

Introduction

Report of the 26th Asia-Pacific International Seminar on Education for Individuals with Special Needs

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For the four-day period from December 4, 2006, the National Institute of Special Education held the "26th Asia-Pacific International Seminar on Education for Individuals with Special Needs" at Yokohama Symposia. Fourteen countries participated including Japan: Australia, Bangladesh, PRC, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The Seminar was participated by around 250 persons. These included the delegates from the participating countries, and from the Japanese side, those involved in the education for disabled children and general participants.

This year (2006) marked the first year of NISE's five-year Second Medium-term Plan. Partly for this reason, NISE strove to innovate the Seminar, both its management and contents, by establishing new basic policies for the further and active promotion of international exchange and contribution activities, by taking into account the recent trends of education in Japan. Below are some examples of such innovations.

1. Change of the Seminar's name

Until the 25th, this Seminar was titled "Asia-Pacific International Seminar on Special Education". This was changed to "Asia-Pacific International Seminar on Education for Individuals with Special Needs". This was designed to actively supply information to the Asia-Pacific countries and regions regarding new trends of education for children with disabilities in Japan.

2. Change of the time of implementation, and collaboration with other organizations

This year's Seminar was held from December 4 to 7. This was designed to position the Seminar as one of the programs related with "Disabled Person's Week" which is from December 3 to 9. This was to spread the concept of "special support education" to the general public. Additionally, from the viewpoint of international exchange, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) Yokohama's facilities were used for the lodging of the participants from overseas. This was to promote efficient collaboration with related organizations.

3. Holding of a pre-conference

Until the 25th, the overseas participants visited facilities related with education for disabled children after the seminar. In this year's Seminar, this visit was held on the first day as a pre-conference, and a pre-conference was helpful in deepening mutual understanding about the contents to be

discussed in the Seminar.

The participating countries' conditions vary. Partly owing to this reason, in the past Seminars, what were discussed tended to vary too much, and not enough discussion was carried out on the individual topics. To solve this problem, the pre-conference was held to promote mutual understanding by providing the participants with clear information on the conditions in Japan and the topics to be discussed in the seminar.

4. Determination of the basic Seminar theme

NISE has set up the following basic theme for the coming five years: "Advancement of Education to Meet the Special Needs of Individuals - Toward Realization of Principle of Equity and Social Cohesion". This was to focus on the concepts of "normalization" and "inclusion" in determining the themes for the respective years. On this basis, this year's theme was determined as "Collaboration Based on Partnership among Related Fields (Education, Healthcare, Medical Care, Welfare etc.)".

In the past Seminars, the themes were determined by type of disability. From the 26th, the themes will be determined every year by taking into account both the commonalities and differences among Japan and other Asian and Pacific countries and regions but by ensuring international applicability, for the enrichment of the contents of the discussions.

5. Establishment of Coordinator

Education is closely related with the respective countries' national policies and measures, culture, customs and practices. For this reason, translating and interpreting what were presented or discussed into other languages could cause misunderstandings and inconsistencies. This might be said as a problem of literal translation. To avoid this problem, NISE had been holding meetings with interpreters, etc. beforehand. To avoid this problem further, the 26th Seminar established the position of Coordinator to make sure that the translation, etc. are appropriate.

As a result of such innovations, we were able to receive good impressions from overseas participants who said for instance that the general discussion was useful in further pursuing the topics and that they were able to understand the trends of special support education in Japan very well. On the other hand however, we spotted new issues, such as the need to refine the framework of the discussions for the further enrichment of the Seminar, to ensure the continuity of the outcomes from one Seminar to the next, and to give considerations to enhance the awareness of the general participants in view of the fact that the Seminar will be held as part of "Disabled Person's Week".

In the future Seminars, NISE would like to explore methods to further enrich the Seminar by solving these issues.