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We would like to thank Fiona Creaser for offering one of her papers to the LLL SIG newsletter and we have included it in its entirety in this issue. Fiona has spent many years in Japan, first working on the JET programme then moving into University education. She has worked at Tama University in Kanagawa, Osaka University and now is an associate professor at Kitakyushu City University. She holds a M.A and PhD in East Asian studies from Durham University, UK. Her research interests are harassment, gender and disability studies.

Lifelong Learning and Educational Needs in Japan: An Overview

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the specific educational needs of adult learners in Japan in their quest for lifelong learning. It presents an overview of the meaning of lifelong learning and includes the history and controversies surrounding Japanese reforms of lifelong learning. The paper then looks at hidden minorities within the lifelong learning process, focusing on adults with physical and learning disabilities. A wealth of information is available in the United States and Western Europe regarding the rights of disabled people, but disability awareness in Japan is a relatively recent concept. The Japanese Ministry of Education is trying to promote awareness of the needs of disabled children in schools, but how far reaching is this awareness and how does it help adults with physical or learning difficulties? Finally, this paper gives some brief examples of methods of instruction suitable for adult learners with special education needs.

Key Words: Lifelong learning, adult education, physical and learning disability, special education needs

Introduction

This paper focuses on the educational needs of adult learners in Japan, in particular the difficulties and challenges adult learners with physical or learning disabilities encounter in their pursuit of lifelong learning. In order to understand the concept of lifelong learning and what it means for different cultures and countries, I provide a general overview of some varying interpretations of lifelong learning and examine the situation in Japan regarding the controversies surrounding reforms made to lifelong learning, which has de-powered the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science

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and Technology (MEXT) and paved the way for private businesses to commercialize adult study. I then take a closer look at the problems faced by adults with physical and learning difficulties, a hidden minority group, who are often failed globally by inadequate educational systems, which do not offer the correct kind of support. Much of my discussion about physical and learning disabilities is centred on models from the United States and Western Europe. Finally, I take a brief look at methods of instruction suitable for learners with special education needs.

What is Life Long Learning?

The description of life long learning varies from country to country; for example, in the United States, life long learning has taken on the meaning of adult education. In Europe, the meaning is often synonymous with work-related training or re-education and there is an emphasis on studying on the job, taking extended leave for educational purposes, and using open and flexible learning institutes such as the Open University, which offers a range of vocational courses. There are many factors which contribute to an interest in lifelong learning in Western countries. One main motivator is financial, as, for example, in industrialized areas with high rates of unemployment where people may wish to move from traditional manual labour jobs to those in tertiary services (Cropley, 1991). Another good example is that of the teaching profession in the United Kingdom. During boom times there is often a shortage of teachers because more money can be earned in the private sector. However, when the economy takes a downturn, there is a predictable increase in the number of people applying to teacher training programmes, as it is seen as a secure job with good safe benefits (Lipsett, 2008).

In South East Asia, Areeya Rojuithee (2005) writes of Thailand: According to National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) the lifelong education means education resulting from integration of formal, non-formal, and informal education so as to create ability for continuous lifelong development of quality of life. (p.1) She then goes on to group by age the different stages of lifelong learning in Thailand: those from ages six to twenty-four are mainly taught in formal educational settings, starting with primary education and followed by secondary and tertiary level education; those from ages twenty-five to sixty tend to learn informally from instructional or mass media, from information technology, or in the work place; and finally people aged sixty and above generally enjoy learning art, crafts, music, and sports (Rojuithee, 2005). In Japan, lifelong learning usually means taking up a hobby or leisure activity, which is taught in community centres, sports halls, or educational facilities. Changing careers mid-life,

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while possible, is difficult in Japan, where the notion of one job for life is still the ideal, although this is changing to some extent (Anon, 2009).

One advantage, in theory, of lifelong learning is that minority groups, such as those with physical and learning disabilities, who, traditionally, have not benefited from formal educational systems, find support in less conventional and more creative learning environments. Those with disabilities are often viewed as ‘disabled’ first and learners second. This leaves little room for flexibility, and many students with physical and learning disabilities face a number of challenges and barriers throughout their school years (Hemmingson & Borell, 2002). Ganon and Nolan (2005) analyzed data from Ireland and concluded that students with a disability are more likely to leave school earlier and gain fewer qualifications than those without. Drawing from my own experience as an assistant teacher in a Special Education Needs department at a boys school in the UK, I found that teachers tended to expect less from students with disabilities than they did from their non-disabled cohorts. Unfortunately, teachers and teaching assistants of both children and adults with disabilities can unwittingly hinder rather than help their students’ progress (Hehir, 2002). Lifelong learning, on the other hand, can be used as an avenue for self-expression and an exploration of creative methods of study for students with disabilities. In Japan, lifelong learning has taken many twists and turns, some progressive and some arguably regressive, to reach where it is today. Even so, given the rapid problem of an ageing society and decreasing birth rate, I feel more can be done to utilize lifelong learning to create sufficient opportunities for mature people with disabilities.

Overview of Lifelong Learning in Japan

Between the years 1984 and 1987, Prime Minister Nakasone established an ad-hoc advisory committee and a national council on educational reform. In July 1990, in Japan, law number seventeen (Law Concerning the Development of Mechanisms and Measures for Promoting Lifelong Learning), an expansion of the Social Education Law of 1949, was enacted (Thomas, 1997, Kawachi, 2008). These actions were significant in that it was the first time in Japan that the term “lifelong learning” had been used. Previously (until 1988), the official term had been “lifelong education.” There were two main reasons behind the change in terminology. First, the word education was thought to imply teacher-centred classes whereas the word “learning” is associated with a more student-centred approach to learning suitable for adult learners (Thomas, 1997). The second, and arguably the more controversial reason, was that the word “education”

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gave exclusive decision-making power to the ministry in charge of education, MEXT (formally known as MONBUSHO), but once the wording was changed to “learning”, other ministries such as the Ministry of International Trade and Industry were able to become involved in lifelong learning (Thomas, 1997). Critics of this law have focused on two controversial points. Once the wording was changed to “learning,” the government gave private businesses the green light to invest in lifelong education programmes. The private sector has set up vocational schools in business and computer technology and foreign language schools have also been established throughout the country (Gordon, 1998). Supporters see this private sector intervention as a welcome economic boost, taking some of the burden of financing off the shoulders of the Ministry of Education. However, opponents of the involvement of the private sector fear that private business is concerned more about making money than in providing education. Only the most profitable and expensive courses are introduced to the public, thereby reducing the number of individuals able to take them (Thomas, 1997).

Nevertheless, since 1990, lifelong learning has become increasingly popular in Japan and has resulted in the establishment of the administrative body, the “National Advisory Committee for Lifelong Learning (NACALL-established in 1990) (Fuwa, 2009). Since 1990, three general patterns regarding lifelong learning in Japan have been observed; namely, the majority of participants are women and the elderly, are from middle class backgrounds, and are mainly interested in taking up a hobby or a sport (Fuwa, 2009). Lifelong learning helps participants to broaden their social networks as Watanabe (2005) discovered in his study of people taking karaoke classes. Housewives in the class learnt there was more to life than housework and childrearing, and retired businessmen were able to expand their social network. Although the participants in these classes did not benefit economically, they did become more self-aware and conscious of a world outside their previous comfort zones.

Adult Education and the University System in Japan

In Japan, it is rare for mature students to enter university, the normal route being for an eighteen year old to enter an institute of higher learning immediately after high school. After that, on job training starts, usually done in-house at the place of employment. Unlike the European model, extended paid leave for educational purposes is rarely, if ever, given. However, lifelong learning could play a key role in helping people who have previously been marginalized in the job market, such as elderly people with no university education, find gainful employment.

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The decreasing number of eighteen year olds in Japan has created a situation whereby competition for students is fierce. In the year 2007, the number of eighteen year olds was equal to the number of enrolment places at Japanese universities (Kawachi, 2008, Poole, 2010). In order to stay afloat, many small to middle sized private universities have adopted an open door policy and are beginning to accept students of varying academic levels as well as mature students.

Recently special examinations for adults, using different methods of selection, have been introduced at universities in the private sector (Fuwa, 2009). For example, a small private university I worked at accepted mature students through admission office examinations (AO examinations). These students were selected on the basis of an internal written exam and an interview rather than on their high school credentials. In addition, the university had begun to open its doors to adults who wished to pay only for a single course. Mature students were able to improve their qualifications and gain credits for the courses they took even if they were ineligible for graduation. Nevertheless, such a flexible higher education system still eludes many educational institutions in Japan because the notion of part time study has yet to be accepted. Higher education is still viewed as unsuitable for older people, who often have to juggle study, work and family responsibilities (Fuwa, 2009; Thomas, 1997).

To sum up, Japanese society still regards placement at a prestigious university straight after graduating from high school (known in Japanese as *gakureki shakai*) as extremely important in determining the type of career young people will have later in life (Gordon 1998). Lifelong learning, therefore, is not seen as a way to improve one's career but rather as a leisure activity, a way to engage in or perfect a hobby or a particular interest.

If Japanese society were to place less importance on the prestige of attending a certain school, and instead view part time study or lifelong learning as a way to improve career opportunities or change careers, this would be the first step towards empowering individuals at the periphery of formal education. For example, Karen Nakamura (2006), in her book *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity*, writes about the difficulties deaf people in Japan face in receiving an education on par with their non-deaf peers. Children attending schools for the deaf in Japan are often taught by teachers who are not deaf and who cannot sign, forcing them to learn how to lip-read.

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Similarly, deaf children who are enrolled in mainstream schooling are not assigned a teaching assistant to sign for them, again forcing them to rely on strong hearing aids or lip reading. Many deaf students in mainstream schools in Japan return to schools for the deaf during high school years and very few enter mainstream universities (Nakamura, 2006). Lifelong learning opportunities could provide deaf students who have been failed by the education system a chance to acquire academic qualifications in order to improve their employment prospects.

Characteristics of the Adult Learner

Adult learners in university not only bring the university extra revenue, they also bring new and exciting dimensions to the university environment. Based on my personal observations in the classroom, mature students are often more attentive and actively participate in class discussions. I noted in my English language classroom at a small private university in the Kanto region that mature students tended to make more effort in their English studies and were much more self-disciplined and self-motivated when it came to specific learning targets and outcomes. These observations notwithstanding, it is interesting to consider what it is about the adult learner that makes them want to learn beyond traditional formal educational settings. Cropley (1991) analyzed salient characteristics, which define the life long learner as: strongly aware of the relationship between learning and real life; aware of the need for lifelong learning; highly motivated to carry on lifelong learning; possesses a self-concept favourable to lifelong learning; possesses the skills necessary for lifelong learning. (p.45)

The above statement rings true for adult students I have taught at the university level. One mature female student was very appreciative of the opportunity to study for a degree in her twilight years because as a child she was not encouraged to pursue an academic career, being expected to marry and become a housewife. This particular student acted as an informal mentor, encouraging younger female students to seek out the various opportunities that were open to them.

Many mature students have to juggle jobs and families, and are therefore less flexible than their younger peers when it comes to full time study (McCormick, 2010). Full time study is costly both economically and socially, and may take mature students away from areas of priority in their lives such as childcare and employment. One way in which many universities have tried to adapt to the needs of mature students is through

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part time study. This, however, as I have mentioned previously, does not apply to Japan, which does strongly support part-time study at further or higher education institutions.

Western Europe and the United States have increased their support for mature students and sophisticated approaches to lure students into the educational net have been developed. These include providing students with compensatory education; for example, the University of Waterloo in Canada requires students to take an English language exam and those who fail are referred a writing clinic where they practice taking the exam until they pass it. Between 1979- 80, the University of California spent over five million dollars for basic courses and programmes for under-prepared (mature and non-mature) students. Sheffield University offers two-year preparatory courses for mature students called “flexi- study” and there are similar courses offered at the University of Melbourne and Manchester (Cropley, 1991). Napier University in Edinburgh offers a free course for mature students to introduce them to the university as well as an excellent interactive web site that introduces them to the rudiments of academic life and the basic skills needed to succeed (Getting Ready for Study, Napier University, <http://www2.napier.ac.uk/getready/>).

The Japanese higher education sector would benefit from a similar flexible approach to study for adult learners. Japan’s economy is still struggling after the collapse of the “bubble economy” in the late 1980s and early 1990s (BBC News, 2002). Consequently the notion of a job for life is becoming increasingly rare in Japan. A notable number of companies are downsizing and making employees redundant. For example, some years ago, Japan Airlines (JAL) had to cut 14% of its workforce (McCurry, 2009). Creating a large window of opportunity for mature students to study at university would enable individuals to retrain for a new career path. Finally, increasing the number of lifelong learners with learning and physical disabilities in Japan would pave the way for more job opportunities and a better quality of life for marginalized groups.

Definitions of Disability

In the United States, legal recognition of discrimination towards people with learning and physical disabilities began with the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). These acts were passed by Congress to protect adults with learning and physical disabilities against discrimination. More recently, the Assistive Technology Act (1998) provides technological assistance to people with learning disabilities; some examples of the technology available include electronic spell

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checkers, talking word processing programmes and word prediction software (Covington 2004). In spite of these legal and technical advances in the United States, disability is still a legal problematic minefield.

A continuous problem with the term disabled is that it covers such a wide spectrum of physical and mental conditions that it is often very difficult to categorize who is disabled and who is not. Minow (1990) explains this dilemma saying: When does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatize or hinder them on that basis? And when does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatize or hinder them on that basis. (p.20)

If disabled people are treated differently from what is considered normal by the able-bodied world, there is danger that their perceived abilities may fall short of what they can actually do. Opportunities will be closed to these people simply because it is thought they cannot do them. On the other hand, treating people the same without considering their differences can hinder rather than help someone. For example, is it fair to stop a person in a wheel chair from using public transport simply because the majority of individuals do not need to use ramps?

Until relatively recently, doctors in the medical profession were the only people who differentiated the disabled from the non-disabled. Disability was historically framed within medical, rehabilitation, and psychological fields the disabled person was a freak, to be stared at or made better (Craton, 2009).

There are two main philosophical schools of thought related to the study of disability, the first is the British model which is sociology based and is the idea that a person is only disabled because they are made to feel this way by the restricted barriers placed upon them in a predominantly able-bodied society. ¹ It is thought, changing the physical environment and making it more accommodating for the disabled person, is one solution in the fight against oppression and discrimination. The second school of thought, the American model, is recognized for its “phenomenological” structure. This model promotes the idea of minoritization (Clark, 2006). Critics of minoritization believe it is difficult to compare disabled people with minority groups based on race, class or gender. This is because disabled people as a group do not have the same strong sense of solidarity other minority groups have. For example, not all disabled people see themselves as disabled and not all disabled people want their disability to be politicized

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(Clark, 2006). Defining disability is one step in the direction of recognising the needs of disabled people, but there is still a huge gap between defining and acting upon the definition.

In Japan the definition of disability is someone “whose daily life or life in society is substantially limited over the long term due to a physical, mental retardation, or mental disability.” (Heyer, 2006 p.6). This definition is very close to the American definition which states that “a disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual; a record of such an impairment; or, being regarded of having such an impairment (Heyer 2000 p.6).” Because of the UN International Year of Disabled People: “Full Participation and Equality”, the Japanese government was pressured into making changes to the way disability was viewed (Heyer, 1999). In theory these changes were the promotion of normalization for disabled people, allowing disabled people to live independently and be integrated equally into society without discrimination. In practice Japan still adheres to the welfare model in their attitude towards disabled persons. Disabled people are segregated from mainstream society from a very early age. The majority of disabled children attend special schools (yōgō gakkō) and are then later employed by government run sheltered workshops (jusan shisetsu) or social welfare companies (fukushi kōjō) (Heyer, 1999).

Disability and Education

A British Household Panel Survey (1998-2003) studied the ratio of people with disabilities participating in lifelong learning. Participants of the survey were instructed to respond to a medical definition of disability and a non-medical definition. People were asked if they were receiving the Disability Living Allowance (medical definition) and also asked the non-medical question, “Does your health prohibit some types of work?” The results of this survey showed that people with a disability were more marginalized and less likely to participate in lifelong learning than their able-bodied peers (Macleod & Lambe, 2007). These statistics are no surprise to anyone who has studied about disability or knows what it is like to have a disability. Many people with disabilities are loath to “come out of the closet” and be associated with disabilities or study disability in any form (Monaghan, 1998). Dr. Rosemarie Thomson who is an associate professor at Howard University (Washington, U.S.A) says that at first coming out as a person with a disability was: “a little scary. I felt vulnerable. I felt exposed. It was difficult for me to talk about an issue that I had imagined as being very personal,

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perhaps even embarrassing, sort of shameful.” (Monaghan, 1998, p. A15). For those people who are born with a disability the feelings of shame and embarrassment begin as a child. Thomas Hehir (2002) tells the tale of a child born with disabilities and how his mother soon discovered how hard it is to have your child accepted into the world of the non-disabled: Penny was quickly developing the view, held by most disability advocates, that while disability is not a tragedy, society’s response to disability can have tragic consequences for those who have disabilities. (p.2)

Images of disabled people range from Tiny Tim characters who are seen as feeble and weak, but basically good hearted and in need of charity, to disabled people who gain admiration by doing something extraordinary, something that even able-bodied people would not be able to do. In other words, disabled people are not seen as normal individuals, and as such, are not treated equally. In Japan, during the 1970s, parents battled the Japanese government to allow their children to have the right to compulsory education prior to, 1979 compulsory education only included disabled children who were deaf or blind (Heyer, 1999).

Education for deaf children in the United States began over one hundred and fifty years ago. The island of Martha Vineyard was seen by some as a paradigm for the integration of able and disabled community because of the higher than usual percentage of deaf adults. Most of the islanders, deaf or hearing, could sign, and in some places it was even impossible to carry out everyday activities without signing. Deaf and non-deaf residents alike used sign and non-sign languages simultaneously and there appeared to be no sense of one method of communication being better than the other. However, this paradise came to an abrupt end by the advent of oralism, which advocated the benefits of lip reading over sign language (Hehir, 2002). Contrary to the romantic image displayed in films such as *Mandy* (1952), most profoundly deaf people find it very difficult to lip read and prefer sign language. In the 1970s, research in the United States showed that sign language developed naturally in children who were deaf as just as spoken language developed naturally in children who could hear (Hehir, 2002). In Japan, deaf students are encouraged to be normal, that is to behave like hearing children, one school for the deaf in Sapporo has a very strict oral approach in its methods of instruction. Karen Nakamura (2006) recounts an incident, which happened when she took an old student back to the school for a visit. At the end of the visit the principal of the school spoke to Karen in a slow clear manner praising her “wonderful” enunciation. “He had thought I was deaf. The idea of a hearing person who

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could sign without voicing, who wasn't an interpreter, and who was interested in the deaf community, had escaped him" (Nakamura, 2006, 134). In many respects the deaf community is fortunate in that it has been able to harness its members and bring about change in order to improve the quality of life for deaf people in Japan.

Recently, in Japan the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has made some efforts to address the issue of learning and physical disabilities but these reforms are mainly aimed at children and not adults. For example, education for Japanese children with disabilities was renamed in the School Education Law from 'special education' to 'special education needs.' This is the first step Japan has taken towards inclusive education.ⁱⁱ Some of the main changes to be made under the new name concern the extension of the umbrella of Special Education Needs (SEN) to include children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and High-Spectrum Autism. Previously 'special education' in Japan was used to describe children with easily recognizable disabilities such as deafness, blindness or cerebral palsy (Doyle & Creaser, 2011).

Japan is a part of an international convention called The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (May 3rd 2008), countries which take part are to prohibit all discrimination based on disability and guarantee persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection. In other words the Japanese government has to guarantee inclusive education at all levels, in order to help people with disabilities attain a full and productive quality of life. The convention itself predominantly deals with primary and secondary education however it does mention lifelong learning (Doyle & Creaser, 2011).

The Japanese Law to Support Persons with Development Disabilities (April 1st , 2005) states that universities in Japan should recognize students with disabilities and give due consideration to their individual needs. The reality, however, is I believe very different, from reality. I visited a disability centre at a very large well-known university in Japan and was very disappointed to find the office itself was very small and tucked away behind screens, almost as if the office was ashamed to be there. The advisor I consulted spoke in very hushed tones and added to the atmosphere of shame and suppression. This was in marked contrast to the university web page, which gives the impression of an open and active celebration of receiving students with disabilities. Furthermore, some years ago in Japan, I had the opportunity to listen to a speech

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about the creation of a 'barrier free' campus at a large prestigious Japanese university. The speech was informative but I was very shocked afterwards to listen to a young disabled man tell the guest speaker that he was disabled but it was said in a way, which denoted shame rather than pride.

Japan is not the only country where disabled people are as a group underrepresented at university and in western societies disabled people as a group are more likely to be less educated and earn less money than non-disabled persons (National Disability Authority, 2007; Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). University courses are expensive and people with disabilities are very often at the lowest end of the pay scale and simply cannot afford further education, whether it is in the form of part-time or full-time study. People often wrongly believe all disabled individuals receive huge sums of money in the form of benefits and do not need to work or can afford education using benefits available to them. Based on my own experience of working in a young person's disabled nursing home, in the UK, the reality is often quite the opposite; those people who receive benefits will more often than not tell you that the money they receive is simply not enough. Then, there are those people whom society sees as disabled and yet are not legally disabled and therefore do not receive any government money. Not only do these people suffer from discrimination in the job market they also receive no recognition or support from society in general. This is particularly the case for hidden disabilities such as a learning disability: a person may spend their entire school life believing they are not as 'bright' as their peers and expectations to succeed by teachers and family are not vocalized sufficiently to instill a sense of self-motivation and desire to achieve a better quality of life.

Strategies to Help Lifelong Learners with Educational Needs

A key ingredient to successfully teach adult students with learning difficulties is to create a safe and comfortable learning environment. Once a comfortable place of study has been established it, is important to help organise students study a simple way of doing this is to ask the student to carry a daily or weekly planner and, with the student, map out the week ahead. Boosting a student's esteem can have a significant impact on the way that student views their study. The University of Hull (UK) has produced a "Charter of Rights" (see Appendix A), to empower students with learning difficulties. The final right "I have the right to be me without the approval of others" is invaluable. Nobody has the right to put a disabled person into a medical box and claim to 'know' everything about that person. Another right is: "I have the right to make

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mistakes,” this is crucial for people with learning disabilities to understand. Often people with learning disabilities are so afraid to make mistakes for fear of being found out, they place enormous pressure on themselves, which inevitably increases anxiety, and exacerbates their learning difficulty (Riddick, Sterling, Farmer & Morgam, 1999).

Many educators of adults have a genuine desire to help students with learning difficulties but are frustrated at the lack of information about the assessment process for recognizing adult students with learning difficulties (Jovita, Plotts, Joesel, & Wells, 2003). For example in the United States, children are categorized into two main categories, elementary and secondary, but there is no similar categorization system for adults (Covington, 2004). Not having a clear idea of the assessment procedure for adults with learning difficulties hinders an educator’s ability to individually assess and address specific educational needs. There is a risk that both the adult student and the educator will become frustrated and disillusioned by the whole pedagogical process. An individual’s needs, will differ and individual assessment and learning strategies need to be thought out for everyone (Clark, 2006). People with learning difficulties are easy to recognize in a classroom environment because they display a sudden inability to function as expected in one or more of the following areas; reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning, mathematics (See Appendix A). Lifelong learning does not necessarily take place in a formal classroom, making it so much more problematic to recognize a learning difficulty (Covington, 2004). For Example, adult learning may take place in a more informal setting such as a persons home or on line. Educators need to develop a wide range of teaching methods to incorporate the needs of those individuals with learning disabilities (See Appendix B for ideas). Although these recommendations are primarily for use in the classroom they can be adapted for more informal modes of instruction.

One approach in the UK to help people with learning disabilities, which can readily be adapted in Japan, is to teach memory retention skills (see Appendix C). Using colour when explaining things in writing is also helpful for students with learning disabilities as they can remember key words, dates, and phrases by remembering the colours they were written in. Not correcting a paper in red pen is a simple but effective confidence booster for students. Red is often associated with danger and if a student sees a paper corrected all in red they will immediately be put on high alert and stress levels will increase making it difficult for them to rationally think through problems.

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Conclusion

Recently, in the UK, Philip Davis the MP for Shipley, has been in the news for implying that people with learning disabilities and mental illnesses should be allowed to work for less than the minimum wage. He is quoted by the BBC as saying: Given that some of those people with a learning disability clearly, by definition, cannot be as productive in their work as somebody who has not got a disability of that nature, then it was inevitable that given the employer was going to have to pay them both the same they were going to take on the person who was going to be more productive, less of a risk (BBC News HRZONE <http://www.hrzone.co.uk>)

The attitude above is typical of someone who has no idea about disability in general and learning disabilities and mental health problems more specifically. It is the view that if someone looks different or expresses themselves differently from the majority, then they are in some way 'less productive' and a 'greater risk' than their so-called able-bodied peers. Attitudes, like the one expressed above, need to change if disabled people are ever going to achieve equal status in global society, and adult education is one route, which could be mobilized to bring about positive change for those people with learning and physical disabilities.

In Japan, awareness of students with learning disabilities in the classroom is only just beginning. There are many social and cultural hurdles both on an individual and institutional level, which need to be overcome before a true mutual understanding between the disabled world and the non-disabled world can be reached. Parents of children with physical or learning disabilities need to have the courage to stand up and fight for their child's rights, socially, economical, and politically. This can only realistically be achieved if they have positive support from outside organizations and the medical profession. Disability is something to be celebrated not something to hide.

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Appendix A: Characteristics of learning disabilities in the classroom

Table 1

Subject area	Characteristics
Reading	Difficulty processing sentences with more than one tense; difficulty recalling main ideas and characters, details and concepts, identifying sequence; difficulty with articulation, phonemic synthesis when reading aloud
Writing	Difficulty with mechanics, spelling, organization of written tasks and using given words correctly in sentences
Listening	Difficulty processing verbal information without visual clues, and in processing details, sequence, abstractions
Speaking	Difficulty expressing ideas, using appropriate vocabulary, and /or using appropriate grammatical patterns
Reasoning	Difficulty making inferences, planning problem-solving steps, explaining “why” questions
Mathematics	Difficulty with recall of math facts, solving problems (remembering steps)
<p>Note: Information synthesized from Ganschow, Philips, & Schneider, 2001; Mastropieri, et.al., 1996; Woodward & Montague, 2002</p>	

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Appendix B: Recommendations for bridging the gap between a teacher and a student with learning difficulties

- *Structuring lessons to systematically group learning into manageable pieces;
- *Connecting lessons to link the learning process with the learner's goals;
- *Informing the learner about how the learning process works, the expectations of each lesson, and giving proper feedback;
- *Providing explicit instruction with explanations and models about how to approach the learning process to inform the learner;
- *Providing direct instruction to control the learning and to guide the learner to successful outcomes;
- *Scaffolding instruction to use the learner's prior knowledge and experiences to build a context for new knowledge;
- *Providing intensive instruction to engage the learner with frequent practice and application to new skills;
- *Providing instruction that is sensitive to the various cognitive barriers that might inhibit learning;
- *Accommodating instruction to provide the changes that are legally required to reduce the impact of a learning disability
- *Evaluating instruction to assess progress of the learner with the specific techniques and strategies by the teacher;
- *Providing instruction that is generalizable to the learner's environment;
- *Providing instruction that will be enduring and will allow learners the time it takes to effectively master goals. (Covington, 2004: 98)

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- ⁱ Mitchell and Snyder (1997) also have this point of view and believe ‘abelism’ is a social practice that makes the disabled person appear to be abnormal, someone who does not fit into the majority able-bodied community.
- ⁱⁱ For further information about inclusive education see, Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou (1998) and Vlachou (1997).