Invited Paper
Current Topic

**Present Situation and Problems of Inclusive Education
in Korea: An International Comparison**

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Problems in the practice of inclusion is a historically complicated issue. Each country has encountered its own issues in relation to the practice of inclusion, because it has its own problems in particular situations and contexts. From an international comparison study, Mazurek and Winzer (1994) ranked countries as being in various developmental phases of special education, according to the degree of inclusion. I question whether inclusion is indeed an ultimate purpose of the developmental phases of special education and whether it is reasonable to rank countries according to the degree and level of inclusion. In Korea, inclusive education is a central issue of educational policy at national level. We have a legal basis to support the policy, regulated by the Korean Special Education Law (1994), and Elementary and Secondary School Education Law (2004). Currently there is a big gap between reality and pursuit in inclusive education in Korea. However, I expect a dynamic empowerment in the actual process of inclusion, as much as in political and economic development in Korea.

Key Words: inclusion, inclusive education, international comparison, Korea

Introduction

Inclusion has historically been an important subject for discussion. While Inclusion International, a non-government organization (NGO), suggested that it is a problem of disability as human rights, and commented that human rights are fulfilled when everybody has the right to participate fully without exclusion (Inclusion International, 2000). Why should full participation be “inclusion”? For those with disabilities, this question can be seen as a forced option, as well as a fair offer of opportunity.

“Nothing about us without us” is a slogan that becomes a significant issue within a society of people with disabilities when a movement regarding people with disabilities spreads as movement of a minority. Empowerment as shared power of participation by self-selection and self-determination of people with disabilities should be respected in the practical process of inclusive education. Considering our own ideological foundation and historical background, I will discuss critically actual

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conditions and practical problems of inclusion in Korea from the point of view of an international comparison.

Policy of Inclusive Education in Korean Special Education

Inclusive education in Korea is based on a planned policy of special education. According to the “2005 Plan of Special Education” by the Education Human Resource Department (2005), “maximizing educational performance of all students by shared responsibility of general and special education” is an operation indicator that emphasizes “planning generalization and qualification of special education” as one of the basic directions (Education Human Resource Department, 2005). This is an official announcement reinforcing the practice of inclusive education through the shared responsibility of general and special education. Article 15 of the Korean Special Education Law in 1994, outlined ‘inclusive education’ as follows:

- School principals in general education should comply with the demand of inclusive education by students with disabilities, their parents, or their consultants in special education.
- School principals in general education should establish accessible facilities for convenience of students with disabilities.
- School principals in general education should establish and operate special classroom in accordance to governmental standard when they operate inclusive education by the provision of clause 1.

As outlined above, the Korean Special Education Law emphasizes the responsibility of principals in general education to ensure the implementation of inclusive education. That is, principals in general education should accept the demands of students with disabilities and also establish the required facilities for inclusive education. Therefore, the 2005 Special Education Plan of the Ministry of Education intends to guarantee the right of accessibility and learning to all students by establishing facilities for students with disabilities in general schools until 2006 and will further guarantee accessibility rights of students with disabilities by establishing special classes in all general schools from 2007.

Thus, the conceptual direction of inclusive education based on the Korean Special Education Law and national level policy reflects the following two features. First, “inclusive education” will be reinforced by establishing special classes extensively in general schools and operating part-time special classes. This means that special classes are continuously established in general elementary and secondary schools so that they are expanded as the first base for inclusion by operating part-time special education. These ideas are similar to the change to special education in the 1970’s described by Dunn (1973), who pointed out problems of self-contained special classes of the 1960’s in the United States.

Second, establishing facilities for the accessibility of students with disabilities is especially emphasized for the practice of inclusion in Korea. The guarantee of accessibility is a very important condition for the practice of inclusion for students

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with disabilities. However, although expansion of facilities can be the first required condition, it cannot be a sufficient condition for inclusion. When we talk about the process of inclusive education in special education, we rank qualitative intensifying processes beginning with physical inclusion (the first inclusion), followed by educational inclusion (the second inclusion), and social/psychological inclusion (the third inclusion) (B.H. Kim, 2003). The policy in the Korean Special Education Law and the Ministry of Education intensifies “physical inclusion” as an inclusive condition.

The Ministry of Education establishes three aspects of inclusion for the creation of a school culture where students with and without disabilities study together. The qualitative aspect for the practice of inclusion is as follows.

First, the development of curriculum material and teaching intensification for improvement in the students’ development as it relates to students with disabilities. Second, making a school climate, in which students with and without disabilities study together through disability-experience activities. Third, improving recognition of students without disabilities for working with students with disabilities through volunteer activities at school or in institutions for people with disabilities (Office of Education Human Resource, 2005).

The above mentioned have an ultimate purpose, of creating a “school culture of living together”, including (1) curriculum content in relation to disabilities, (2) disability experience activities, and (3) volunteer activities for people with disabilities in institutions. In spite of those policies, we need to examine the reality that dominates school culture in Korea at the present time. The central point of Korean school culture is competition for school grade and college entrance examinations. Every student and parent obsesses over grades, and every teacher obsesses over teaching only for results.

In order to transfer the school climate from competitive to cooperative and human-centered, we need to focus on a macro viewpoint, which sees things broadly and comprehensively. From this point of view, we need to notice Skrtic’s (1995) suggestion of reconstruction of special education. He discusses how to reconstruct special education through reorganization of current public education in post-industrial time as follows.

Given the relevancies of an emerging postmodern culture and postindustrial economy, successful schools in the twenty-first century will be those that produce cultivated citizens-liberally educated young people who can live and work responsibly and interdependently under conditions of uncertainty. The curriculum and pedagogy in these schools will promote students’ sense of social responsibility, awareness of interdependence, and appreciation of uncertainty by cultivating their capacity for experiential learning through collaborative problem solving and reflective discourse within a democratic community of interests. These schools will achieve excellence and equity simultaneously, recognizing equity as the way to excellence. They will be those that produce cultivated citizens by giving all of their students a progressive education in an “adhocratic” setting (Skrtic, 1995, p.259).

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Skrtic (1995) considers reconstruction of school and reorganization (revolution) of special education well matched for post-industrial and postmodern culture. According to him, the special value of inclusion is required to accomplish this, if the advocates of special education recognize the significance of change in post-industrial society (Skrtic, 1995). In his position, democracy is a solution with reflective and collaborative discourse and the value of inclusion can be accomplished by efforts through those democratic procedures.

From this point of view, the “school culture of living together” policy put forth by the Ministry of Education will not be downward tendency, but a significant key for it is occurring spontaneously within schools. And, when a competitive school culture transfers to a cooperative school culture, inclusion can exist as real inclusion.

Limit of Inclusive Education in Korean Reality

In 2001, the theme of the fifteenth Asian Conference on Mental Retardation (ACMR) was “Inclusion: From Vision to Reality, Policy and Action”. I believe the title has significant implications for inclusion in Asia. While each country has different situations and issues relating to inclusive education, inclusion is a common ideal policy having many things to solve for practice in several Asian countries.

Winzer (1993), who wrote an American-focused history of special education, used the subtitle, “From Isolation to Integration” in his book, *The History of Special Education* (1993). In the second half of the book, he explained that special education developed from isolated custody condition to separated education by establishing special schools and special classes during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He explained that special education came to develop inclusive education from separated education in the middle of the 20th century, when labeling and classifying of disabilities were issues. Although Winzer (1993) also recognizes that inclusion does not have products enough for verifying appropriateness in American education reality, he assumes that inclusion has an ideological, political, and philosophical purpose.

However, Kauffman (1989) criticized inclusion, saying that it appeared when a regular education initiative was being emphasized and funds for students with disability were reduced by the Reagan-Bush administration. Regular education initiative support was based on the “trickle-down theory”, whereby inclusion would be easily accomplished if general education was reformed and special education had positive affects from the reform. However, as we can guess, inclusion was born for the political purposes of the Republicans, and students with disabilities were wholesaled with inclusion.

In a macroscopic point of view of an international comparison, Mazurek and Winzer (1994) described the development phase of special education through international comparison study, as follows:

phase 1: Countries with limited special education

South Africa, Papua New Guinea, Senegal, West Bank and Gaza Strip

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phase 2: Countries of emerging in special education

Nigeria, Islamic Republic of Iran, Brazil, Indonesia, Egypt, Pakistan, China, India, Uruguay

phase 3: Countries that focus on segregated special education

Japan, Taiwan, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Hong Kong

phase 4: Countries that approach to inclusion

Israel, Poland, Australia, Canada

phase 5: Countries of the integrated special education

Finland, Norway, Sweden, United States, New Zealand, England, and Wales

From the above report, we may classify countries more simply as under-developed special education countries, developing special education countries, and highly developed special education countries. The standard degree of development of special education depends on whether special education approaches inclusion and by how much. The inclusive system is the fifth phase (the last phase) and thus 10 years to appear on the report, it reported that the Asian countries, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, are classified into “separated special education system”.

Inclusive education is a central issue of educational policy in Korea. There is also a legal basis to support the policy. It is regulated by the Korean Special Education Law (1994) and Elementary and Secondary School Education Law (2004). However, we have to analyze keenly why inclusive education has a big gap between reality and pursuit. From the result of a survey on the perception of inclusion with Korean teachers in special and general classes (Kim, Kim, & Rhee, 2001), I found some positive results suggesting that teachers have an acceptable tendency in spite of practical difficulties.

However, I also found from the same survey that teachers in Illinois showed a partly negative position regarding inclusion indicating practical difficulties. It explains that while Korean teachers in field have positive ideas on inclusive education, they do not make systematic efforts. Teachers in Illinois, on the other hand, have some negative ideas, because they experienced specific difficulties with the practice of inclusion.

In Korea, special classes in general schools may be a bridgehead for the practice of inclusion. Accordingly, I will discuss the practical limits and problems of inclusive education in Korea from the position of special classes and actual educational practice.

Special classes are a light in one hand and a shadow of inclusion in the other hand in Korea. It is a light, in that the establishment of special classes is continuously increased, and therefore, it can play an important role in the practice of inclusion. However, because special classes are only physically included in general schools, we cannot deny that they are functionally excluded.

The operation of special classes has been changing from full-time to part-time since the Korean Special Education Law (1994) emphasized as following, “special classes should be operated as a part of practice of inclusive education”. However,

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94.5% of special classes are still operated on a part-time basis and only 1.5% of them are operated full-time (Office of Education Human Resource, 2005).

While there seem to have been changes, there are no real changes when we analyze it deeply. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Education establishes a basic direction of special education policy as “maximization of education accomplishment through shared responsibility of general and special education”. We can see a big gap between reality and pursuit from it. It is natural that students in special classes are excluded from general classes in the Korean education situation, which is focused on competition for college entrance exams.

Consequently, the position and identity of special classes may keep falling into confusion unless the fundamental culture (educational climate) of Korea changes. S. H. Park (2003) indicated that we have to ensure that special classes in regular schools were not recognized as being inferior. She also indicated that general teachers perceived educating students of special classes in their general class as out of their charge, while some special class teachers misunderstand inclusive time as “rest time”.

However, there is a possibility of practicing inclusion positively when general and special class teachers make an active effort for inclusion. According to a presentation of teachers in special classes titled, “Special class management for inclusive education” (BK21 Project Force of Special Education, 2001), inclusion can be actualized when special teachers have active personal relations, professionalism, and persuasive leadership. Crisis can be taken as an opportunity for creating new changes. Educational crises of special classes in Korea should be changed into opportunities for development that can construct a new paradigm of inclusion.

Criticisms and Problems in Inclusive Education in Korea From the Viewpoint of International Comparison

As Mazurek and Winzer (1994) pointed out, mentioned above, the standard of development for special education is the degree to which inclusion is practiced. I will discuss two problems about their standard and classification of international comparison study.

First, the standard was set up to be Europe- and America-focused. For that reason, I question if it is reasonable to classify countries according to the degree of inclusion practice. When we see it macroscopically, it is another standard based on a Europe and America-centered idea.

Kang (2004) suggested a transfer from a Europe- and America-centered to non-Europe and non-America-centered approach. He indicates the problem as follows.

According to a Europe and America-centered view of the world, which we accept unconsciously, European and American civilization exists eternally as a center of the world and others exist as incomplete reflection or remainder. European and American (re)created modern age and world with their own image. It can be confirmed with Mercator’s projection, which was devised from modern Europe

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and America—a method that mark Europe and America bigger than real size, putting them center—, it is confirmed from Europe (England)-centered longitude and standard time. . . . Asia was classified as Near East, Middle East, and Far East with Europe and America-center. Korea, Japan, and China belong to Far East area (Kang, 2004, pp. 11-12).

Like this, influence of European and American civilization is not limited to the concept of time and space. Furthermore it is our reality that “something European and American” and “something Asian” is taken as special and local, respectively. Even Karl Marx referred to Asians as “they cannot speak themselves, but they should be spoken by others” (translated, H. G. Park, 1999). It comes from a Europe- and America-centered world view in which the Orient was recognized as a remote region or subordination. Therefore, orientalism is another stigma Europe- and America-centered-world-created.

The movement of inclusive education in America was influenced by a policy for the integration of white and black people. When we comprehended the history of special education in a microscopic view, inclusion appeared as an alternative on the limit of separated education. When special classes were rapidly increased in the 1960's and compared to the efficiency of inclusion, people found that inclusive education had more advantages for the students' learning achievement and adaptation than separated education had. Of course, the students who were included in special classes at that time were children with developmental disabilities and learning disabilities.

Inclusive education was not appropriately and systematically provided for students who were deaf or blind. That is, they were the minority in special education, because it focused generally on students with learning, speech, or behavior disabilities and mental retardation.

Nakamura, Oka, and Cho (2005) discussed deeply the limit and problems of inclusion for students with visually impairments, criticizing the theory that disability is equal to minority which creates, ironically, another disability-minority, such as those with hearing or visual impairments. Likewise, I can indicate problems in education for students with hearing impairments. Cochlear implants (CI) are seen by some as a violation of human rights from a position taking serious consideration of the culture and identity of people with hearing impairments. Recently, identity of education for people with hearing impairments has been reevaluated, as sign language is respected as an independent language system with the 2Bi (Bicultural/Bilingual) approach. Even though some problems can be solved by arranging an in-class sign language interpreter for students with hearing impairments, how much they can communicate appropriately with other peers still remains a crucial issue.

From a similar view, Poon-McBrayer (2005) indicated that there are many problems in the educational reality in Hong Kong, despite the justification of ideology of inclusive education for children with severe learning disabilities. He reminds us of the fact that inclusion cannot apply appropriately for some students in a certain step (preschool or kindergarten, elementary, or junior high school). This means that

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inclusion cannot apply appropriately for students with severe learning disabilities. All policies and practices should be based on a principle of “proper education”, but there are many problems associated with including students with severe learning disabilities in Hong Kong (Poon-McBrayer, 2005).

Another problem Mazrurek and Winzer (1994) drew from the international comparison study by ranking countries as developmental phases of special education according to the degree of inclusion. I question if inclusion is indeed an ultimate purpose of the developmental phases of special education and, if it is reasonable to rank countries according to degree and level of inclusion. I am doubtful that the practice of inclusion based on a Europe- and America-centered model can be the standard of special education. Historically, we may be under their colonial disposition, because our theory discourse practice has been influenced by a European and American worldview. Moreover, it may be more difficult to overcome a Europe- and America-centered discourse in special education than in political and economic aspects.

An academic conference, titled “Tasks for practice of inclusion”, was opened last year in the Korean Special Education Society (2004). From the conference, Im (2004) criticized inclusion in Korea for lacking conceptualization and differing from the global standard. He discussed inclusion in our country compared with the practice of inclusion in America. He then discussed building a discovery system for children with special needs, building an evaluation system, IEP, supportive services, developing professionals, and increasing parents’ participation and training as tasks for the practice of inclusion. It is correct that we have to find methods appropriate for our own situation through philosophy on inclusion and recent trends of highly developed countries. However, it is not necessary to follow a model of highly developed countries for the practice of inclusion.

Since the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Act (P. L. 107-110) was passed in the U.S. in 2001 for educational reform, standard-based reforms were emphasized for all children in America, including children with disabilities. It implies that bureaucratic intervention is strengthened by the responsibility for public education (Skrtic, Harris, & Shriner, 2005).

The practice of inclusion for children with special needs confronts many limits in England, where a national curriculum has operated for the last ten years in all schools, emphasizing superior quality of education based on a principle of liberal-market competition. Those problems happened, because there is no teacher who can meet narrower class variances and, at the same time, sustain higher class means (Skrtic, 1995). For that reason, it is impossible to include all children in general classes without restructuring schools. It may mean that special education has still its efficiencies.

Problems in the practice of inclusion are a historically complicated issue. Each country has encountered its own issues for the practice of inclusion, because it has its own problems followed by particular situations. Korea was historically influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. That hearty and cooperative concern on

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people with disabilities was comparatively great. Nonetheless, we do not have a long history of special education for them. However, I expect a dynamic empowerment in the practical process of inclusion, as much as in political and economic development in Korea.

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