

Chapter 3

China Special Education: The Perspective of Information Technologies

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ABSTRACT

The development of information technologies should be able to benefit to every educated person. The use of information technologies in special education is a little studied by Chinese scholars. This study focuses on China's special education from the perspective of information technologies, discusses the causes and impact factors why the information technologies applications in special education in China is a blind area, presents the two principles for information technology applications in special education, and put forwards to three implementation models of special education applications in special education.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2002 the United Nations adopted the “Biwako Millennium Framework for Action” in the activities of the Second Asia-Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons “towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific”. The outline claims that the construction of information barrier-free should be promoted as a priority to solve the difficulties of people with disabilities fully through using modern information and communication technologies. The theme of World Telecommunication Day 2008

is “Connecting Persons with Disabilities: ICT Opportunities for All”, its purpose is to urge the countries to pay special attention to vulnerable groups of persons with disabilities in the national strategy of informationization, encourage the design, production and provision of information and communication technologies, equipment and services required by persons with disabilities, establish the capacity of information communication technologies for the use of all people including persons with disabilities to promote equal access to information communication technologies by people from all sectors of society in order to improve the sharing of development results of information and communication technologies.

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As early as 1998, President Bill Clinton signed the “Americans with Disabilities Rehabilitation Act”, and the Section 508 stipulates that when the U.S. federal government purchases IT products and services, including software, websites, telecommunications, audio and video, PC and notebook computers, copiers, printers, kiosks, etc., the supplier must take the initiative to prove that their products meet standards of information accessibility established by the Barrier-Free Committee of United States. As a result, the legislative precedent of global information accessibility is created.

Spain and Sweden issued “Computer Accessibility Regulations” and “Computer Accessibility Guide” in 1998. The United Kingdom, Germany and Ireland respectively issued the relevant regulations, acts and guidelines in 2002. Netherlands developed “Network Accessibility and Regulations” in 2003. Swiss formulated “Government and Ministry of Utilities Accessibility Regulations” in 2004. In the same year, the EU issued “Procurement Procedures”. In the Asia Pacific region, Japan made relevant regulations in 2004 and introduced “Japan Industry Association Standards” developed cooperatively by the government and industry.

It should be noted that China is already lagging behind in the establishment of information system and the development of barrier-free. From 2004 on, the Ministry of Information Industry established the annual session of “China Information Accessibility Forum” associating with the China Disabled Persons Federation, the China Internet Association, the China Disabled People’s Welfare Fund aimed at narrowing the digital divide and sharing the information civilization to enhance scientific and technological innovation capacity and construct information barrier-free environment, so that the application of information accessibility is promoted. Ministry of Information Industry formulated the development program of “the Eleventh Five-Year Plan” for the information

industry undertakings for the disabled, and the information accessibility became an important task in the planning. In the meantime, Ministry of Information Industry actively supports the Internet Society of China to develop standards of information accessibility, and actively promote R&D and applications of products and services in terms of information accessibility.

“CPC Central Committee and State Council Views on Career Development for Persons with Disabilities” was issued in March 28, 2008, and proposed to improve the accessibility of information and exchange for persons with disabilities through some measures as following, public institutions provide voice and text tips, Braille, sign language and other barrier-free services, television and movies and programs have subtitles, networking, electronic information and communications products are convenient for people with disabilities etc.

China’s system is in constantly improving along with the information society development not only concerning about the basic livelihood of persons with disabilities but also concerning about the information access of persons with disabilities. Meanwhile, the Government gives full attention on information technologies applications in special education. The priorities of special education in “Eleventh Five-Year Plan” are information technologies and modern distance education of special schools.

The international scholars have done a great deal of research on special education, such as Gibb and Dychesm (2000), Heward (2000), Lorenz (1998), Taylor (2000), Vahid (1998), Harwood and Brown (2000). China’s special education study is developed over the past 20 years, the well-known scholars, such as Yunying Chen, Jiacheng Xu, Ningsheng Zhang, Youngxin Piao, Junming Fang etc have done exploratory research on special education. China’s current information technologies research on special education is in

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