
Special Education in Japan: Systems, Scenarios & Strategies

— Lindsay and Nicole —

What We'll Discuss

- Your Role as an ALT
- Overview of Special Education in Japan
- Descriptions of Disabilities & Strategies to Support Students

Your Role - Disclaimer

- This session is a general overview, not an intensive training course
- Do not go outside your job responsibilities
 - ALTs do not discipline students
 - Consider your personal safety
- Ask teachers about expectations for working with students with disabilities
 - Teachers can give you a clearer idea of your role

Special Education in Japan: Context

- **Inclusive Education**

- Beginning in 2007, more students with disabilities have been integrated into regular classes
- Japanese education seeks to foster students abilities to fit into Japanese society.
- Some of the positive changes since this policy was enacted include:
 - Number of children receiving special education support has increased
 - Percentage of students diagnosed with learning disabilities has increased
 - Recognition of attention deficit disorders, hyperactivity and other learning disorders.

Classrooms for Students with Exceptionalities

- There are three scenarios you will potentially face when teaching students with special needs
 - I. Regular School – Regular Classes
 - II. Regular School – Special Classes
 - III. Special Needs Schools
- The second scenario is the most common of the three

ALT Experiences

- What is visiting a special needs school like?
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What Should Guide Our Approach?

- Person-first thinking and language:
 - Aims to see the person first, the disability second
 - For example: Person with autism, not autistic person

What Should Guide Our Approach?

- Understand the function of behaviours
 - Remember: SEAT
 - S- Sensory: Provides a positive sensory experience
 - E- Escape: Remove or end undesired activity or interaction
 - A- Attention: Provide access to people or interactions
 - T- Tangible: Provide access to preferred items or activities

Adaptations

- **Adaptations** - changes in how instruction and assessment are carried out
- You can adapt your lessons by making changes to the following:
 - **Environment, Materials, Instructions, Rules, Methods**
- Effectively teaching students with disabilities requires adapting your teaching style, techniques, activities, and materials to suit the needs of your students.
- Good adaptations will:
 - Promote interaction and engagement
 - Increase their confidence and self-esteem
 - Will not impede on others' learning
- *FOR EXAMPLE: Introducing visual aids and examples to your presentation so that students with hearing impairments can understand more clearly.*

Types of Disabilities and Strategies to Teach Students

Physical and Motor Impairments

- Including but not limited to:
 - Congenital deformities
 - Cerebral palsy
 - Muscular dystrophy
 - Spinal cord injury
 - Amputated limbs
- Language/cognitive abilities may be unaffected

Strategies

- **Adaptations**

- You may need to make physical adaptations to the environment
 - Be mindful when designing activities and lessons
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- Students may deal with peer isolation - be inclusive and kind
 - Try not to talk down to students - interact on their level
 - Ask if they want help - don't make assumptions about their physical capacities!
 - Challenge students academically - Physical impairment doesn't mean cognitive impairment

Visual Impairment

- **Definition -**
 - Uncorrectable vision loss that interferes with daily activities
 - Use of regular glasses and contacts does not meet the definition for low vision
- There are multiple levels of visual impairment as defined by the WHO
- About 15% of people with visual impairments are completely blind

Strategies

- **Adaptations**

- Environment: Take into consideration lighting and seating arrangements
 - Materials: Prepare appropriate materials and design your lesson accordingly
 - *For example: printed materials should use big font, avoid clutter*
 - Method: Speak clearly - be aware of tone and pronunciation
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- Challenge them academically - Don't lower your expectations of academic ability
 - Encourage use of visual aids - They may have their own tools to help them
 - Provide breaks - Let them rest so they don't strain their eyes
 - Use oral practice - Reading and taking notes may be tiring

Hearing Impairment

- **Mild Hearing Loss**

- Can hear most sounds but may be distorted by background noise

- **Moderate Hearing Loss (Majority of Students)**

- Difficulty hearing speech of those nearby
- May be using strategies like lip reading

- **Severe Hearing Loss**

- Hearing device
- Uses lip reading and body language to understand
- Speech affected

- **Profound Hearing Loss**

- Relies on visual information

Strategies

- **Adaptations**

- Environment: Be mindful of lighting, sit or stand where they can lip read, remove noisy equipment that may make it hard to hear
 - Methods: Don't explain things while writing on/facing the board, use gestures
 - Materials: Give notes before class, use visual media
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- Breaks are very important - Students have to work very hard to listen and learn the information, breaks will help prevent burnout or stress
 - As always, challenge them - hearing ability doesn't reflect cognitive ability

Intellectual Disabilities

Severity Category	Approximate Percent Distribution of Cases by Severity	DSM-IV Criteria (severity levels were based only on IQ categories)	DSM-5 Criteria (severity classified on the basis of daily skills)	AAIDD Criteria (severity classified on the basis of intensity of support needed)
Mild	85%	Approximate IQ range 50–69	Can live independently with minimum levels of support.	Intermittent support needed during transitions or periods of uncertainty.
Moderate	10%	Approximate IQ range 36–49	Independent living may be achieved with moderate levels of support, such as those available in group homes.	Limited support needed in daily situations.
Severe	3.5%	Approximate IQ range 20–35	Requires daily assistance with self-care activities and safety supervision.	Extensive support needed for daily activities.
Profound	1.5%	IQ <20	Requires 24-hour care.	Pervasive support needed for every aspect of daily routines.

Strategies

- **Adaptations**

- Materials: Provide clear instructions; use visual aids when explaining an activity
 - Method: Repetition is key!
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- Adjust the difficulty - Students with intellectual disabilities may present as being one or two grade levels behind
 - Establish rapport - building a positive relationship with students will help engage them and maintain motivation
 - Celebrate successes! - Offer students genuine praise for accomplishments
 - Foster friendship - Encourage active participation and collaboration with their peers

Autism

- **Features of Autism**

- Difficulties with communication and social interaction
- Tendency to engage in repetitive behaviours or stimming
 - *Examples: flapping hands, spinning things, making specific noises*
- May be sensitive to sounds, visuals or touch

- **Autism is a spectrum**

- Often have secondary diagnosis
 - *Examples: anxiety, language impairments, hyperactivity*
- Often visual learners and better at understanding details than the big picture

Strategies

- **Adaptations**

- Materials: Use written or visual schedules, timers, checklists
- Environment: Be mindful of lighting or potentially loud equipment
- Method: Provide clear explanations and transitions

- Clear rules - Kids with autism usually work best with a set of rules
- Routine - Establish a regular routine or schedule with clear transitions between activities
- "First _____, then _____." - Prepare students for transitioning to different activities
- Special interests - Engage with your students and get to know their special interests (common in children with autism) because this can help you cater your lessons to them

Emotional Disorders

- **Emotional disorder** can be defined as:
 - A person experiencing a mood or emotions that are not appropriate to a given situation.
 - *Examples: major depressive disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder & bipolar disorder*
- Behaviours may include:
 - Aggression
 - Withdrawal
 - Anxiety
 - Mood swings
 - Distractibility/impulsiveness
 - Attention-seeking behaviours
 - Problems with social interaction
 - Difficulties following routine/rules & frequently off task

Strategies

- **Adaptations**

- Materials: Remove distracting or potentially dangerous materials
- Be empathetic - Establish a good relationship based on empathy
- Keep on task - Ignore secondary behavior (unless dangerous) and redirect the student
- Provide feedback - Any statements about behavior, good or bad, must be specific and timely
- Be consistent- Rules and consequences should be carefully selected and must be followed through on
- Guided interactions - Create opportunities for students to exhibit positive behavior, and then praise them for their positive behavior
- Remain calm - Do not deal with students in a confrontational manner, and instead face them with compassion and understanding regardless of the circumstances

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- ADHD is defined as persistent hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention that impairs learning
- ADHD can be categorized into 3 broad groups:
 - ADHD/I- Inattentive Behaviours
 - ADHD/HI- Hyperactive/Impulsive
 - ADHD/C-Combined
- Some students with ADHD may experience trouble maintaining relationships with peers
- Manageable with medication, behavioral interventions, and family/community support

Strategies

- **Adaptations**

- Materials: Limit distractions in the classroom (Example: Don't hand out extra materials until it's time to use them)
 - Procedure: Clear and simple instructions, repeat instructions, establish a routine or visual schedule, warn before transitions, break activities into small manageable tasks
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- Visuals aids- these are a useful tool to set expectations and track progress (example: check list)
 - Rewards - Reinforce positive behavior and completed tasks
 - Stay on task - Redirect negative behavior, ignore attention-seeking
 - Feedback - Give specific feedback in positive or negative situations (eg. "I like how well you're listening!")
 - Breaks - Both for movement and brain breaks - staying focused and still may take a lot of energy

Speech/Language Disorders

- Expressive Language Disorder
 - Problems in speaking and writing language.
 - *Understanding is usually stronger than speaking, but this depends on the individual*
 - Trouble making full sentences and limited vocabulary in native language and second language
- Receptive Language Disorder
 - Difficulty understanding language
 - Difficulty taking turns in conversation
 - Poor use of tone, facial expressions and body language
 - Retaining information and following instructions may be challenging
- Global Language Disorder
 - Difficulties in both understanding and expressing language

Strategies

- Adaptations
 - Materials - Visual picture cues, visual communication cards (Example: Student has cards to indicate “I understand” or “I do not understand” to show after receiving instructions)
 - Method - Find appropriate speaking pace, use gestures, use role play
 - Procedure - Ensure you have students attention before class begins
- Check in - Make sure students are keeping up with you by checking in regularly
- Be understanding - Don't confuse their misunderstanding with behaviour misconduct
- Learn their needs - You may need to use alternate activities to practice having conversations

Learning Disabilities

- **Definitions**

- Various conditions that interfere with an individual's ability to learn
- Impaired functioning in language, reasoning, or academic skills (such as reading, writing, and math)
- Learning disabilities are caused by difficulties in processing and integrating information
- Students can have a discrepancy between intelligence and achievement
 - For example: Average to high IQ, but low academic achievement
- *Examples: Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and many others*

Strategies

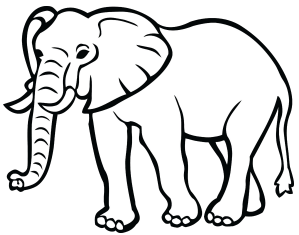
- **Adaptations**

- Materials: Check lists, physical manipulatives (*example: tiles with letters on them*), timers, picture association for sounds, highlighting letter combinations for one sound, “bed” hands, echo reading
- Procedure: Establish a routine that includes distinct transitions,

- Work on visual memory - helping students remember what letters or words “look” like
- Feedback - Provide concise feedback about academic work; praise positive behaviour and redirect negative behaviour
- Stay on task - Provide a clean, uncluttered work area to prevent distractions
- Goal setting - Set *realistic* and *measurable* goals, and adjust level of difficulty as necessary

Picture & Sound Association

Example: /e/ like **e**lephant



Highlighting Letter Combinations

Example word: heat

ea = /ee/ like “**ea**r”



Final Thoughts & Suggestions

- **Special needs are something to work with!**
 - The goal is not to overcome these “problems” but rather help children learn and navigate the world around them as people who experience it a little differently
- **Promote and model inclusion**
 - Your students look up to you, so setting a positive example and being kind and inclusive to all students is important
- **Have a backup plan**
 - Sometimes we’ll miss the mark when planning a lesson for a special needs class. Be adaptable, have a backup plan, and regroup for next time!
- **Set students up for success**
 - Special needs students often find themselves living in a world that isn't designed for them. It can be frustrating and discouraging to encounter so many roadblocks in their daily lives. Be a place where they feel like they can be themselves and still succeed!
- This job will come with a lot of trial and error. Don't worry - with effort and experience, and most importantly kindness and empathy, you will find yourself quickly becoming comfortable in alternative teaching scenarios!