

Study of “Appropriate Education According to Ability” Theory by Harutaro Suzuki in the Prewar and Special Educational Considerations

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Abstract

The establishment of special educational considerations for children, learning in regular classes, who have disabilities and special needs can be cited as an important issue of today’s school education. It is important to examine its historical lineage, including its relationship with regular education, when we conceptualize current and future modes of special needs education and special educational considerations.

This study, as part of that work, examined an educational theory by Harutaro Suzuki (1875–1966), who was eminent for accomplishing the standardization of Binet intelligence measurement: in particular, efforts in “special classes” of Osaka Normal Elementary School and standardization tests for intelligence measurement were linked with “appropriate education according to ability” theory developed under the close relationship with special class organization.

That is to say, this study was intended to elucidate a historical lineage and practical standpoint leading to today’s special needs education through special class organization and intelligence test methods and “appropriate education according to ability” theory developed by Harutaro Suzuki for supporting diversified children’s developmental and educational needs. In addition, a thorough examination is made of special educational considerations for children with various learning difficulties and maladaptations which are identified there.

Based on “measuring schoolchildren’s intelligence scientifically”, Suzuki consistently advocated, “From results of the intelligence measurement, current educational systems and educational methods must be reformed”. Its concretization was the introduction of “appropriate education according to ability” theory based on intelligence test method and special class organization of Osaka City, and fundamental educational reform of uniform elementary school education through them.

Specifically, not restricting “appropriate education according to ability” theory only to special classes, he called for improvement of teachers’ specialties so that “ordinary teachers can practice” in elementary school. Such a sentiment is extremely innovative from the perspective of today’s situation of special needs education. Furthermore, “appropriate education according to ability” had been formulated not only for underachievers, but also for schoolchildren with high intelligence in the classroom.

As stated above, “appropriate education according to ability” theory was one which provided individual and special educational considerations/ supports according to diversity and needs of children. Suzuki tried to posit the concept as a reformation of elementary school education and of regular schools. Such viewpoints and methods are inferred as a historical lineage and practical viewpoint that have given rise to today’s special needs education.

Key words: Harutaro Suzuki, “appropriate education according to ability” theory, “special classes” of Osaka Normal Elementary School, special class organization of Osaka City, special needs education, special educational considerations

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