Review

**Transition Support System in Japanese Special High
Schools for Students with Intellectual Disabilities:
A Comparison with the ITP Process
in the United States**

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The transition support system in Japanese special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities consists of two parts: career guidance and post-school assistance. Individualized transition support plans were introduced in Tokyo in 2001 in order to promote students' vocational independence and collaboration among schools, families, and local agencies. Tokyo's individualized transition support plans propose 2 separate fixed forms: individualized transition support plan (1) for career guidance and the individualized transition support plan (2) for post-school assistance. Some characteristics of the Japanese transition support system, including individualized transition support plans, are commonly found in the traditional individualized transition plans (ITP) process in the United States, such as the teacher-directed tendency. There seems to be nothing in common between the Japanese system and the person-centered ITP process in the United States.

Key Words: career guidance, post-school assistance, individualized transition support plans, individualized transition plans (ITP), person-centered planning

Individualized transition support plans were introduced at special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities in Tokyo and at some other special schools in the 2001 school year (Japanese Association of Special School Principals, 2002). Implementation of the plans seems to be strongly influenced by individualized transition plans (ITP) which have been practiced as transition service statements attached to the individualized education programs (IEP) in the United States since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA, PL 101-476; Mizutani & Yanagimoto, 2002).

The purposes of the present article are to review studies relating to the transition support system, including career guidance, post-school assistance, and individualized

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transition support plans, in Japan, and to examine the characteristics of the Japanese transition support system by comparing it with the ITP process in the United States, including traditional ITP and person-centered ITP.

The Transition Support (*Iko Shien*) System in Japan

Career Guidance (Shinro Shido)

In “Future Directions for Special Education in the 21st Century,” the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2001) declared that one of the goals of special education was vocational independence for students with disabilities. As a result, recently, much research and many practical programs have been implemented to promote career guidance targeting vocational independence.

The Tokyo Public Special Schools for Students with Intellectual Disabilities’ Association for Promoting Employment (2001) reported experimental practices on three themes: (1) dividing Tokyo into six regions for collaboration among schools and local agencies on the job placement of students; (2) task analysis of three popular categories of jobs for students with intellectual disabilities (i.e., service industries, clerical, and information processing); and (3) establishment of job support networks including schools and local agencies. The Tokyo Department of Education, Division of Instruction in Special Education (2001) reported that three themes emerged in the programs at special high schools in Tokyo: (1) fulfillment of career education in vocational courses at special high schools (e.g., an urban gardening course at Seicho Special High School); (2) fulfillment of career education in other courses at special high schools; and (3) career guidance focusing on fulfillment of career education.

Mizutani and Fujita (2001) surveyed the current practice of career guidance at special schools in Tokyo and found that the teachers specializing in career guidance coordinated transition support by referring to guidebooks (*shinro no tebiki*) and annual career guidance plans (*nenkan shinro shido keikaku*) originally developed by their own schools, that is, the teachers did not develop plans for career guidance individually. Hoshino (2002) surveyed department stores in Tokyo to ascertain employers’ opinions and discussed the gap between employers and special education teachers, i.e., the employers requested that the students be accurate and have the ability to work, as well as have telephone conversation skills, while the teachers thought greeting was the most important work skill. This type of disparity might be resolved if individualized transition support plans were used as a tool to facilitate communication and common understanding among the people related to students’ employment.

Individualized transition support plans are proposed to involve students, families, schools, agencies, and others in business or in the local community, in order to promote common understanding by the interdisciplinary team (Hara, 2002; Japanese Association of Special School Principals, 2002).

Post-School Assistance (After-Care)

Post-school assistance is not mandatory, but is often practiced as one function

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of transition support at special high schools in Japan. Post-school assistance includes continuing education at a special high school (*seinen gakkyu*), home visits, and follow-ups at work. The importance of post-school assistance has been recognized for many years (Koide & Ominami, 1984), and the schools agree to do it, however, the necessary funds have not been appropriated consistently (Otsuka Shinro Aftercare Kenkyukai, 1999).

Another issue is how long post-school assistance should be provided. In a national survey (Otsuka Shinro Aftercare Kenkyukai, 1999), the average answer was 3 years. Mizutani and Fujita (2001) supported those results, and suggested that 3 or 4 years post-school assistance probably matched the needs of graduates. They also argued that if only one teacher were in charge of career guidance, that individual might not be able to take care of the variety of post-school problems of all graduates, and their needs such as dismissal, graduates' hopes to leave/change their job, work attitude, job performance, and interpersonal relationships.

Mizutani, Hiruma and Yanagimoto (2002) surveyed 220 special high schools as to whether they had implemented post-school assistance. The results indicated that 44% of the schools were providing post-school assistance for graduates for at least 3 years after graduation; 36% provided assistance for all graduates; and 20% replied "other," including "depending on the case". Almost all teachers (96%) answered that there was a need to place transition specialists in local agencies, especially for post-school assistance purposes.

Post-school assistance appears necessary even though there are issues relating to its non-mandatory status. Individualized transition support plans are expected to include post-school assistance, and consequently may contribute to the establishment of post-school assistance with local agency involvement.

Individualized Transition Support Plans (Kobetsu Iko Shien Keikaku)

In January 2001, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2001) proposed that special school teachers collaborate with parents, private companies, and local agencies in order to develop individualized support plans for employment (*kobetsu no shugyo shien keikaku*) so that they can promote students' vocational independence through secondary special education. The same report also emphasized the importance of arranging for an array of supports for students with disabilities from their infancy to adulthood. The Japanese Association of Special School Principals (2002) defined individualized transition support plans as primarily for students who hope to be in competitive/supported employment, but the word "transition" was used instead of "employment" because the plans would cover not only work-related domains but also other domains, such as family life and recreation/leisure. So far, 15% of Japanese special high school teachers develop individualized plans for career guidance (Mizutani et al., 2002), and 13% of teachers at special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities develop individualized transition support plans (Ogata, 2002).

The characteristics of individualized transition support plans that the Japanese

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Association of Special School Principals (2002) proposed are: (a) two separate fixed forms: individualized transition support plans (1) for high school students and individualized transition support plans (2) for graduating students and graduates within 3 years; (b) focus on job-training or job placement and closely related to individualized plans for instruction; (c) development through a series of career counseling meetings (*shinro sodan*) held with students, parents, teachers, and possibly representatives from local agencies. The contents of each plan are shown in Table 1. Other proposals for individualized transition support plans seem to have common characteristics with the above (Murakami, 2002), but one proposed plan includes domains, i.e., work-life, community life, family life, and recreation in plans both for high school students and for graduates (Nishimura, 2002). The importance of transition domains such as recreation and leisure in maintaining the motivation to work has been suggested (Mizutani, Ishida & Yanagimoto, in press-b), and the individualized transition support plans tend to include these domains.

Individualized Transition Plans in the United States and the Japanese Transition Support System

Previously, we reviewed how the Japanese individualized transition support plans were introduced in order to facilitate career guidance and post-school assistance. Japanese special high school teachers who began to develop the plans are now seeking an effective way to involve students, their parents, and local agencies in the planning process (Tokyo Public Special Schools for Students with Intellectual Disabilities' Research Association for Promoting Employment, 2003) while the students and their parents' involvement in planning process has been secured in the United States by PL94-142 of 1975 and its amendments, as a result of which person-centered transition planning is recommended for implementation. In this chapter of the present article, we examine the characteristics of the two types of ITP in the United States, in order to identify common characteristics and differences compared with individualized transition support plans in Japan.

Characteristics of ITP in the United States and the Japanese Individualized Transition Support Plans

Recent ITP forms, for example, used in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD, 2000), consist of the factors shown in Table 1, which also depicts similarities and differences in individualized transition support plans (1), (2), and the ITP. We selected the Los Angeles Unified School District as an example because it is the largest school district in California that promotes person-centered planning in the ITP process. The individualized transition support plans (2) are more similar to the ITP, although the development of the plans (2) can be limited only once before graduation of the student. We find that only the plans (2) include the role of the school in the domains. That probably means that the school's role is more significant in Japan than in the United States for high school graduates, where local community agencies

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TABLE 1 Transition Support System in Japan and the United States

	Japanese System		U. S. System
form	individualized transition support plans (1)	individualized transition support plans (2)	ITP/IEP
student's age	15-18 (high school)	18-21 (post-secondary school)	14 up to 21
purpose	school-to-adulthood career guidance job-training job-placement	post-school assistance support coordination informed consent	service coordination instructions, common understanding, shared responsibility
frequency of development	once a year	once before graduation may be revised as needed	at least once a year
persons involved	classroom teacher, teacher in charge of career guidance, may include student, parent & agencies	classroom teacher, teacher in charge of career guidance, may include student, parent & agencies	transition coordinator, special/regular ed. teacher, student, parent, employer, agencies, friends, etc.
domains	student's hopes, parent's hopes, job-training evaluation	family life, post-school life (work, etc.), recreation/community life, medical care/health, roles of the school	community experience, post-school living, post-school education, employment, instructions
other factors	goal/objective/tasks summary of meeting, future guideline	student profile, responsible personnel, hopes for the future, support needs, date/signature	agency involvement, assessment of student interests & abilities, projected date of transition, student attendance, reasons for student absence, transition services to support the activities & outcomes, responsible personnel, time line
year started	2001 in Tokyo	2001 in Tokyo	1990 federal mandate
number of pages	1 page	1 page	3 pages

Note. Based on “Individualized transition support plans” by Japanese Association of Special School Principals, 2002; and “Individual transition plan” by Los Angeles Unified School District, 2000.

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provide post-school assistance much more extensively. Student and parent involvement is essential in the ITP in the United States, where students', parents', and local agencies' involvement is optional in the Japanese system.

The Japanese System and the Traditional/Person-Centered Individualized Transition Plans

Recently, person-centered planning that is student-directed in nature, including greater involvement of the student's family, has been recommended in the ITP process (Bassett & Lehmann, 2002; California Department of Education, 2001; Mizutani, Ishida, & Yanagimoto, in press-a). Characteristics of both the traditional and person-centered ITP and the Japanese system are listed in Table 2. Five out of 13 items are commonly found both in traditional ITP and in the Japanese system. Those items are all related to the nature of planning meetings, such as whether they are teacher-directed or whether educational professionals are in control. Students tend to be passive service recipients, and students' parents are not significantly involved in the traditional ITP and the Japanese system. No items are in common between person-centered ITP and the Japanese system.

Summary and Future Research

Individualized transition support plans were introduced to promote collaboration among schools, families, and local agencies dealing with students. Some characteristics of the Japanese transition support system are common to the traditional ITP process in the United States, but there seem to be no commonalities between the Japanese system and person-centered ITP. Little research, however, has been done in order to prove the effectiveness of a person-centered ITP approach compared to the traditional type, although some experimental studies of the transition planning process, such as Allen, Smith, Test, Flowers, and Wood (2001) or Zhang (2001), demonstrated some effectiveness of self-directed IEP for developing student self-determination skills. Future research is needed, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of person-centered transition planning.

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TABLE 2 Japanese Transition Support System Compared to ITPs in the United States

	Japanese System	U.S. System	
		Traditional ITP	Person-Centered ITP
Orientation	present/future, teacher-directed, needs-based	present, teacher-directed, needs-based	future, student-directed, capacity-based
Values Promoted	vocational independence, full participation, equality	hierarchy	self-determination, inclusion, independence, self-reliance
Participants	teacher only-may include student, parents, & service providers' opinions on a limited basis	teacher selected-may include service provider, not friends	student selected-may include friends, neighbors, may not include deliverers of services
Level of Functioning	based on vocational tests, evaluation at job training and in classroom	based on standardized assessment scores, focused on deficiencies	ascertained by participants addressing student's strengths
Record-Keeping	teacher-completed planning form	teacher-completed planning form	public display of meeting notes by recorder
Student Role	passive service recipient	passive service recipient	leader, center of attention
Educator's Role	schedule & conduct meeting, ask opinions from parents, evaluate student in classroom, facilitate	schedule & conduct meeting, facilitate	assist student in pre-planning, maintain focus, follow-up action plan, help student achieve goals, facilitate
Participant Status	educational team in control	educational team in control	parents, community members, & friends on equal basis with professionals
Communication	professionals address parents, parents may also address professionals	professionals address parents and professionals	student addresses
Agenda Development	based upon job-training, job-placement, etc.	based upon necessary forms (e.g., IEP, ITP)	based on meeting purpose & participant ideas
Meeting Logistics	at school around a table	at school around a table	meeting location selected for convenience of participants; comfort considered
Goal Development	based on community resources	based on 1-year increments	derived from dreams of desired future
Follow-up Activities	teacher-driven	teacher-driven	listed on action plan, include support of participants

Note. From "Student-focused conferencing and planning" by D. S. Bassett and J. Lehmann, 2002, p. 49. Copyright 2002 by Pro-Ed.

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—Received September 30, 2002; Accepted February 3, 2003—