, Blind, and Living in Poverty was conducted in 1931. The Ministry of Education also conducted an Investigation of School Aged Students who are Blind and Deaf in 1936.

Besides conducting nation-wide level investigations, local authorities also conducted research. Osaka Prefecture practiced an Investigation of Underachievers in 1938.

Parallel with gathering information about students with special needs, special classes were opened within common elementary schools based on specific types of disabilities. Tokyo City Yanagawa Common Elementary School (東京市八名川尋常 niezbę学校) created a class for students with speech impairments in 1926. The first class for students with weak eyesight opened at Tokyo City Minamiyama Ordinary Elementary School (東京市南山尋常小学校) in 1933, and a special class for students with physical disabilities was opened at Tokyo Metropolitan Kudan Junior High School (東京都立九段中学校) in 1944. In 1931, the total number of Japanese schools with special classrooms was 71, the number of special classrooms was 100, and the number of enrolled students learning in those classrooms was 3,063. However, those numbers gradually decreased due to the Japanese economic recession in response to the Great Depression in the United States. In 1935, the number of schools with special classrooms was 49, the number of special classrooms was 53, and the number of students learning in special classrooms was 913.

Like the establishment of the special classrooms within regular elementary schools, special schools emerged for specific types of disabilities. For example, the first school for students with physical disabilities, called Tokyo City Municipal Kohmei School (東京市立光明学校), was established in 1932, which was the only school for those with physical disabilities in Japan until the end of World War II. Osaka City Municipal Shisei Elementary School (大阪市立思斉学校), which was the first special school for mental retardation, was established in 1940, and a special school for those with physical disabilities, called Seishi-Ryogoen (整肢療護園), was opened in 1942 by Kenji Takagi, who was inspired by a German-style medical, educational, and occupational training institution called the Kruppelheim (Nakamura, 2005).

**Post World War II**

Japan’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration resulted in political, social, and
educational reform. The major political change was the end of fascism, which had long influenced Japanese special education policies. Special education was therefore affected by the intervention of the United States. Thus, education for those with mental retardation and other disabilities experienced increased attention after World War II.

The School Education Law (学校教育法) and the Fundamental Law of Education (教育基本法) were reauthorized in 1947. Under these laws, various types of special schools for students with special needs were established. Each type of disability was distinguished and segregated. Accordingly, there have been three types of special schools: schools for blind (盲学校), schools for deaf (聾学校), and schools for other disabilities, called Yogo-Gakko (養護学校). The vague meaning of this Japanese-Chinese character 養護 is “nursing,” and the educational terminological meaning is a school that provides appropriate protection and discipline according to individual physical and mental development. Yogo-Gakko is a new and unique type of educational institution in Japan for those with disabilities other than blindness and/or deafness. Moreover, Yogo-Gakko is divided into two categories: one for those with mental retardation, and another for those with physical disabilities including invalidity and fragility. Unlike the United States, those with physical disabilities attend special schools, separately from regular public schools, even if they do not have any mental or cognitive problem.

In August 1952, the Office of Special Education (特殊教育室) was established at the Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education (文部省初等中等教育局) to solve issues regarding special education in Japan. There were two critical problems. One was regarding schools for the deaf and/or blind. The other was the significant delay of special education for those with disabilities other than deafness or blindness, such mental/cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, and invalidity or fragility. Therefore, there was a need to develop standards to assess students with disabilities, and to determine the exact number of these students. Thus, the Standard of Criterion for Assessment of Students who Need Special Treatment in Educational Settings (教育上特別な取り扱いを要する児童生徒の判別基準について) was established in 1953, and an Investigation of Children with Physical Disabilities and Physically Weak Children (肢体不自由児及び身体虚弱児実態調査) was conducted in 1954. These fulfilled the need for a means of standardized assessment.

To improve the special education system, there were several laws regarding the encouragement education for students with disabilities. The Law of Encouragement of School

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Attendance for Schools for the Blind or Deaf and Yogo-Gakko (盲学校、聾学校及び養護学校への就学奨励に関する法律) was issued in 1954. Accordingly, compulsory school education for deaf and blind students was established in 1956. In contrast, Yogo Gakko (養護学校) was not placed under the compulsory education system yet. There are other considerable issues which prevented the improvement of special schools and special education, including finances and a lack of well-trained educators. Therefore, due to these issues, the Legislation for Special Measures of Maintaining Public Yogo-Gakko (公立養護学校整備特別措置法) was established in 1956. As the result of recognizing the importance of encouraging students with disabilities, the partial amendment of the School Education Law in 1957 recognized that attendance at Yogo-Gakko is the equivalent of attendance at mandatory school. However, enrollment into Yogo-Gakko was not yet part of compulsory education.

While schools for students who are deaf or blind were recognized as compulsory and equivalent to regular elementary and middle school in 1948, and even though Yogo-Gakko was established in 1948, Yogo-Gakko was not recognized as a part of compulsory education until 1979. Since compulsory education at Yogo Gakko began, the number of students and schools dramatically increased in response (S. Shimizu, Aoki, & Shinagawa, 2003; Shimoda, 1991). The total number of special schools, including schools for the deaf, schools for the blind, and Yogo-Gakko, was 685 in 1978, and increased to 837 in 1979 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2001). The increased number of special schools, especially Yogo-Gakko, meant an increased number of educational sites able to provide specialized educational support. Therefore, the number of students who were excluded or exempted from compulsory education significantly decreased. The total number of uneducated children and youths due to disability was 33,972 in 1950, but it decreased to 2,214 in 2003 (K. Shimizu, Akao, Arai, Ito, Sato, Fujita, et al., 2004).

In general, people tended to hold the view that special education gathers students with disabilities who meet the criteria for special needs, and educates them in special schools and/or special classrooms, which are completely separate from the general education population. Gradually, however, traditional special education has become disinclined toward segregating students with special needs due to the influence of normalization and mainstreaming. In 1969, one sentence was added into an investigative report on special education. This sentence emphasized avoiding extreme segregation of students with special needs and providing increased
opportunities for education with other students without disabilities in a regular setting (Ministry of Education, 1984). This was the first official recognition of the idea of inclusion. Due to the increased number of students with special needs enrolled in regular schools, the Advisory Committee submitted a Final Report on Resource Rooms and Related Issues to the Ministry of Education in 1992. Then, in 1993, instruction in resource rooms began. The number of students receiving instruction in resource rooms in 1993 was 12,259, and increased to 31,767 in 2002 (K. Shimizu et al., 2004).

During the 1990’s, because of the presence of students who demonstrated difficulties with academic achievement independent of mental retardation, recognition about learning disabilities has gradually increased. Therefore, disseminating appropriate knowledge and establishing guidelines about learning disabilities became a critical issue. In response, the Final Report on Investigation for Children with Learning Disabilities and Similar Learning Difficulties was submitted in 1999 (S. Shimizu, 2003). The Final Report on Future Direction for Special Education in the 21st Century was submitted to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the new name of the old Ministry of Education and the Science and Technology Agency, in 2001.

Since this report, special education in Japan changed its name to “special support education.” The old name of “special education” appeared to indicate that the education was only for students with disabilities. On the other hand, the new name of “special support education” indicates that the education is not only for those with disabilities, but also for students who are experiencing learning difficulties independent of disabilities (Japan Association of Special Education, 2003). The significance of this report is that the eligibility of students with disabilities such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism to receive special education has been officially recognized (S. Shimizu, 2003; Japanese Association of Special Education, 2003). These disabilities have not yet been authorized by law. However, this investigation has been carried out in a way that is mindful of the future revision of special education legislation, so these disabilities will be stated as eligible under national authority in the near future.
Table 2
The Historical Landmarks of Special Education in Japan and the United States

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<tr>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>United States</th>
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<tr>
<td>1600's - 1800's Students with disabilities accepted and educated at many <em>Terakoya</em>, old fashioned institutions of primary education</td>
<td>Early 1800's Educational institutions for the deaf established</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1832</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mid 1800's Establishment of schools for mental retardation</td>
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<tr>
<td>1866 Introduction of European asylums for the deaf, blind, and those with mental retardation in “Western Matters” by Yukichi Fukuzawa</td>
<td>1864 The establishment of the National Deaf Mute College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871 Establishment of the Ministry of Education</td>
<td>1870's - 1880's Establishment of educational institutions for deaf and/or blind.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yamao’s submission of a statement to the government regarding education for those who are blind and deaf</td>
<td>1879 Repeal of Educational System, and issue of Legislation of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>1872 Establishment of Educational System</td>
<td>1886 Establishment of the Legislation of Primary Schools</td>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>First special class for underachievers and those with mild mental</td>
<td>1890’s</td>
<td>Establishment of special schools/classes for exceptional children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>retardation (Matsumoto Elementary School)</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>First regulation of certification for teachers of the deaf and blind</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First institution for mental retardation by Ishii (Kojogakuin)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Tokyo School for the Deaf and Blind purchased Braille printing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>machine from the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>First practice of Kyuka-Shuraku (school for health impairment)</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>First compulsory school laws for exceptional children enacted</td>
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<td>1907</td>
<td>Establishment of 6 year compulsory education by Amendment</td>
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<td>of the Legislation of Primary School</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Educational separation between students who are deaf and blind</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Segregated classes in the public schools are established as a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>initiated</td>
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<td>viable alternative for training exceptional children</td>
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<td>1917</td>
<td>Establishment of Rinkan-Gakko: the first permanent institution for</td>
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<td></td>
<td>children with health impairment</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Regulation of School for the Blind and Schools for Deaf and Mute</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>The term “mentally retarded” introduced</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>The Ministry of Education begun supporting education of deaf and</td>
<td></td>
<td>The term “gifted” appears in the literature</td>
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<td></td>
<td>blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>First special class for students with speech impairment (Tokyo City</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>The International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yanagawa Common Elementary School)</td>
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<td>founded</td>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>First school for student with physical disabilities (Tokyo Metropolitan Koumei School)</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>The first class for students with weak eyesight (Tokyo City Minamiyama Common Elementary School)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Helen Keller visited to Japan.</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Investigation of underachievers (Osaka)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>The first school for mental retardation (Osaka Municipal Shisei School)</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Leo Kanner identifies the syndrome of autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Mandatory Education Law / School Education Law</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>The U. S. Supreme Court hands down its decision in Brown vs. Board of education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>The Law of Encouragement of School Attendance for Schools for the Blind or Deaf and Yogo-Gakko</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Establishment of compulsory education for deaf and blind Legislation for Special Measures of Maintaining Public Yogo-Gakko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Official recognition of the enrolment of Yogo-Gakko as equivalent of compulsory school attendance</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Public Law 85-926 provides grants for training special education personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>President’s Panel of Mental Retardation under John F. Kennedy</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>The Division of Handicapped Children and Youth is established within the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Samuel A. Kirk introduces the term “learning disabilities”</td>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Investigation of Students’ Mental and Physical Disabilities</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Title VI was added to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>National Institute of Special Education (NISE) founded</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>PARC vs. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</td>
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<td>1971</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act</td>
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<td>1973</td>
<td></td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Education of the Handicapped Act -- grandparent of IDEA</td>
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<td>1974</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Education for All Handicapped Children Act</td>
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<td>1975</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Public Law 94-142, the Education for All handicapped Children Act is passed by Congress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Yogo-Gakko became a part of compulsory education</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Americans with Disabilities Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>United Nations’ International Year of Disabled Persons</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons by the United Nations</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>The IDEA is amended</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Instruction in resource rooms started.</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>The IDEA is amended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>The Ministry of Education renamed the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) The Final Report on Future Direction for Special Education in the 21st Century Special education was renamed special support education</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004</td>
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How Historical and Current Perspectives in the United States Drive and Influence Special Education Policies and Practices

Special education in the United States originated by adopting a European approach, as seen in France and England. Therefore, special education in the United States was initially characterized by institutionalization (Cruickshank et al., 1990), gathering those with disabilities and separating them from a society dominated by those without disabilities. In addition, those with similar disabilities were gathered and grouped together. Winzer (1993) pointed out that those who were deaf were generally the first to receive education because deafness is one significant communication barrier. Therefore, education for students who were deaf was the initial center of development of special education in the United States in the 1800’s. Several educational institutions for the deaf were established during the early 1800’s. For example, the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons (subsequently, the American Asylum), whose principal was Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, opened in Hartford, Connecticut in 1817. The Institution of Industrial Training at the American Asylum at Hartford was established in Connecticut in 1822. The New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb was established in 1818, and the first state school for deaf children was established in Kentucky in 1822. Following this movement to establish schools for the deaf, Edward Miner Gallaudet, the youngest son of T. H Gallaudet, established Gallaudet College in 1894, which later became Gallaudet University. This school was established to provide students with disabilities the same level of opportunity to receive higher education as those without disabilities.

Like Japan, the United States special education system created separate educational institutions based on different types of disability, before the idea of inclusion. The transition from educational charity and the establishment of institutions for the blind to legitimate schools emerged in the United States, partly through the efforts of Samuel Gridley Howe. Howe founded of the Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind (or Perkins Institution for the Blind), which opened in 1832.

Besides educational recognition for those who are deaf or blind, the real progress toward comprehensive special education in the United States started in the mid 19th century, encouraged by the success of special education in France and England. A private school for those with mental retardation was established in Barre, Massachusetts by Hervey Backus Wilbur in 1848. A Boarding School for Idiots, which was an experimental school for those with mental retardation,
was housed at a wing of the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Boston in 1848. The School for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Children in Massachusetts was established by the state legislature in 1850, and the Elwyn Institution, which is the Pennsylvania Training School for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Children, was founded in 1852. In 1851, the New York legislature hired Wilbur as superintendent of an experimental school for those with mental retardation. Then, this school was established in 1854 by Wilbur using New York State funds. In 1855, the school was relocated to Syracuse from Albany and renamed the State Asylum for Idiots.

The appropriate placement of students with special needs has been one of the most controversial issues in special education. The key to the historical changes in United States special education is the transition from institutionalization in the early 19th century to deinstitutionalization (Dorn, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 1996). Public attention began to focus on the importance of community-based care and education of those with disabilities.

The movement of special education paralleled the civil rights movement, influenced by the pursuit of human rights for those who were once objects of racial discrimination (Cruickshank et al., 1990). The case of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 had a significant impact on the history of education and special education (Shealey, Lue, Brooks, & McCray, 2005). According to the court decision, separate educational facilities violate the right to an equal education, to which all citizens of the United States are guaranteed equal protection under the Constitution. Before this case, the educational rights of minority children were not equally protected or guaranteed. This court decision was a landmark in special education history because those with disabilities were viewed and treated similar to minorities.

An educational program that trained teachers for special education started in 1908 in Michigan (Cruickshank et al., 1990). In the United States, the concept of deinstitutionalization and mainstreaming was clarified by form P.L. 94-142 (Cruickshank et al., 1990). Even though there were already partial training programs for teachers of special education, the first full program was established in 1946 with a federal grant under the Eisenhower administration (Cruickshank et al., 1990).

The federal authority’s recognition of special education increased in response to public attention. The most significant development in special education occurred during the Kennedy administration. He assigned a special President’s Panel of Mental Retardation in 1961, which created A Proposal Program for National Action to Combat Mental Retardation (Scheerenberger,
The recommendations by the Panel resulted in later legislations that granted funds and support to improve the environment for those with mental retardation. The Kennedy administration’s encouragement for teacher training resulted in preparation programs for teaching special education at the college and university level throughout the nation after 1963 (Cruickshank et al., 1990). Even after the assassination of President Kennedy, his intention to improve education and quality of life for those with mental retardation resulted in the official establishment of the President’s Committee on Mental Retardation in 1966. Coupled with the active campaign for recognition of mental retardation, the idea of normalization spread rapidly. Due to this movement, institutionalization, the traditional form of special education in the United States, shifted to deinstitutionalization, and accordingly, inclusion.

Language change was one indication of the movement toward respect and equality in special education. During a tour of a “dual school” in Syracuse, New York, one observer noted a sign on a door reading “2nd Grade Normal Children” followed by a sign reading “2nd Grade Crippled Children” on the next door (Cruickshank et al., 1990). These signs gave evidence of discrimination and disrespect for students with disabilities. Currently, due to the perspective that disability is a part of the individual, not an explanatory label of the individual, person-first language is used. For example, “disabled person” was used in the past, however, “person with disability” or “person who has disability” is appropriate language in current days.

Summary

Historically, deafness and blindness were the disabilities that received attention first. Perhaps the disparity between the recognition of blindness and deafness and cognitive disorders was due to the visibility of the former and the fact that they directly affect communication. In addition, these disabilities do not dramatically affect appearance, unlike many other physical disabilities.

Special education in the United States began with residential institutions, a concept brought from Europe in the early 1800’s. Special education in the United States first focused on educating those who were deaf, then those who were blind, then those with cognitive disabilities, and other disabilities independent of mental or physical disabilities.

A “primitive” version of special education was already practiced in Japan in the 1600’s, and this education took the form of inclusion. There was a record that children with several types
of disabilities, such as deafness, blindness, and physical disabilities were educated early on. However, like the United States, special education in Japan began by the recognition of those who are deaf and blind as the “targeted” special education population. Then, attention was paid to those with physical disabilities and those who were invalid and infirm. Those with mental retardation, emotional disturbance, severe and multiple disabilities, were recognized as eligible for special education after World War II (S. Shimizu, 2003).

In the mid 1800’s, the idea of asylums for the deaf and blind was introduced to Japan, and several educators and scholars emphasized the importance of education. Meanwhile, there was already independent college-level education established in the United States. About 70 years behind the United States, educational institutions for those who were deaf and/or blind were founded in Japan. Moreover, almost 100 years after the emergence of educational institutions for those with mental retardation in the United States, educational institutions for mental retardation were founded in Japan. Even though the history of Japanese special education began independently, most of the ideas and forms of special education policies in current Japan have been brought from the United States. In other words, current Japanese special education practices appear to model those of the United States.

One consideration, however, is that of proportion. The United States experienced rapid progress toward its current form of special education, and Japan took longer to reach its current form, given to its long history. However, proportionally, the length of United States history of special education and Japanese history of special education are similar. For example, the establishment of Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), former IDEA, and the official recognition of Yogo-Gakko as compulsory education occurred around the same time: 1975 and 1979, respectively. Given the consideration of proportion, the progress of special education policies and practice in the United States and Japan has been relatively equal.
CHAPTER 5

POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

How Special Education Policies and Practices in Japan and the United States Differ

Current Special Education Policies and Practices in the United States

Referred to as the “New World,” the United States is one of the youngest nations in the world. The new world was established based on the fundamental political ideas of democracy and equality. Many pioneers in the field of special education tried to apply this attitude to the education of people with disabilities. According to Nakamura (2003), the two significant characteristics of adhering to a democratic ideal were the sense of civic duty, namely, supporting special education by public funds, and egalitarianism, which opened education to all, regardless of rank or wealth. Nakamura (2003) recognized that the most modern, advanced, and public special education program bloomed in the United States.

The modern special education system regulated by the federal government was established by the Amendment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) in 1966, which included a new Title VI addressing education for students with disabilities. After several amendments of ESEA, Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act was enacted in 1973, and the Education of the Handicapped Act was enacted in the following year. The Education of the Handicapped Act was amended and became the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. This revision was significant because until 1975, the United States federal government did not require public schools to provide special education services for those with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted in 1990, and in this year, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Currently, four major federal laws regulate special education: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the No Child Left Behind Act.

The most significant and representative aspect of special education in the United States is the presence of six principles, enacted under the IDEA. These six principles are: (a) zero reject, (b) nondiscriminatory evaluation, (c) free appropriate public education (FAPE), (d) least restrictive environment, (e) procedural due process, and (f) parent-student participation (Turnbull,
Six Principles of IDEA in United States

**Zero reject.** Under this principle, no one will be rejected or excluded from public education. All children and youths ages 3 to 21 will receive a free and appropriate education, regardless of disabilities (Turnbull et al., 2004). The severity and type of a student’s disabilities does not influence his/her right to receive public education.

**Nondiscriminatory evaluation.** This is a formal assessment with strict guidelines required by the IDEA, and must have parents’ written consent. The purpose of this nondiscriminatory evaluation is to determine whether or not a student has a disability, and if so, to specify what kind of special education and related services the student should receive (Turnbull et al., 2004). There are three steps preceding this formal assessment: screening, prereferral, and referral. These steps are not required by the IDEA, but educators usually follow them for the effective and successful practice of nondiscriminatory evaluation (Turnbull et al., 2004). Such precautions prevent educators from misevaluating students with special needs.

The screening process entails administering a number of tests. All students are screened to examine the need for further tests, which identify their eligibility to receive special education. Prereferral is informal, immediate help for teachers who are facing challenges in teaching students who might need special consideration and support (Turnbull et al., 2004). Prereferral might be advice from other teachers, suggestions from paraprofessionals, or tips from other professionals about how to overcome these challenges. Referral is the submission of a formal, written request for nondiscriminatory evaluation (Turnbull et al., 2004). Once the referral has been submitted, a nondiscriminatory evaluation of the student is conducted.

This evaluation follows strict guidelines, and should not be racially or culturally biased, or based on a single test. Therefore, the evaluation must involve a variety of assessments and be administered in a student’s native language. The central purpose of this evaluation is to create an individual educational program for the student, so it must attempt to gather information in all areas, such as cognitive and physical conditions, social and emotional status, and academic performance. Given these considerations, the evaluation should be conducted by a multidisciplinary team. The essential members of this team are the student’s parents, general and special education teachers, knowledgeable school district representatives, individuals who can interpret how the evaluation will affect education, persons with special expertise regarding the
student’s disability and related services such as doctors, nurses, and occupational, physical, speech, art, and music therapists, and others upon parents’, students’, and schools’ requests (Turnbull et al., 2004). In short, nondiscriminatory evaluation is the foundation of each individual’s appropriate education (Turnbull et al., 2004).

Free appropriate public education (FAPE). This is a principle that requires schools to provide individually-tailored education for each student based on the evaluation and augmented by supplementary aids and related services. Once a student is determined to be eligible to receive special education, an individualized education program (IEP) is created. This plan is made by a multidisciplinary IEP team whose goal is nondiscriminatory evaluation. Therefore, the participants involved in the student’s special education service are also the evaluators, planners, and practitioners of IEP. IEP must include information such as the student’s present level of functioning, measurable annual goals, short term objectives, specified special education services and related services, means of accommodation, methods of assessment, and transition services (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003).

The IDEA requires that IEP should be effective at the start of each school year (Turnbull et al., 2004), and should be reviewed upon the student’s progress toward specified annual goals. Educators reviewing the IEP must focus on five matters: (a) any lack of expected progress toward the student’s annual goals and in the general curriculum (where appropriate), (b) the result of any reevaluation, (c) information about the student provided to or by the parents, (d) the student’s anticipated needs, and (e) other matters related to the student’s education, such as increasing inclusion in extracurricular activities (Turnbull et al., 2004, p.28). Attention to these areas, according to the IDEA, allows educators to reflect upon and revise IEP effectively.

Least restrictive environment. This principle requires schools to educate students with disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate for students without disabilities. Turnbull et al. (2004) identified three reasons for this principle: a reflection on the long history of segregation and resulting normalization, an expectation of increased social equality and independence, and the need to develop relationships with others. Due to this principle, students with disabilities are more likely to have equal opportunities, independent lives, and a general level of self-sufficiency. If they have access to the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible, students with disabilities and students without disabilities also have a greater likelihood to develop interpersonal relationships (Turnbull et al., 2004).
To guarantee the least restrictive environment possible, a range of services, called a continuum of services, is provided. A continuum of services is offered by schools from more typical and inclusive educational settings to less typical and inclusive settings. The most inclusive setting is the general education classroom, followed by resource rooms, special classes in a regular school setting, special schools, and homebound services. Finally, hospitals and institutions are placed as the least inclusive educational settings. Therefore, in addition to attempting to maximize inclusion in academic areas, students with disabilities should be ensured maximized inclusion in nonacademic areas such as meals, recess, counseling, athletics, transportation, health services, recreational activities, clubs, and activities outside of school (Turnbull et al., 2004; Shealey et al., 2005).

**Procedural due process.** Under this principle, safeguards for students against a school’s action are provided, as well as the right to examine records, to receive independent evaluations, mediation, due process hearings, and the ability to sue. Parents can request mediation and due process hearings when they disagree with a administrative action regarding their children’s special education (Osborne & Russo 2006).

Mediation intercedes to resolve disputes over the student’s evaluation, placement, and the execution of free appropriate public education between the parents and the school. Mediation must be neutral, so mediators must be voluntary and cannot be hired by any agency that provides direct services to the students, such as a state or school entity and/or employee (Osborne & Russo 2006).

In addition to mediation, parents can request due process regarding any aspect of their child’s education, such as assessment, evaluation, placement, and eligibility (Osborne & Russo 2006; Turnbull et al., 2004). A due process hearing is a “mini-trial” (Turnbull et al., 2004), and after a due process hearing, an objective decision is made by a hearing officer, an official who is responsible for objective decisions regarding the presented problems. Like mediators, hearing officers should not be employed by service providers such as a state or school to maintain neutral status (Osborne & Russo 2006).

**Parent-student participation.** Collaboration between parents and adolescent students and schools is required in designing and carrying out a special education program. The move to ensure parental rights and involvement in special education is the work of the National Association of Parents and Friends of Mentally Retarded Children (later re-named the
Association for Retarded Citizens), which was established in 1950 (Dybward, 1980). Their efforts resulted in official recognition for parental involvement in P.L. 94-142 in 1975. Currently, parents are the essential element of a child’s special education program. They must be involved in any decision-making, and the school cannot change a student’s program without parental consent. Therefore, schools must make sure that parents are in attendance at IEP meetings and must accommodate the schedule and location of meetings for active parental participation. In addition, schools must keep a log of attempts to make contact with parents, such as phone calls and visits (Vaughn et al., 2003).

**Summary.** The six principles of special education in the United States have provided the foundation of a fair and balanced system. Special education services in the United States are provided to all eligible children, evaluated fairly, free of charge, and delivered in an extended inclusive setting. Additionally, the system allows legal action, and involves parents. The process, the service provider’s duties, and the protection of service recipients are well-established principles and are clearly codified in numerous regulations within this short history.

The following section will focus on how Japanese special education is legislated and practiced by introducing major laws regarding education and corresponding to the six principles of United States special education.

**Current Special Education Policies and Practices in Japan**

The major laws governing education in Japan are the Constitution of Japan (日本国憲法), the Fundamental Law of Education (教育基本法), and the School Education Law (学校教育法). These newer laws replaced previous educational laws which did not fully guaranteed people’s educational rights, and moreover, neglected the educational rights of people with disabilities.

The Constitution of Japan was established in 1946, based on the draft by staff members of General Headquarters under Douglas MacArthur, following World War II. The three principles of the Constitution of Japan are popular sovereignty, pacifism, and respect for fundamental human rights. These principles relate to special education because human rights includes education, and academic freedom is guaranteed under the 23rd article of constitution. In addition, the 26th article states that all people are guaranteed to have educational rights as fundamental human rights. Notably, the former Japanese constitution did not have such a regulation regarding education. Therefore, Sugihara (2006) notes that the 23rd and 26th articles are remarkably valuable because they safeguard education and human rights, which were previously neglected, together.
with the regulation of thought and conscience under the 19th article.

The Fundamental Law of Education (教育基本法) was established in 1947. Sugihara (2006) referred to its representative characteristics in the introduction: “we, on ahead, established the Constitution of Japan and declared that we are establishing a democratic cultural nation and contribute to the world peace and welfare. The realization of this ideal is founded upon the power of education” (The Fundamental Law of Education, 1947). Sugihara describes the significance of the Fundamental Law of Education as a bridge between the Constitution of Japan and other general laws, even though The Fundamental Law of Education is ranked equally with other general laws. Because the Constitution of Japan weighs heavily on education, the Fundamental Law of Education is referred to as one of the most important laws in Japan and recognized with the same amount of respect as the Constitution. Because the Fundamental Law of Education has such a concrete fundamental philosophy, it is sometimes called the constitution of education (Y. Yamamoto, personal communication, July 1, 2006). In addition, Sugihara points out that because traditional Japanese education had preceded national development, it required individuals to consider the harmony of the society above individual human rights, values, and dignity. After World War II, Japanese education began to respect individual human rights, values, and dignity as the foundation of democracy (Sugihara, 2006).

The School Education Law (学校教育法) was established as a basic and general regulation of Japanese school systems in 1947 (Hayo, 2006). Just as the Constitution of Japan was established with a contribution by the United States, the School Education Law was also established with the collaboration of counsel by the United States and the efforts of a Japanese committee. The Report of the United States Education Mission to Japan submitted to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers was a significant step toward reforming Japanese education. This report was the massive investigation of the conditions of Japanese education, and it was the combination of specific counsel by the United States and efforts on behalf of Japanese educators’ desires (Hayo, 2006; Ministry of Education, 1984).

Hayo (2006) gives six fundamental principles of the School Education Law: (a) the unification of school systems, (b) the extension of compulsory education, (c) the expansion of educational opportunities that includes establishment of compulsory schooling for those with disabilities, (d) the abolition of sex discrimination, (e) the respect for educational autonomy, and (f) democratization and increased flexibility of educational contents. The significance of this law
is the presence of a chapter focusing specifically on special education.

The Constitution is the foundation ensuring educational rights as part of basic human rights, and these educational rights are developed in the Fundamental Law of Education. The Fundamental Law of Education is a codified presentation of Japanese philosophy and attitudes about education. While the Fundamental Law of Education takes the form of a general philosophical statement, the School Education Law sets specific guidelines to regulate the concrete and practical aspects of the Japanese school system.

Japanese special education is conducted in a fashion similar to that of the United States. However, there are several significant differences between United States special education policy and Japanese special education policy. In the following section, current special education policy in Japan is examined in comparison to the principles of United States special education.

**How Principles of Japanese Special Education Compare to the Special Education Principles in the United States**

**Zero reject in Japanese policy.** The Constitution of Japan and the Fundamental Law of Education ensure the right to education for all people. Under the 23rd article and the 26th article of the Constitution of Japan, and the 3rd article of Fundamental Law of Educations, all Japanese citizens are guaranteed the right to receive inclusive education. These general articles do not refer directly or use terms such as “special education,” “those with special needs” or “those who have disabilities.” However, people with disabilities are guaranteed the opportunity of education because they are considered part of “all people” who have the “right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability” under the 23rd article of the Constitution of Japan.

These articles were established at the close of World War II, but the realization of admission of all students, especially those with disabilities, has taken many years. The actual establishment of all students’ admission into public education began in 1979 when Yogo-Gakko officially became part of compulsory education. Under the current laws, no one will be rejected or discriminated against due to disability. However, the placement of students with disabilities is varied, depending on type and severity, while severity of disability and type of disability do not influence their right to receive public education in the United States.

In addition, corresponding to the United States principle of zero reject, parents have the duty to enforce compulsory education. They are responsible for seeing to it that their children receive an education, while the government is responsible for providing free public education.
However, parents may opt for their children’s exclusion from education if the severity of their children’s disability meets the standard. The number of students who are allowed to be excused or excluded has decreased from 32,630 in 1929 to 2,436 in 2005 (MEXT, 2006). Even though the number of students who are allowed to be excused or excluded has decreased, Japanese regulation still holds a statement allowing students to be excused and/or excluded from public education due to the condition of disabilities as defined by School Education Law.

**Nondiscriminatory evaluation in Japanese policy.** Just as there are screenings before entering school in the United States, the Japanese educational system also practices screening of school-aged children. A practical, institutional early-intervention method in Japan begins with a physical checkup of both expectant mother and child, then, a physical health checkup for babies and infants, mandated at 18th months and three years. When the possibility of disability is determined, services such as counseling and consultation are available. This is mandated as at the national level and could be distinctive from other countries, but the services are not well-established nationwide because they are left to local government (Ota, 2000). Therefore, there is no nationwide, regulated early intervention. The School Health Law (学校保健法) regulates the screening process, including medical examination and health consultation. Corresponding to the School Education Law, the school board of each municipality must complete health examinations on its residents who will reach school age by the beginning of the next school year under the School Health Law. Once those health examinations are complete, the school boards of the municipality must counsel medical treatment and provide necessary instructions about health-based issues and the examination results. In addition, they must take appropriate measures such as providing information and offering guidance regarding exclusion from compulsory education and eligibility for special education at schools for those who are deaf, schools for those who are blind, and Yogo-Gakko.

More detailed provisions for screening are stated under the Enforcement Order of the School Health Law (学校保健法施行令). The screening examines: (a) nutrition condition, (b) the presence of disease and/or abnormality of the vertebra and thorax, (c) eyesight and audition, (d) the presence of disease and/or abnormality of the eyes, (e) the presence of disease and/or abnormality of the ears, (f) the presence of disease and/or abnormality of the teeth and mouth, and (g) the presence of other diseases and/or abnormality. In most cases, the placement of students with disabilities would be determined at this point. The issue of placement will be
discussed later on, when comparing the principle of least restrict environment in the United States.

Once a student has been categorized as having a disability and/or anticipates difficulty in a regular school setting during screening, he/she will be examined by other professionals. The Enforcement Order of the School Education Law rules that the school board of the municipality must have a hearing of various professionals with special knowledge in areas such as pedagogy, medical science, psychology, and the education of school aged children who have cognitive and/or physical disabilities.

**Free appropriate public education in Japanese policy.** It is clearly stated that free public compulsory education must be provided under three educational laws: the 26th article of the constitution of Japan, the 4th article of the Fundamental Law of Education, and the 6th article of the School Education Law. Japanese public compulsory education is nine years of general education, which is provided at elementary school for six years and at middle school for three years. The schools which provide free public compulsory education include schools for those who are deaf, schools for those who are blind, and Yogo-Gakko.

Because early intervention is not mandated in special education and high school is not part of compulsory education in Japan, the age range of eligibility for compulsory special education is from 6 to 15. Available forms of current early intervention for those with special needs are facilities for those with mental retardation, hearing impairment, and physical disabilities, and both public and private regular preschools and kindergartens (Ohta, 2000). Even though early intervention is not mandatory, early special education has been provided with a form of educational counseling or consultation since the mid 1970’s (Ohta, 2000).

While United States free appropriate public education includes the requirement of IEP, there is no legal requirement for such a program in Japan. IEP, as used in the United States and England, has been studied and introduced to the Japanese educational environment, creating an increased recognition of IEP (Fujishima, 2000; Miyazaki, 2004; Ohkawara, 2005; S. Shimizu et al., 2003). Several educators have implemented IEP on a trial basis (Kato, 1991). However, there is no regulated requirement for IEP. There are two possible reasons. First, there are national education curriculums for public school authorized by the government. National education curriculum is established for each school grade and type of school, such as regular school and three types of special schools. Second, the presence of separated special schools might be one of the reasons. Because those with similar disabilities are gathered together, the necessity of
establishing IEP has not been fully recognized yet. In addition, IEP is created with various aspects to maximize the effect of tailored instruction. Therefore, an interdisciplinary team is required; however, the current lack of collaboration between professionals might prevent the progress of IEP.

**Least restrictive environment in Japanese policy.** Regarding this principle, the perspectives in Japan and the United States upon the educational placement of students with disabilities are significantly different. First, even though all Japanese children and youths are guaranteed the right to receive free appropriate education regardless of their level of disability, there is a statement which allows parents of children with disabilities exemption from their duty to ensure compulsory education. When there is a considerable difficulty to ensure their children’s education due to the severity of the disability and/or defective development, exclusion is permissible under the 23rd article of the School Education Law. Second, there is a standard that regulates the criteria for entering school. Based on this standard, children who do not meet the criteria are placed in special schools, as they are expected to experience academic difficulties in a regular school setting. The placement of students with disabilities is determined by the type and degree of disability, and standardized by ordinance.

While the idea of inclusion has gained increased attention in the United States, Japanese children determined to have disabilities during screening and further evaluations are placed in special schools or special classrooms in a regular school. There are three types of special schools in Japan: schools for those who are blind, schools for those who are deaf, and Yogo-Gakko for those with disabilities other than blindness or deafness. Each municipality in Japan is required to establish special schools if the municipality has school-aged children who have disabilities and are determined to be eligible for special education.

The purpose of these special schools is to provide regular education corresponding to regular pre, elementary, middle, and high schools, and to prove necessary knowledge and skills to “compensate for defect,” as stated in the School Education Law. These schools provide training tailored especially for specific disabilities. In addition, the School Education Law requests that schools for those who are blind or deaf must build dormitories. Due to the special curriculums and necessity of the facility to adjust to students’ special needs, there is a limited number of these types of schools. There are students who cannot commute due to the distance between their home and the school, and so live in dormitories separately from their home.
Other than special schools, public schools are allowed to establish special classrooms for eligible students who (a) have mental retardation, (b) have physical disabilities, (c) are fragile and/or invalid, (d) have weak eye sight, but are not blind, (e) have hearing impairment, but are not deaf, and (f) have other cognitive and/or physical disabilities. These students, who are determined to be eligible for education in special classrooms in regular schools, are generally referred to as mild and/or moderate disabilities.

**Procedural due process in Japanese policy.** While the right of due process is clearly defined by law in the United States, there is no such legal statement regarding procedural due process in Japan. Japanese laws neither prohibit nor recommend legal action such as litigation. Japanese cultural characteristics might be one factor in this lack of procedural due process; Japanese people tend to dislike and avoid arguing with others, and unless they get in tremendous trouble or hold a strong claim, they avoid taking legal action.

In addition, the presence of a national education curriculum, including agreements between the service provider (government and school), and the service receiver (student and parents) might be directly linked to the absence of procedural due process. The cultural background and geographical size resulted in the establishment of a national curriculum because the Japanese tend to prefer being in ruled standards to maintain harmony. Further, the small size allowed the government to easily administer these standards. Moreover, covering the contents of the national curriculum is the providers’ duty, so recipients are federally granted to be provided service. In short, nonfulfillment by the government is not supposed; accordingly, legal action by service receivers is not expected.

**Parent-student participation in Japanese policy.** Even though parent-student participation in special education has received increased attention in Japan, it has not yet been mentioned in the legal regulation of education. Compared to the United States, Japanese parents might appear passive about their children’s education. However, this does not indicate indifference. Due to fundamental cultural attitudes, Japanese people tend to not speak up, especially in front of professionals. Parents believe that professionals are more knowledgeable, and would therefore think it is too forward to present their own opinion. The Japanese tend to listen and follow the direction of professionals and authorities, feeling that they do not have an equal voice as a member of the team for their children’s education.
Comparing Policies and Practices in the United States and Japan

The purpose of education is to foster and facilitate learners who can explore according to their interests, who can gain the ability of decision-making, and who can be independent citizens, capable of responsibility as moral members of society. This purpose holds true in both general and special education in the United States and Japan. The attitudes and fundamental beliefs are the same, but the way to meet these objectives is different. Table 3 provides a comparison of the major special education policies and practices in Japan and the United States.

The fundamental ideas of zero reject and Free Appropriate Public Education are common in both countries. However, the age range for special education eligibility and the practice of IEP are different. Those with disabilities ages 3 through 21 are covered under IDEA in the United States, which includes early intervention and extended time for academic fulfillment. On the other hand, since Japanese compulsory education is nine years of elementary and middle school, the mandated age range of special education eligibility in Japan is 6 to 15. Moreover, because Japanese education is carried out by following an authorized national education curriculum and because Japan lacks any kind of standardized tests to assess students’ academic achievement during compulsory education, students seldom fail or repeat grades.

The presence of a national education curriculum might be directly linked to the absence of mandated IEP, because the Japanese national curriculum already regulates detailed goals and objectives, materials, and hours. An independent national curriculum is created for each type of school: regular schools and three types of special schools, and each grade level: elementary and middle schools. Teachers must meet all criteria specified in the national curriculum. Therefore, there are several trials in the process of creating and practicing IEP in Japan. IEP might be mandated in Japan in the future, but the Japanese IEP might become supplemental to the national curriculum, and less of a student-centered IEP than that created in the United States.

This different approach toward IEP might affect the difference in procedural due process and parent-student participation between Japan and the United States. Miyazaki (2004) pointed out that the United States IEP has a contractual nature, consisting of an arrangement between the education service provider (the local school district), and the receiver (students and their parents), because there is no federally authorized educational curriculum. As parents and students are members of an IEP contract, they should be protected from legal action in the event that considerable issues are raised. On the other hand, in Japan, there is already an established
agreement between the service provider (government and schools), and the service receiver (students and parents), because of the presence of a national curriculum. Kuboshima (as cited in Ikemoto, 2000) refers to the fact that parents’ rights of procedural due process should be regulated, which plainly models the principle of the United States. However, providing education that meets all the criteria of the national curriculum is the providers’ duty and nonfulfillment by the government is not supposed. Therefore, legal action by service receivers might not be expected in Japan.

Nondiscriminatory evaluation is conducted in both countries; however, the results influence placement in different ways. The result of nondiscriminatory evaluation causes the most significant difference between the United States and Japan, which is students’ placement. In Japan, there is an educational service continuum, as in the United States. However, the significant difference is that a student’s placement is usually defined at the time of entrance to elementary school. Therefore, once a student is determined to be eligible for education at a special school for a specific disability at the beginning of elementary school, he/she is expected to be educated in the same type of middle and high school. On the other hand, all students’ educational placement begins in a regular environment and moves to a more specific and special setting in the United States. Students are referred to a further restricted environment based on their individual educational needs. In short, Japan tends to determine students’ placement by focusing more on the medical aspect of a disability, while the United States focuses more on the educational aspects.

Even given the increased recognition about normalization and inclusion, the principle of least restrict environment does not apply to special education in Japan. There is a conflict between the increased recognition of inclusion and the presence of special schools. Even though the public pays attention to and advocates the importance of inclusion, special schools have increased in number due to the presence of the current School Education Law. It might be easier to categorize, gather, and educate students based on their disabilities, however, this is opposite to the idea of inclusion and least restrictive environment. For example, unlike the United States, even if a student does not have a cognitive problem or would not experience academic difficulty in a regular classroom, if the student has physical disabilities, he/she attends a special school and is educated separately from others. In the most recent case of such segregation, a female student’s acceptance into general elementary school became a controversial issue in Japan (“Suzuka, accepted into a regular school,” 2007). The student needed hourly phlegm aspiration and her
enrollment in preschool was rejected due to this medical condition. Then, her placement in elementary school was debated between Yogo-Gakko and regular school. She was eventually accepted into regular school following an argument between the school district and her parents and advocates. This decision was made from an evaluation of her cognitive development. Her cognitive development level proved that the medical condition would not affect her learning in regular school. In this case, the educational aspects were considered over the medical aspects, and her acceptance marked a significant event in the Japanese movement toward inclusion.

These special schools: schools for those who are deaf, school for those who are blind, and Yogo-Gakko, have more specialized environments, with disability-specific facilities, teachers, therapists, and materials. The most critical issue and purpose of Japanese special education is providing education tailored to one’s disability and training students for future independence. This educational attitude is based on the concept of “what they can do” rather than “what they want to do.” The curriculums provided at special schools are more specified. For example, these schools provide special instructional domains called self-sufficient activities in addition to the general education curriculum. Therefore, Japanese special education focuses more on practical ways that students can be rendered independent in the future, rather than a respect for students’ desires or will. Japanese special education is structured by a self-contained aspect while the United States special education is founded on a self-determined aspect. Even though there is recognition of normalization and inclusion in Japan, it appears to be far from the United States’ version of inclusion.

The presence of special schools, especially those which are residential, might stall the progress toward educating students with disabilities within their own communities. For example, many students who are deaf attend boarding school. The education for those with disabilities is distinguished and provided in separate settings; however, the Japanese perspective is that this is the appropriate education for students because the appropriate education corresponds to one’s disability and needs. In Japan, the right to receive public education is guaranteed, and appropriate education will be provided, but one’s disability causes separation from their communities. However, this does not invoke the sense of discrimination toward disability. This action might be the result of the consideration of sufficiency and efficiency of education for those with disabilities. Providing individualized appropriate education that corresponds to disabilities and responding to needs in a regular inclusive setting is ideal, but Japan experiences difficulty making this
materialize under the current conditions, including federal legislation and existing schools. Even though there are several activities and curriculum that facilitate communication between those with disabilities and their society, the educational system itself has not demonstrated any statements that include recognition of the idea to educate these students with disabilities within their own communities.

Table 3
Comparison of the Major Special Education Policies and Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero Reject</td>
<td>Granted</td>
<td>Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAPE</td>
<td>Granted</td>
<td>Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>6 through 15</td>
<td>3 through 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Not mandatory</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nondiscriminatory Evaluation</td>
<td>Considers medical aspect</td>
<td>Considers educational aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least Restrictive Environment</td>
<td>• Type and severity of disability determine students’ placement</td>
<td>• Service continuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More self-contained</td>
<td>• More self-determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural due process</td>
<td>No official statement/regulation</td>
<td>Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-student participation</td>
<td>Encouraged but no official statement/regulation</td>
<td>Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition services</td>
<td>• Granted</td>
<td>• Granted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Less encouragement of post-secondary/higher education</td>
<td>• Encouragement of post-secondary/higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical accessibility</td>
<td>Encouraged but not mandatory</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic accommodation</td>
<td>Little recognition and practice</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The differences and similarities between the United States and Japan relating to the six principles of the United States special education are addressed in the previous chapter. In this section, other issues and circumstances surrounding special education will be discussed, including transition services, the special education environment, and the controversy over other disabilities.

Transition Services

Even though high school is not part of compulsory education in Japan, due to the nationwide spread of enrollment in both general and special education settings, enrollment in high schools for students with disabilities is now expected nearly compulsory (Hoshino, 2000). Therefore, the situation of post-secondary education for students with disabilities in Japan is comparable to that of the United States.

In the United States, transition services for postsecondary education, adult life, and employment are mandated under IDEA (Vaughn et al., 2003). These services are intended to bridge the span between high school and the real world and encourage students’ successful continuous participation in adult society. They may include “postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing adult education, adult services, independent living, or communication participation” under IDEA (as cited in Vaughn et al., 2003). Creating an individualized transition plan is a key part of IEP, and necessary for successful transition.

In addition to the adoption of United States style IEP, the practice of providing transition services is now introduced and encouraged in Japan. However, the options provided during transition planning to students appear to be slightly different. In particular, the attitudes towards post-secondary higher education for students with disabilities are different.

Even though the Japanese perspective and attitudes towards disabilities and special education have evolved and become closer to natural perspective in the United States, the difference regarding FAPE and LRE seems to influence students’ transition plans. Vocational training is the most critical objective in special education settings in Japan. Since education for students who are deaf or blind has a longer history than education for students with other
disabilities, these special schools involve more systematic and efficient vocational training, and a special technical educational curriculum in addition to a standardized general education curriculum. For example, high schools for students who are blind provide courses on tuning instruments and physical therapy procedure, and high schools for students who are deaf provide courses in printing, hairdressing, cleaning, and dental laboratory techniques. These special curriculums are systematic and a sufficient contribution to students’ future acquisition of certification in a specialized area involving lectures, discussion of theories and/or legal issues, and a practicum. The courses are practical for the students’ future careers, and demonstrate the efficiency of transition services.

Even though these well-established vocational courses encourage students’ future careers, there is no official notation, recognition, or legal statement, which considers, emphasizes, or fosters post-secondary education for those with disabilities, as is the case in the United States. This suggests a lack of support, aside from a college entrance exam which allows the use of Braille and enlarged text, a raised writer, extended exam time, or a scribe. Without official recognition or emphasis, only a small number of Japanese students with disabilities enroll in college. One exception is the National Corporation Tsukuba University of Technology, the first national public college for those with hearing impairment and visual impairment, which opened in 1987 (Research Group on Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2005). However, this college targets a limited population -- those with hearing or visual impairment -- and there is little existing research about students with disabilities in general colleges or universities. Therefore, there is a lack of evidence-based information, such as how many students with disabilities are admitted and studying at a college or university level educational institution, what courses are provided, and how many colleges and/or universities have accessible facilities or accommodation systems.

While there are increased opportunities for learning in an advanced educational environment after high school in the United States, those with disabilities seldom go to colleges or universities in Japan. According to the Statistic Investigation on the Careers of Students who Graduated from Special High Schools conducted by the MEXT in 2003, 48% of students who graduated from schools for the blind (162 students out of 337), 53% of students who graduated from schools for deaf (247 out of 470), 13% of students who are fragile and invalid and graduated from Yogo-Gakko (47 out of 375), 2% of those with physical disabilities (33 out of 1895), and
1% of those with mental retardation who graduated from Yogo-Gakko (95 out of 9210) entered colleges or advanced specialized schools. The percentage of such students who advanced to higher education was only 1.9% (Mochizuki, 2004, chap. 1). Graduates of high schools for mental retardation generally enter or participate in activities at a welfare agency. 66% of high school graduates with mental retardation entered a welfare agency and 30% were employed by a private enterprise. Overall, a huge number of Yogo-Gakko graduates, 41.1% of graduates in 1995, work at sheltered workshops (Hoshino, 2000).

Although there is less encouragement of enrollment in college or advanced special schools for students with disabilities, the federal government encourages lifelong learning, and local governments provide workshops which provide useful information on life-skills for those with disabilities, especially mental retardation (Uchiumi, 2000). These workshops could be classified under post-secondary education. However, they are not part of a degree, but focus instead on survival skills, social skills, and cultural and leisure activities. In short, while the Japanese public tends to have high expectations of students’ independence, there is a lower expectation of academic accomplishment for students with disabilities.

There are two reasons for the lack of well-established encouragement for post-secondary education. First, the Japanese special education system provides transition services, but they hold mainly a vocational purpose. Therefore, those who attended special high schools due to their disabilities tend to enter the working world immediately following graduation. Because the Japanese special education curriculum focuses more on vocational training to facilitate independence, and because there is no official statement or legal requirement to encourage higher education for students with disabilities, it is doubtful whether there is sufficient counseling on higher education.

Second, the lack of establishment of strong accommodation systems and the lack of accessible school environments might prevent an increase in the number of students with disabilities attending college. Compared to the United States, the number of Japanese college students with disabilities is far fewer. There is no legal statement that considers and literally refers to the educational environment for those with disabilities, including accommodations, assistive technology, and/or accessibility to the facilities.
Supportive Educational Environment: 
Accommodation Systems and Accessibility

Compared to the United States, there is not a well-established system of accommodation and little recognition of accessibility in Japan, such as universal design and assistive technology. In the Japanese educational custom, because students with disabilities go to specific special schools based on their needs, students with disabilities are “invisible.” Accordingly, the public has not experienced the realities which those with disabilities face. As well as the lack of public recognition of accommodation and accessibility, because there are already a number of special schools designed, equipped, and facilitated for specific disabilities, student with disabilities rarely experience difficulties when they are in school. In addition, because their future career already depends upon educational placement, students rarely experience difficulty later on. In short, the long history of separation between special education and general education and the presence of well-established and successful special schools and curriculum has hindered public recognition about accommodation and accessibility for those with disabilities.

Accommodation is a rule which allows students with disabilities to carry out their academic career in regular school settings. Assistive technology, note-takers, extended time for exams, and testing centers with less distraction are common examples of accommodation. Many students with disabilities can be educated in regular settings by providing accommodations, which might be rephrased to a “supplemental support system” based on the notion of fairness. In the United States, accommodations and accessibility for students with special needs are guaranteed under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Percy, 1989). In Japan, even though recognition about special education has increased, including open dialogue about how to educate students with disabilities, there is no legal recognition of accommodations which the education system in the United States guarantees.

According to the 2002 revision of the School Education Law, students who are qualified as having disabilities and determined to be eligible for placement in special schools are now allowed to be educated in regular elementary and middle schools if the school has well-trained professionals, an appropriate instructional system, and facilities that correspond to the students’ disabilities (MEXT, chap. 3). However, there is currently no specific official and legal statement requiring the accessibility of school facilities such as restrooms, electric powered doors, and elevators under legislations regarding school facility. In the revised Disabled Persons
Fundamental Law of 2004, the 2nd chapter of the 14th clause generally states that the federal government and local municipal entities should “facilitate” physical accessibility of the school facility for those with disabilities, in addition to researching and studying education methodology. Therefore, the Japanese government has begun to support public schools in their effort to facilitate accessibility of building elevators, slopes, and accessible restrooms (MEXT, chap.11). This clause encourages the federal and local government to establish physical accessibility, but does not yet mandate, however. Therefore, even though there is a trend toward environmental accessibility, regular public schools do not have to modify the environment and facilities to be accessible. Accordingly, due to the issue of physical accessibility, even if students with physical disabilities do not have learning difficulties, they tend to be educated at separate special schools (personal observation).

Due to the increased recognition of normalization, the number of students with disabilities who are educated in regular classroom has also increased. In addition to the issue of accommodation and accessibility for those with physical disabilities, this lack of well-established accommodation and accessibility is critical for those with disabilities other than deafness, blindness, physical and/or mental disabilities.

**Other Disabilities**

In addition to the disabilities mentioned above, public attention about other “high incidence” disabilities has increased in the United States. According to the United States Department of Education (as cited in Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2005), four key high incidence disabilities are learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disorders, and speech/language impairments, and 90% of students receiving special education fall into the category of high incidence disability. In addition to these high incidence disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is also critical issue in special education, due to the increased number of students diagnosed. Even though ADHD is not recognized as a disability under the federal definition of IDEA, ADHD is treated as other health impairment (Sabornie & deBettencourt, 2004; Turnbull et al., 2004; Vaughn et al., 2003).

Similar to the United States, public attention in Japan now focuses on these disabilities. In addition to Japanese “traditional disabilities” such as deafness and blindness (S. Shimizu, 2003), physical disabilities, and severe mental retardation, there is a new category of disability
called *Hattatsu-Shogai* (発達障害), which literally translates to “developmental disabilities” or “developmental disorders” in English. However, the definition of Japanese developmental disabilities/disorders is different from that of the United States. Disabilities in this category are similar to high incidence disabilities in the United States. However, while the four key high incidence disabilities in the United States are learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, mild mental retardation, and language/speech impairment, this new category of developmental disabilities includes learning disabilities, ADHD, pervasive development disorders such as autism and Asperger’s syndrome, and other disabilities caused by partial brain dysfunction.

While emotional disorders and speech/language impairments are included in high incidence disabilities in the United States, these are not included in considerations of Japanese regular classroom circumstances. Students with emotional disorder and students with speech/language impairment are usually educated in special classes full time or for most of regular school hours through a pull-out program. There are seven disabilities that determine placement in special classes within regular schools: visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical disabilities, mental retardation, speech/language impairment, emotional disturbance, and fragile/health impairment (S. Shimizu, 2003). Thus, those with emotional disturbance and speech/language impairments are customarily educated in separate settings.

Classification and legislation regarding these disabilities is critical because students with these disabilities are usually enrolled in regular classrooms. Increased Japanese public attention to learning disabilities, ADHD, pervasive development disorders, and disabilities caused by partial brain dysfunction resulted in the issue of the Act of Supporting People with Developmental Disabilities in 2004. This brand-new act ensures federal support and foster public recognition of people with developmental disabilities. In accordance with this nationwide movement toward recognition, the MEXT created a Guideline for Educational Support Systems for Students with LD, ADHD, and High Functioning Autism at the Elementary and Middle School Level (小・中学校におけるLD, ADHD, 高機能自閉症の児童生徒への教育支援体制の整備のためのガイドラライン) and promotes research and presents workshop at the National Institute of Special Education promote (Research Group on Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2005).

Due to the relatively unnoticeable nature of these disabilities, compared to deafness, blindness, physical disabilities, and severe mental retardation, these learning disabilities are sometimes referred to as “invisible disabilities.” (Vaughn et al., 2003) As a result, students with
these disabilities are sometimes neglected. However, in recent years, public attention in Japan has increased to include a focus on “invisible” Japanese developmental disabilities as well. These disabilities are of significant impact on both special and regular education in Japan, because a huge number of targeted students in special education enrolled in regular classrooms have these disabilities.

The rate of students receiving special education in Japan appears to be less than other countries; therefore, those who need special educational support are educated in regular classrooms without such benefits (S. Shimizu, 2003). Even though teachers in regular settings acknowledge the presence of students with special needs, no nationwide research on this population has been conducted. The former Ministry of Education had not conducted an investigation into the conditions of these students, because they assumed no such students existed in general classrooms (S. Shimizu, 2003). Due to the lack of knowledge about these disabilities, called developmental disabilities in Japan, and the presence of various independent special education settings, the Japanese government did not expect students with special needs to be educated in regular classrooms. Thus, even though there has been a movement toward establishing a clear definition, diagnostic standards, and instruction methodology for these disabilities, these disabilities have not yet been officially recognized under the School Education Law, which entitles students to special education (S. Shimizu, 2003). Therefore, an investigation of students with developmental disabilities enrolled in regular classroom was conducted in 2002, and the results revealed that about 6% of school-aged children enrolled in regular classrooms might have these disabilities (MEXT, 2002). However, this research was not based on medical or psychological assessment; this was a survey based on classroom teachers’ observations. The results therefore informally indicate the amount of the regular school population “assumed” to have developmental disabilities.

Recognition of these disabilities is also critical because they present a significant socioeconomic impact for modern Japan. One controversial issue in current Japanese society is NEET, which stands for Not in Employment, Education or Training. The relationship between the increased number of NEET individuals and developmental disabilities has been pointed out as the cause of this current social problem. According to research on NEET in metropolitan areas by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2006, 23.2% of NEET youths were assumed to have developmental disabilities (Yasuda, 2006). These NEET individuals experience struggle to
maintain employment due to the communication and/or socialization difficulties caused by developmental disabilities.

Even though Japanese special education methodology still presents complete separation and a strict education environment, those who graduate from special schools obtain employment and rarely lose their jobs because they are trained, guided, and/or protected by well-established education system and welfare systems. On the other hand, those with developmental disabilities educated in general classrooms appear to be unemployed or lose jobs easily. These students might have been provided inadequate education due to the invisibility of their disabilities, or neglected by educators, perhaps after being labeled “lazy.” They might not know how to behave in a community, how to be accommodated, or how to face and manage their disabilities. They might even not know they have a disability.

Due to a lack of recognition and guidance for these disabilities, the education of those with “invisible disabilities” was often neglected. These unrecognized disabilities have not allowed students to be placed in either special schools that provide systematic, well-established education, or regular settings. In other words, students with invisible, developmental disabilities have been in an educational grey area for a long time.
The common goal of both traditional and special education is to establish an educational environment that ensures accessibility, equality, and opportunity. These are the key components of inclusion. Because every nation has a different cultural and historical background, public opinion, perspective, legal policy, system, and curriculum vary. In this study, two representative western and eastern nations, the United States and Japan, are compared, with an examination of why such differences exist.

**The Uncertain Direction of Special Education in Japan**

Western countries such as the United States and England, have established a systematic structure and collaboration between education and welfare, corresponding to a variety of disabilities. On the other hand, Japan appears to be still studying the problems of special education and welfare. They have experienced difficulties in the attempt to establish a well-balanced special education system within the legal system overall (Ujimori, 2000). Therefore, the major critical issue of special education in Japan is uncertain direction. Even though Japan is following the general aim of inclusion, they are experiencing difficulty in determining how to direct this aim. This uncertain direction is linked to the gap between the world-wide movement of inclusion and current Japanese educational circumstances, Japanese cultural characteristics, and the unbalanced measures to maximize educational services for students with disabilities.

**Problem 1: Current Worldwide Movement and Japan**

There is a conflict between current worldwide movement and current special education circumstances in Japan. Like the statements made by the United Nations, the worldwide movement regarding special education urges inclusion. On the other hand, even though Japan also urges inclusion, the country is still influenced by a relic of a bygone age. Due to the idea of harmony, which can be linked to totalitarianism, Japanese education has emphasized the efficiency of the whole, rather than the good of the individual. Special education has been separate because the public, educators, and authorities have equated specialized education with
corresponding disabilities (Yanagimoto, 2000). Therefore, the Japanese education system is systematically organized by gathering similar individuals and educating them together, which addresses the concerns of chronological and economic efficiency. Thus, even though free, appropriate education is guaranteed for all as in the United States, and even though many people have mentioned inclusion, the principle of the least restrictive environment has not yet been completely realized in the Japanese special education environment.

**Problem 2: Influence of Japanese Cultural Characteristics on Special Education**

The representative Japanese characteristic of harmony has formed the positive representative virtues of modesty, patience, and honesty. On the other hand, these virtues are prone to result in excessive conformity. There is a saying “長いものは巻かれろ” in Japan, which is roughly the equivalent of “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” This saying represents the typical Japanese attitude, which demonstrates the idea of harmony acting in a different, more negative, way. In addition, the Japanese tend to follow authority and those who have more power. Due to the long history of separation from other countries and little opportunity for inter-cultural contact, many people tend to long for the influence of foreign countries, especially western culture. Because the United States has a long history as an “advanced” nation, which wields a huge economic, industrial, and cultural power, Japan tends to look up to, model, and borrow the western way, especially the practices of the United States. As history shows, Japanese educational modernization has been influenced by western culture, especially the United States, and many Japanese educators look up to western methods. Learning about other cultures and methods is necessary for progression, however, excessive influence from other countries may cause a gap that can be a distortion in reality.

**Problem 3: Unbalanced Circumstances**

Besides the current matter of inclusion, the unbalanced situation surrounding students with other or “invisible” disabilities contributes to the condition of uncertain direction. The educational system for students who are blind or deaf has been dramatically and significantly developed. Following these traditional disabilities (S. Shimizu, 2003), the educational needs of other disabilities were addressed. However, these efforts have contributed to the separation and distinction between disabilities and the unbalanced progress and quality of education. Compared to more traditional disabilities, special education for students with learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, pervasive developmental disorders, or ADHD is a new attempt. Current
special education in Japan has not yet established an environment which corresponds to the individual needs of students with these newly recognized disabilities. Therefore, it is assumed that there are large numbers of students who are suffering inadequacies in regular classrooms without appropriate accommodation because they are not qualified for traditional eligibility (S. Shimizu, 2003; Ujimori, 2000).

The progress of special education in Japan has varied depending on types of disabilities. For example, schools for students who are deaf have established more particular methods and vocational training than the facilities for other disabilities (Yokkaichi, 2000). Students who enroll in Yogo-Gakko are usually referred to work at sheltered workshops. This special school system has carried students’ careers and future independence on its own shoulders. However, the problem of current Japanese general and special education concerns students with disabilities educated in a regular setting. These students are prone to be ignored, and this ignorance impacts their future life, and furthermore, the Japanese economy.

**Outcome of Japanese Special Education:**

**Special Support Education Coordinator**

Despite the struggle between influences from other nations and the balance between current reality and historical background, as well as the uncertain direction for the future of special education, Japan has managed to develop its own methods. The position of special support education coordinator is the unique outcome of the progress of special education in Japan, reflecting the country’s own history and need. The special support education coordinator was created and officially suggested in the Final Report for the Future of Special Support Education, submitted to the MEXT in 2003. Due to the long history of separation between special education and regular education, there is a lack of connection between professionals. This new position is intended to foster such connections. The special support education coordinator should be a well-trained person who can make the best use of knowledge of special education. This knowledge would include familiarity with current legislation to protect students’ right to education and the move to provide an available public service system for the students’ needs. A coordinator might establish strong connections with psychologists, physicians, occupational therapists, pathologists, language therapists, art therapists, and music therapists. This new position is strongly recommended, but it has not been mandated yet by the government.
The special support education coordinator, who is well-trained and possesses a wide body of knowledge regarding special education, is the key for the future. This new type of professional establishes collaboration within the school setting, and acts as a bridge between students and parents, various education professionals, related service providers outside the school, and the school district (Miyazaki, 2004; S. Shimizu, 2003). The coordinator ensures that each group shares the same goal of meeting the student’s educational needs, and moving the student toward a future as an independent member of society.

Until the introduction of the special support education coordinator, classroom teachers and parents had to communicate and coordinate the educational environment for their children by themselves. This independent effort has not always worked effectively due to the lack of sufficient collaboration (Miyazaki, 2004). Regular education teachers might have struggled with how to educate students who presented academic and social difficulties in the classroom, unsure of who to ask for advice and assistance. Parents might have not known what services were eligible for their children. Even public school administrators did not fully know how to help their students with special needs, or how to advise their educators.

For successful inclusion, the establishment of IEP by an interdisciplinary team is critical, because IEP guides professionals who relate to a student with special needs for the maximized educational outcome. Creating an interdisciplinary team for IEP is mandated in the United States, and due to the characteristic of individualism in the United States, each person plays his/her role as an independent member of a collaborative team. On the other hand, creating a collaborative interdisciplinary team has not been well-established in Japan. Japanese harmony tends to cause extreme humility, and this attitude sometimes affects collaborative efforts, as members simply follow and listen to whoever in the team is considered the authority. Therefore, there is a need for an individual who can facilitate collaboration and connect with other fields.

For successful inclusion, there is a need for successful IEP. For successful IEP, there is a need for successful collaboration between family members, professionals from various fields, and society. Then, for successful collaboration, there is a need for a well-trained, knowledgeable and sensitive coordinator, in the position of a special support education coordinator.

The Issue of Class Size

The new professional position of special support education coordinator is the response to
Japan’s specific historical and cultural background. However, there remains another issue that must be handled with serious and immediate consideration: class size. The number of students in a classroom greatly influences the effectiveness of special education in a general setting.

**General Classroom Size**

There is an increased number of parents who want their children to be educated in a regular classroom even though they have been recommended to be educated in special settings during the screening process (Ikemoto, 2000). Generally, the parents of students with disabilities fall into one of two categories. One prefers their children to be educated in a special setting due to the concern over the potential of lack of adequate education in a regular setting. The other prefers their children to be educated in a regular school setting due to the idea of inclusion. However, the fact remains that there is still a lack of well-established, individually tailored instruction for students with special needs enrolled in a regular setting. This sometimes causes nonfulfillment, or failure to provide appropriate education, and students are “left back” or left behind, sometimes referred to as “dumping” (Ikemoto, 2000). This is the unfortunate side effect of the lack of well-established inclusion in Japan.

Primarily, regular classrooms in Japan have contained more students than their United States counterparts. Even though Japan has experienced a declining birth rate and the number of students in a class has decreased, the number of students in a classroom is still high compared to the United States. The average number of students in an elementary school class in Japan is 28.8, and the average number in middle school is 32.3 (MEXT, 2005). In addition, due to the declining birth rate and decreased number of school age students, there is an increased number of unused classrooms, surplus teachers, and a huge number of unemployed young future teachers. Since the recognition of the effects of instruction in small size classes has increased, the number of teachers in public school has increased. However, employment as a full-time teacher is still highly competitive at 8.3-fold magnification in 2003. (K. Shimizu et al., 2004).

There is a conflict between the number of students and classroom teachers. While there is a declining birth rate and decreased number of school age students, the number of students with a disability who are newly recognized as having a disability has increased, due to the increased general recognition of disability. Therefore, an increased number of teachers is needed, but the number of teachers has not yet adjusted to this need. There is an increased number of unused classrooms and surplus teachers due to the decreased number of students. However, due to the
present fixed number of positions and current number of working teachers, full time
appointments are highly competitive. Given the increased number of students with special needs
and the matter of large class size, a decreased number of students per class and an increased
number of teachers would be one immediate solution to this problem.

**Cooperative Teaching Arrangements and Teaching Assistants**

Cooperative teaching (Salend, 2005) is one possible solution to the problem of class size. There is no national-level research about team teaching, but many case studies have shown its effectiveness in Japan (K. Shimizu et al., 2004). Team teaching allows increased attention for each student, and variety within instruction (Salend, 2005; Vaughn et al., 2003). Furthermore, due to the consideration of Japanese traditional attitudes such as harmony and humility, which link to denial of leadership and respect for one’s senior or superior, the implementation of teaching assistants or paraprofessionals might be more effective than the formation of committees which requires equal contribution and/or responsibility. In other words, the one teaching/one helping arrangement (Salend, 2005) might be more suitable than team teaching in Japanese educational settings. Teaching assistants provide individual supplemental assistance for students who have difficulties catching up in the inclusive setting, while the main instructor is conducting class. Student might feel freer and more comfortable asking for individual help if there is an additional person “on duty.” Otherwise, students might feel they are interrupting the class by raising a hand to attract the teacher’s attention. Furthermore, students are generally open to the big sister/big brother-like presence, and this openness becomes an effective way to establish rapport.

In addition, not only do students benefit from teaching assistants, but teaching assistants can learn by observing experienced teachers. Teaching assistants may increase their classroom experience in less stressful circumstances than conducting a whole class independently from the beginning of their teaching career. The position therefore carries an important apprenticeship and mentoring component.

**Response to Intervention**

Regarding the consideration of class size and additional professionals in a classroom, response to intervention (RTI) could be well-suited to the Japanese situation. RTI is a new approach in special education settings introduced in the United States, based on identifying students’ problems and providing support through screening, progress monitoring, and diagnosis (Al Otaiba, in press; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The features of RTI provide supplemental, immediate,
and effective intervention for students with learning difficulties, which would reduce the caseload of special education and catch students before they fail or fall significantly behind (Vaughn, 2003). Some students need only supplemental support; with appropriate support, they are able to achieve academically. One strength of RTI is flexibility in an educational setting without labeling students or wasting time waiting for approval of eligibility to receive special education services. There has not been a well-established method of assessment and authorization for those with disabilities in an inclusive setting in Japan. However, there is no time to wait until these issues are resolved. RTI would fulfill these immediate needs. Providing tailored instruction for each individual according to his/her strengths and weaknesses is ideal but almost impossible; the RTI model could be one important step toward the ideal educational approach.

A decreased number of students per classroom and supplemental lessons as needed would be an efficient means for students to receive services corresponding to their needs. One of the most necessary elements in Japanese education is therefore flexibility. Thus, rather than focusing on regulating legal policies and hastily determining labeling methods, educators should focus on practical means of serving students’ needs in this current chaotic educational circumstance.

**Final Thoughts**

The development of special education began with the principles of expediency, charity, and imperative duty in both the United States and Japan. Now, the goal of special education has moved toward inclusion. Both countries have experienced a similar development, but the course has been divergent in several important ways. Originally, special education in Japan began with inclusion. Then the segregated style of education spread, followed by a return of inclusion, once its importance was re-introduced. These events appear to be a reflection of the influence of other countries, especially the United States.

The United States is one of the leading nations in special education (Hoshino, 2000). Two reasons might be the rapid progress compared to its short history, and the correspondence of policy making and historical movement. The development of special education in the United States has been a seemingly spontaneous outcome of various factors, such as cultural diversity, the perspective on “self,” and the civil rights movement.

On the other hand, the reason why the system of separate educational settings and
vocational training has been developed in Japan is that this system is well-suited to traditional Japanese culture. Due to the idea of harmony, people are taught not interrupt others, which impacts perspectives on those with disabilities, and affects attitudes toward inclusive classrooms. This idea has also resulted in the perspective of the importance of being useful to a group and independent within a larger society. Special education in Japan therefore emphasizes a self-contained purpose, while special education in the United States emphasizes self-determination.

The course of special education in Japan appears to be following the United States, which remains highly influential. However, Japan must also realize that the methods of the United States might not be completely suitable or directly translatable, because Japan has a different cultural and historical background. Japanese educators must pay attention to simple but practical and drastic reforms. As history shows, Japan invented and carried out education for those with disabilities in an inclusive setting spontaneously and without any outside influence. Therefore, Japan might be able to successfully form an independent educational style suited to their own cultural attitudes. Learning from the United States is important, but simply borrowing ideas and applying them directly will likely prove ineffective. Instead, Japan must consider how to modify the United States’ practices to suit their unique situation.

Conversely, the United States might also import new ideas from Japan. Even though it is a historical fact that a huge number of Japanese students with disabilities were ignored, the overall incidence of disabilities in Japan is lower than in the United States (S. Shimizu, 2003). This lower incidence of students with disabilities could be the reflection of teachers’ effort to fulfill duties authorized by national curriculum or high public expectation influenced by the culture. In addition, because the Japanese traditional educational style focuses more on a self-contained aim, education for those with disabilities sometimes appears to be strict, practical “training” rather than true exploratory education. The limited but well-established and highly effective occupational opportunities that ensure one’s independence and participation in society can also be considered a product of traditional Japanese attitudes.

Though each country’s educational system is different, the goal of special education is relatively universal. The breakthrough of high technology has brought increased accessibility, and educators have the opportunity to actively utilize the opportunities offered by technology to communicate with other countries. Educators should not merely follow or model, but modify the
new information, perspectives, and methods to adjust to their own culture. Because cultural, 
historical, and socioeconomic background has a significant impact on a nation’s education system, 
educators should examine these areas when implementing a new approach. A balance of respect 
for outside influence and one’s own nation would maximize the effectiveness of collaborative 
methodology and offer the most optimistic future for special education.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yui Murakami was born in 1978, in Tokyo, Japan. She attended Toho Junior College of Music majoring performance flute. After graduating from Toho Junior College of Music, she came to the United States to study Music Therapy in 1998. Yui received double degrees: Bachelor of Science majoring in Music Therapy, and Bachelor of Arts majoring in performance flute from State University of New York at New Paltz in 2002. After completing music therapy intern at nursing home in Miami, she began master program of music therapy at Florida State University in Fall 2003. However, due to increased interest and passion in special education, she changed her major to special education from music therapy in 2005.

Upon completion of Master’s degree program in special education, Yui will return to her home country, Japan to bring knowledge and introduce the first-hand experience what she learned in the United States, and will contribute to future special education in Japan.