

## Chapter 2

# Focusing on the Current State of Special Needs Education in Japan and the Utilization of Handmade Teaching Materials

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### ABSTRACT

*In recent years, special needs education in Japan has undergone major changes due to the ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014 and enhanced enforcement from 2016 of the Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities in Japan. In this chapter, the authors first considers the current state and issues concerning special needs education in Japan based on recent historical developments. Next, they introduce two clinical support cases in which the authors discuss the use in special needs education schools of various handmade teaching materials and information and communication technologies (ICT). The new approaches identified are likely to help students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) who do not have oral language and support students with severe and co-morbid disabilities who require full-time medical care.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, concerning Japanese special needs education; it has been recommended that an inclusive education system be established within regular classes (in general education classrooms). In Japan, a separate educational system has been adopted that traditionally distinguishes normal students from disabled students, and educates them. However, because of UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [MOFA], 2014), national educational measures are gradually changing. In the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "reasonable accommodations" is required for people with disabilities. In order to ratify this international convention, Japan had revised domestic laws (Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities in 2011) and had enacted new laws (Act for Eliminating Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities in 2016). On the other hand, as a result of promoting inclusive education, students with special educational needs, who are enrolled in regular classes, may find them difficult, as the classes do not provide environmental or other supports that would enable special needs students to be successful in classroom. This may not only cause anxiety for them, but has resulted in further issues, such as a refusal to attend school. This chapter examines these matters and considers future directions.

At Japanese special needs education schools, handmade teaching materials have been created in accordance with the characteristics of each student's disability. In particular, in the revision of the guidelines for teaching in 1999 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2000), it was obliged to prepare an "individualized educational plan" for students enrolled in special needs education schools to advance support, according to each person's disability characteristics, degree of disability, and needs. As a result, efforts using handmade teaching materials and/or information and communication technologies (ICT) to meet students' individual characteristics have been actively introduced (Kanamori, 2016).

The authors have worked on raising the ability of students with disabilities to communicate by providing assistive technologies that substitute for languages, particularly for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) who do not have oral language. In addition, the authors have undertaken initiatives to foster voluntary expressions of intention by encouraging the use of remaining body capacities for students with severe and co-morbid disabilities for whom medical care is always necessary. It is generally considered that students with ASD are not good at expressing themselves using language and often have problems with communication (Wing & Attwood, 1987). However, the ability to comprehend word meanings is high, and as students' life experience increases, they can act according to instructions (Frith, 1991). It has also been pointed out that even people with severe and co-morbid disabilities can find the ability to express intention by closely observing the state of the person (Mita, 2007).

K.K. and Researcher 1 (F.N.) conducted research using a "sound pronunciation system (using dot code technology (Ezoe, Ikuta, & Suzuki, 2006))" for special needs education school students with ASD without oral language. In addition, K. K. and Researcher 2 (M. Y.) succeeded in eliciting voluntary movements from the residual capacities available in specific individuals among severely disabled students (severe mobility restrictions and mentally challenged) requiring permanent medical care.

Objectives of this chapter include:

- Reviewing the current state and issues concerning special needs education in Japan.
- Examining environmental supports and reasonable accommodations in Japan and other countries.

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