

NISE Activity in International Cooperation

International Academic Exchange and Cooperation

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1. History of International Research Exchange and Cooperation in the NISE

International exchange activities in the academic area have been conducted since the establishment of the National Institute of Special Education (NISE) but most were activities carried out at the individual level such as participation in international conferences and academic exchanges through the fellowship programs that support overseas travel for researchers by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (MESSC). The first public academic activity of the NISE in cooperation with international organizations was the "International Seminar on Vocational Education for the Mentally and Physically Disabled Youth" jointly sponsored with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) / the Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) in 1980. Since then, the NISE has made an effort to widen its areas of activity as well as to organize yet more activities: It has continued the "APED Regional Seminar on Special Education" which started in 1981 as a public project, international joint research which has been conducted for four terms since 1990, and academic exchanges with foreign researchers by NISE researchers as individuals or a group.

Actual results from these activities include:

- (1) Through exchange activities with UNESCO and OECD, information on special education trends worldwide was obtained as early as possible and consequently could be examined and investigated from early on.
- (2) The contents of the research described in (1) have been spread nationwide through the NISE publication, "Special Education in the World," national special education seminars, etc..
- (3) The NISE has undertaken academic exchange agreements with the Korea National Institute for Special Education (KAISE) as well as the Faculty of Special Education, University of Cologne.
- (4) The number of visits and stays by researchers not

only from the Asian-Pacific region and South America but also from advanced western nations increased.

- (5) The fraction of NISE researchers with academic experience abroad reached almost two-thirds.

As a result, though the international exchange activities of the NISE used to be focused on the collection and accumulation of exhaustive documents from advanced nations in the special education area, the direction of current activities is moving toward academic exchanges on an equal footing to deepen research content with the aim of making academic contributions.

2. Improvements in the Support System

When the International research activities of the NISE were initiated on an official basis, the need for systematic organization to aid in activities being implemented smoothly became apparent and in 1986 the International Investigation Sub-Committee was organized as a subordinate organization of the Research Planning Committee. The objective of this sub-committee was to investigate the current situation of special education in foreign countries as well as to gather and offer information in an effort to contribute to the progress in the research of Japanese special education. The International Investigation sub-committee was renamed the International Research Cooperation Sub-Committee in 1994 because the sub-committee expanded and deepened its objectives from document gathering to joint research.

Subsequently, the International Research Cooperation Sub-Committee, in pursuit of international trends in special education, became independent from the Research Planning Committee, changing into the International Exchange Committee in 1999 in order to improve its support function for a variety of international academic exchange activities and collaborative projects.

The APEID Seminar Committee, as an independent organization since the beginning of the APEID

seminars, has continued its role in planning and management of the still ongoing seminars.

3. The Condition of International Exchange Activities

(1) Researcher Exchanges

(Sending Researchers Abroad)

NISE researchers may go abroad through a variety of programs and funding such as fellowships for research abroad from the MESSC (long-term & short-term), international research conference funding, research funding by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), the foreign study programs of the APEID seminar, and invitations by foreign government officials. Researchers may also go abroad to attend international conference via private funds.

Since the establishment of the NISE, researchers have been visiting abroad on an ongoing basis; an average of a little less than 20 people per year have traveled abroad over the last seven to eight years. As a result, as of December 1999, approximately two-thirds of current NISE researchers have gone abroad for research related activities via the programs listed above. Such experiences no doubt play an important role when researchers try to obtain new knowledge and information in their own research fields. Researchers who were sent abroad have played an important role in helping to understand the latest trends in special education in many countries.

(Inviting & Hosting Foreign Researchers)

Visits to the NISE by foreign researchers consist of mainly individual researchers arranging visits or via invitations from the JSPS. The activities on the part of individuals resulted in exchanges of opinion based upon observation of facilities and explanations of educational activities and tended to be one to two days in duration, while the visits under the auspices of the JSPS played the role of helping gather the information necessary for research through special lectures and similar activities during stays of several days duration.

Through the organizing of international conferences and APEID seminars, inviting foreign researchers as special guests to information seminars, and participating in the UNESCO conferences and related events, the circle of exchanges with foreign researchers has gradually enlarged. With these developments, the countries from which foreign researchers originate expanded from western nations to a wide

variety of nations throughout the world. Recently in particular, researchers from Asia and Central and South America where special education schools are to be established are staying for a long period in increasing numbers through the invitation program of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

(2) Research Relationships with Foreign Research Institutions

(Exchange Agreement)

The agreement for research exchanges with foreign research institutions by the NISE is a result of the deepening of researcher exchanges as described above. Formal agreements made with the NISE as of today include the "Korea National Institute for Special Education" (November 1995) and the "Faculty of Special Education, University of Cologne" in Germany (November 1998).

The University of Cologne is an European center of the academic network on special education. Academic activities and international joint research for that network as well as invitations to APEID seminars and research exchanges mainly with NISE's Department of Education for Children with Physical Disabilities have been producing results.

Meanwhile, because the research staff of the Korea National Institute for Special Education at signing of the agreement have already moved out, systematic exchanges are not conducted at the moment, but the new staff have informed the NISE of their wish to restart academic exchanges.

(Cooperation with Nations from the Asian & Pacific Region)

The APEID Special Education Seminar plays a large role in the cooperation with Asian and Pacific nations. This seminar started in 1981 as a part of the Asia and the Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development (APEID) for UNESCO member nations in the Asia and Pacific region in cooperation with the Japanese UNESCO Committee. Since then, the seminar has been held once a year at the NISE.

The seminar cost was budgeted by ODA and within the budget, people from approximately 13 nations are invited every year to facilitate information exchange among special education specialists (administrators, researchers, educators, etc.). In relation to this seminar, the NISE dispatches researchers to member countries for cooperation and accepts researchers from foreign nations.

(Cooperation with European, North American, & Other Nations)

A joint seminar with OECD / CERI (the International Seminar on Vocational Education for the Mentally and Physically Disabled Youth) in 1980 established the foundation for research exchanges with western nations. As a consequence, the NISE has conducted joint research as well as exchanges with researchers from the U.S., Germany, Britain, and Scandinavian Nations. At the 20th Anniversary of the NISE in 1992, the seminar "Issues and Perspectives of Special Education" was held with participants from the U.S., Britain, Italy, Canada, and Norway.

The MESSC is now examining the future of special education in the coming 21st century and the need for comparative studies on special education systems among western nations and Japan. Improvement of research exchanges with western nations is being considered.

At the same time, regions that had relatively little contact with Japan in the past such as Central and South America, Middle East, Africa, etc. are participating in exchanges through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). Such exchanges are an opportunity to make the best use of research results and are a fundamental part of the international activities of the NISE.

(Cooperation with International Organizations Such As UNESCO)

Since 1981 when the UNESCO started its cooperation with APEID projects, based upon a request from UNESCO, the NISE has contributed to the infrastructure building in special education in certain nations by sending researchers, cooperating in

implementing workshops, etc.. It is necessary to yet deepen relationships and exchanges with international organizations such as UNESCO and OECD in the future in order to get the largest benefit from exchanges of personnel with other nations and to optimally use NISE's research results.

(3) Global Information Gathering and Dissemination

(Information Gathering)

The Information Center of Special Education (NISE Library) systematically collects foreign research bulletins, books, journals, and related documents; it currently owns over 13,480 books and 435 journals. In addition, individual research departments collect books and journals. Thus the NISE as a whole possesses a large collection.

(Information Dissemination)

To disseminate NISE's research results to both international and domestic research institutions, an English version of the research bulletin has been published once every three years since 1981. Five bulletins have been published to date and an improvement in content as well as a two-year publication schedule is planned. The reporting of research results abroad is a project to back up research exchanges and in this sense, publication of English bulletin is expected to become more and more important.

Furthermore, an English newsletter on related topics on special education both in Japan and abroad is published once a year and is sent to APEID participants and UNESCO related institutions in the Asian region.