

My visit to the Yokohama integral Rehabilitation Center and some consideration on Japanese present situation of special education.

Special educator from foreign country

had been some time since I wanted to visit this center, but I hadn't had the chance. This is precisely the reason why I was so glad to visit.

First, our guide suggested we should define the term "disability" as if we were explaining it to a child in elementary school. This task proved to be harder than it seemed, and in trying to come up with a definition, I noticed that although I have been working in the field of education for children with disabilities for many years, there are many things I thought I knew but I really don't fully understand, and individuals in the healthcare field (medical staff, e.g., child neurologist, child psychiatrist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech pathologist and education staff, etc.) have a hard time trying to explain the concept to other people in simple terms. This visit reminded me that we can't forget about the basics while making effort to specialize in a field of knowledge.

This center's functions are as complete as I had imagined, it is an example of the level of social assistance the city of Yokohama provides. The investigation and design development departments in the center grabbed my attention particularly. They develop devices not only to

facilitate activities, but also to improve well-being and quality of life of individuals with disabilities. This is not a profitable business for companies, so other organizations such as this center have to take on this function. This is an issue that reminded me of the Japanese society's immaturity. The center recognizes it can still improve in the fields of education and early treatment; they are making great efforts to improve, although they don't have the required capacity yet because Yokohama City has the population of 3.4 million. I consider these fields are the mainstay for healthcare and will follow the development of this center closely.

An outstanding subject to be discussed in the center is "continuous connection between such early medical and educational intervention and special education" which greatly attracts me. Human development has to be understood as a continuum. However, administrative intervention has divided human development into different stages such as infant age which is under the control of the department of health and social welfare, a school child age which is under the educational board and adult that is again under the control of the department of health and social welfare. And in the field of

Japanese special education the medical staff is excluded from the school and only special educators “educate” children with disabilities. Is there any meaning if an educator feed cerebral palsy child using all the school time without using nasal tube. This unnatural division and irrational exclusion of medical staff can cause problems. There is greater and urgent need to link special education with such kind of early intervention performed by the cooperation of various medical staff and education staff.