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A Comparison of Special Education Systems in Japan and Peru

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The differences and similarities between the Japanese and Peruvian Special Education practice, considering aspects like, educational approaches used, communication strategies to deal with non-verbal students and the education system in general, were explored. Teachers of intellectual disabled children in Japan (30) and Peru (30) were the participants who completed a questionnaire developed by the researcher to determine the different ways of teaching in both countries. Results indicate important differences in the practice of special education between the groups, but some coincidences in the limitations teachers have in this field. The importance of inclusion doctrine in both countries and the role it plays in the special education system was found to be considerable. Implications include the need of an individualized education for students with special educational needs.

Keywords : educational approaches, inclusion, applied behavior analysis (ABA), TEACCH, picture exchange communication system (PECS)

Introduction

The professional services for students with special educative needs are becoming more and more specialized and globalized around the world. There are new strategies that suitably match with their educational needs, like new communication approaches, teachers working for the handicapped students' independence, educational inclusion, and attempts to hire the trained students in ordinary companies with ordinary people surrounding them. The family plays an important role in the effort to achieve the Inclusive Education of students with special needs, cooperating with the teachers who guide the activities in different contexts of the students' lives.

In Peru, special education started, as in Japan, with the education for the individuals with visual and auditory disturbances, and then progressively the Ministry of Education incorporated students with mental retardation and autism into special classes, with non-specialized professionals, who put much effort into educating these students.

Between Peruvian and Japanese education there exist huge differences but few similarities, while Peruvian public special schools have an overpopulation of students (a minimum of 10 per class) and few personnel resources per class for individual attention (1); in Japan the teachers are numerous enough for the amount of students in the classroom (six minimum with two teachers responsible). One similarity is that the Peruvian special education system starts with the early intervention program, for children from 0 to 5 years old to prevent some other effects of their disabilities by working with the parents and professional staff in charge of the family and community orientation (2). In the case of Japan there exists the Health Check up System, which through physical examination at 4 months, one year, one year and a half, and 3 years old, detects in the

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child a possible development delay or any other disability (3). This check up let start the early intervention program.

This section will describe the current educational system in Peru to give an idea about the real situation of education. There are many reasons that caused the collapse of Peruvian education. The increased illiteracy of the population, the lack of attention to the poor society, learning by memory method, inappropriate distribution of teachers, in combination with other social and economical problems made the Ministry of Education declare the education system in an emergency state from 2003 to 2006 (4). Special education is not an exception: The lack of attention to the disabled people even though there is a law that protects them, the lack of teachers' training to face the different characteristics and behavior of the students is another deficiency of the education. The most important similarity between Japanese and Peruvian special education is the ideal of life for our students with disabilities: their comfort, happiness and independent life. For Peru, it is very important to learn from the developed countries like Japan, the methods and approaches they are using with autistic students, whose particular characteristics are, in some cases, difficult to understand and manage if teachers are not well prepared to identify any specific useful strategy to educate them.

Concerning American approaches for the education of autistic students, there are two widely used treatment approaches for autism: Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children (TEACCH), both of them come from USA and according to some authors they are quite effective to educating students with autism (5). According to Jennet, Harris and Mesibov (2003) (5) between these two approaches there exist some relevant differences and similarities; while ABA helps the individual with autism to appear indistinguishable from his/her peers, TEACCH respects the culture of autism, considering it as one of its values. The first approach, ABA or Lovaas therapy, includes individual 40-hour weekly therapies to increase communication skills and the autistic children IQ after three months of therapy, which are based on instructions and external reinforcement to improve the quality of the student answer (6). The TEACCH program, developed in 1970 by Professor Eric Schopler in North Carolina University, organizes the student day using a schedule with a variety of activities, based on the interests and cognitive profile of the student. The classroom is structured to provide a good atmosphere; each task is performed using cards with drawing figures or pictures, considering the high visual ability of the autistic students (5). In ABA, students learn skills they do not have, and emphasize the development of new skills, as opposed to TEACCH students who are taught the process of learning and applying skills, with an emphasis in building on their strengths, interests and emerging skills. Talking about reinforcement, the one used in ABA is external, as a primary way to engage students in a task, while TEACCH focuses on visually structured activities based on the interests and the cognitive profile of the student to promote an implicit understanding on the task, thereby engaging the student in it. About considering unobservable variables like thinking, understanding or feeling of the students, ABA does not consider them as TEACCH does, focusing on the unobservable variables, such as how their students think, how they understand the environment and integrate information, in addition to how they focus on observable variables such as their behaviors.

For the management of challenging behavior, ABA assesses the environmental determinants and maintains variables of problem behavior; while TEACCH assesses how their students are having difficulty in understanding the expectations of the environment, and coping with the sensory stimulation based neuropsychological deficits. Okuda (2003) considers among other differences, that ABA evaluates the individual, making use of simple case experimental method, whereas TEACCH develops several individual assessment tools (7).

Among the similarities are as follows, according to Jennet, Harris and Mesibov:

- The two approaches share the goal of achieving independence for individuals with autism.
- They recognized that many individuals with autism may not achieve full independence and therefore may require special support in adulthood.
- Involvement of parents can facilitate generalization of skills across environment.

- Both approaches stress that teaching in a naturalistic environment is important.
- Structuring the environment for the spontaneous use of communication is an appropriate way to teach communicative skills.
- Using students' stronger areas to develop their weaker ones is a common teaching method.

This study is to compare Japanese and Peruvian special education by knowing how these educational approaches (ABA or TEACCH) are being used. As a hypothesis, it is stated that special education teachers in both countries must be identified and must ensure some specific approach.

It is important to compare as well the alternative augmentative communication system they are using as to know whether they are identified with new and effective systems.

Methods

Participants

Two groups of 30 teachers in each country participated in this study: special education teachers from public Peruvian schools, and special education teachers from public Japanese schools. The researcher developed an anonymous questionnaire of 9 items in the Spanish and Japanese languages. The Peruvian teachers belong to different special schools situated in the south of Lima, San Juan de Miraflores. The Japanese teachers belong to different special schools of Okayama Prefecture. The questionnaire was sent to Peru via mail and distributed by the principal of the schools; in the case of Japan, it was delivered to teachers in a conference in the Attached School of Okayama University, and at the Special Education Department of the same university, to some students of the special education master course that have teaching experience as well. The majority of teachers in the Peruvian group were female (27 female and 3 male) while the Japanese group consisted of a significant number of male teachers, although the female teachers were a majority (18 female and 12 male). The Japanese group was considerably young compared to the Peruvian group (10 Japanese teachers belong to the age range of 20-29, and the other 9 to the range of 30-39 while only 3 Peruvian teachers are at 20-29 range and the other 14 belong to 30-39 range.) In the years of experience the differences are representatively important; the mean number of years of experience for the Japanese teachers was 5-9. Twenty-one of the 30 teachers fell within this range. In the case of Peru, only 11 teachers belong to the same range of 5-9 years. The two groups did not differ in the major attained; 20 Japanese teachers had special education license and 16 Peruvian teachers have it as well.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was prepared in order to prove the hypothesis of this paper about Peruvian and Japanese special education, about which educational approach is used and what alternative communication system is more important in these countries, as well as other important factors of their education. The questionnaire consisted of 9 questions, the first 2 about personal information, and the next 2 about personal teaching information, questions 5 to 9 were about their teaching experience in special education field and about the strategies they were normally using. Questions 5 to 9 have alternatives to choose. The questionnaire teaching strategy questions are as follows: Special education field and strategies being used:

5. Which of these approaches are you using?
   a) ABA
   b) TEACCH
   c) Other
6. What of these techniques do you use to manage lack of communication with your students?
   a) PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)
   b) Signal language
   c) Other
7. What is the level of independence your students are acquiring when they conclude their studies?
   a) Independence at home
   b) Work outside the house with assistance
8. What are the limitations you have as a teacher of autistic children?
   a) Lack of Training
   b) Lack of parents cooperation
   c) Other
9. What of these behavior problems do you find most difficult to solve?

a) Aggressive behavior
b) Self aggressive behavior
c) Hyperactivity
d) Self stimulation
e) Other

Results

Mean differences between groups: The two groups were compared on the usage of ABA or TEACCH program. According to this comparison, there is a considerable difference between Japan and Peru: 16 special teachers in Japan used the TEACCH program with their students with disabilities, but in Peru, none of the participants used this program. In the usage of ABA, there is no great difference (Fig. 1).

The identification or commitment with some specific approach was confirmed only for the Japanese group, where most of the teachers utilized the TEACCH program. In the case of the selected respondents in Peru, this approach is not used; more common is the usage of Augmentative Alternative and Communication System. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is used in both groups, with a slight difference, in Peru 9 teachers and in Japan 6 teachers were using it (Fig. 2). In Peru, the PECS system is one of the Augmentative and alternative communication systems used to deal with non-verbal students. Compared to Japan this use is a bit higher, although the PECS system is alternately used by the TEACCH Program as well.

The level of independence of the students after graduation is as follows: in Japan 59% of teachers answered that their students have independence at home and 23% said that their students work outside with assistance. In the case of Peru, 40% of the teachers said the students have independence at home and the 13% answered that the students work outside with assistance (Fig 3).

About the relationship between the limitations as a teacher of special education, and the challenging behavior most difficult to manage, both countries teachers have the same limitations: lack of Parents' cooperation and lack of training. As well as facing the behavior most difficult to manage, is aggressive and self-aggressive behavior, and hyperactivity.

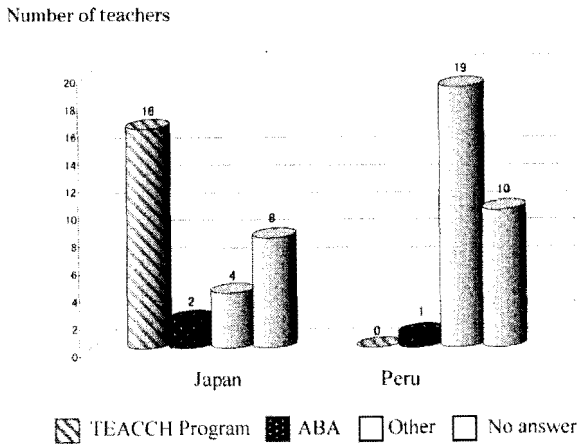

Fig. 1 Educational approach used in Japan and Peru

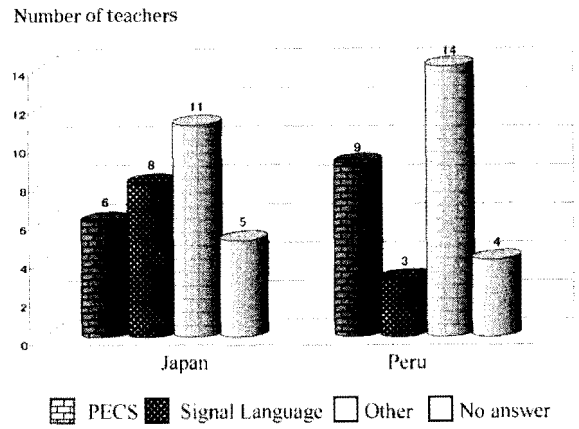

Fig. 2 Alternative augmentative communication system used in Japan and Peru

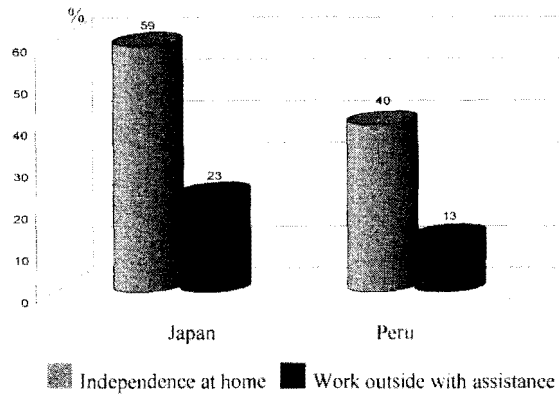

Fig. 3 Level of independence of students after graduation

Discussion

Up to now, there has not been any previous comparison study about special education between Japan and Peru, but it is understood and known the influence of American ideology as a model in both countries. Japan is applying the TEACCH program,

since Dr Masami Sasaki and 10 colleagues invited the TEACCH staff in 1984, to perform a seminar in Tokyo.

In Peru, the influence of PECS, another American educational approach for the non-verbal students is being used. This study attempted to analyze through a questionnaire of the teachers in special education in both Japan and Peru, the usage of different strategies and educational approaches with their students. The background explanation is the following:

The educational systems in Japan and Peru both have special concerns about integration of the students with disabilities in a regular class, although this effort would take a few more years to establish the idea of integration to the whole society. Both governments are doing their best to set up policies and the rules for this purpose. Regarding this point, the educational approaches used with mentally disabled children, in Peru and Japan, actively respond to the strong influence of integration and normalization doctrine in Peru, and the application of the individual attention in Japan. Even though the benefits of individualization are considered in Peru to improve the quality of special education, conditions like the proper distribution of students in each classroom do not allow the individual attention of students to be practiced. Moreover, because of the inclusion idea, all the special education teachers are focused on preparing their students to be included in regular classes, which makes them practice regular methods and strategies in their classrooms, and the teachers are requested to offer an education where normal situations and normal life style is taught (8).

The explanation for the strong concentration on inclusion is the following: the special education schools have been considered for a long time, as the place where even those students with mild intellectual disabilities, mild language problems, or emotional problems, should go to attend classes. It continued for many years, which made the special education become a school with a large variety of students, from mild to severe retardation, becoming much more difficult to cover all the students' needs. Therefore, the Regulations for Special Education were recently approved and published, which emphatically say that, "The principal function of Special Education is, to educate students with severe and multiple disabilities", making it very clear the point of avoiding the students without this diagnosis to enroll in special schools. The first objective of special education in Peru is to promote and ensure the inclusion, the permanency and success of possible integrated students (9). In spite of this aspect, the educators' strong necessity to learn new strategies to cope with non-verbal students or those with autism, made the Ministry of Education organize training conferences performed by The Center Ann Sullivan of Peru (CASP) a famous Peruvian nonprofit center, which has had a great success in teaching autistic children by using the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). This center, in association with the Ministry of Education, showed Peruvian teachers the use of PECS in the classroom, and some other strategies to deal with challenging behavior (tantrums, crying, etc.). This training helped the teachers to offer a better service to the autistic population, but still personal resources are necessary to apply the strategies in an appropriate way.

On the other hand, Japanese special education tends to use individualization with disabled children. Since they have adequate number of students per class, have a minimum of two teachers responsible for them, conditions are favorable to control and manage the group, which benefits their correct individual attention and assessment.

One of these programs, which let the students learn independently with little teacher support and offers individual attention, is the TEACCH program which was disseminated by the support and understanding of nongovernmental social welfare groups, and it is being used by the Japanese special education schools, as well as the PECS, which is just adopted and now being utilized.

The Ministry of Education of Japan advises teachers in the usage of individual methods by respecting the particular characteristics of the students, as to improve the effectiveness of their work. The national report 2004 says in chapter 1, part 5 about "Special Schools and Classes for the disabled" that ... "The special educational treatment includes special educational curriculums, small classes (Which is a mandate) specially prepared textbooks, teachers with specialized knowledge/experience, and facilities/ equipment that give consideration to disabili-

ties". This supports the tendency to individualized attention in special schools. In addition the National Curriculum Standard mentions another norm that says "The individualized instructional plan must be developed for students with severe and multiple disabilities". These conditions referred to small classes, individualized attention rules, and the adequate number of professionals for the students' attention. This shows the Japanese special education tendency to a more specialized teaching, individual treatment, and respect for the differences of the handicapped.

As to the level of independence after graduation, it results that the job opportunities for the disabled are not available enough in both countries. The reasons might be the application of inconsistent methods or the lack of continuity in other cases, because there do not exist a long-term plan for students with disabilities.

In Japan as in Peru there exist places called Commuting to Sheltered, where the students with disabilities can work with their peers and with ordinary people, but most of the students after graduation have to stay at home (3). A topic for next researchers is the point about the effectiveness of educational approaches in Japan, Peru or some other countries and the fitness they have on them, according to their economical, social or cultural reality. This study exposes educational differences on Special Education in Japan and Peru; places with different cultures, demands, points of view and facts that have a great influence on the education and the way it is developed and supported. Peru is trying to solve severe social and economical problems, which affects education in many ways, for example, the adequate nutrition of the children, the budget for education, the low efficiency of students, among others. Japan is looking for new strategies to continue improve their education system.

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