

# Opportunities for the Mentally Handicapped to receive Higher Education

T a d a s h i   A n d o h

In the summer of 1998, We established an "open college" at the University of Osaka Prefecture to Provide 24 mentally disabled young People with a form of higher education<sup>1)</sup>. The establishment of the College, which was well received by the students and their families, was triggered by the following question from a female student at my seminar at the University: "If we advocate Welfare for the handicapped, Shouldn't we offer a specific program by which the mentally disabled can receive post high school education?"

Parents of children suffering Down's syndrome had already contracted me many times in search of such learning opportunities, so I immediately agreed with the student's idea. With the help of my seminar students and other graduate school students, I quickly prepared a schedule of activities and a list of teaching staff, and then approached related organizations including "Inclusion Japan" to discuss the idea and seek their cooperation. This was all in preparation for setting up the College. With regard to financing, which was one of our greatest difficulties, We successfully managed to raise funds from the Yamato Social Welfare Foundation and Social Welfare Funds of Osaka Prefecture.

We considered the opening of the College to be particularly significant the following three respects: First, it would serve as a forerunner for others who wished to secure the right of the mentally handicapped to receive education. Vestiges of the concept of normalization, which emerged in the late 20th century to encourage society to live together with the handicapped, remain today. However, as this concept in practice may leave the handicapped isolated even if they seem to be integrated into the community, it is being replaced by the concept of inclusion, which means the handicapped living among the healthy by availing themselves of the community's support. This new concept, which has received the support of the disabled and those around them, focuses on securing the right of the handicapped to receive education.

Given that everyone has an equal right to gain knowledge, the mentally handicapped also have the right to receive higher education<sup>2)</sup>. To make this possible, appropriate support of various

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forms is essential. At the College, we initially focused on what and how to teach students, and decided to assign a University student to each handicapped person to assist them.

Second, the undertaking would secure the development (and social development in particular) of the mentally handicapped. We anticipate that College students will spontaneously absorb the information and technologies for a better life that are typically provided as knowledge at universities and colleges. And, through reporting, together with their peers, their accomplishments in various ways, they will increase their self-reliance and ability to reach their full potential.

We therefore encourage students of the course to have a strong sense of accomplishment and a feeling of participation, and avoid forcing them to work on certain subjects which may cause loss of motivation after learning. We allocate time equally to lecturing by teaching staff, cultural and artistic activities and students' activities on their own.

Third, through the undertaking the University would contribute to the community. In response to growing public demand for life-long learning, universities and colleges have begun to provide higher education to their respective communities, such as establishing a variety of open courses for the public and admitting members of the community as full-time students. Nevertheless, the door to such opportunities has been firmly shut to the mentally disabled. It is the duty of faculty members to provide their knowledge in an understandable manner to those who seek it. Universities and colleges can fulfill their duty to contribute to the community by making their intelligence and technologies available to all community members including the mentally handicapped.

Throughout the country, there are faculty members who believe that such activities are naturally one of the functions of universities and colleges, which respect multiplicity. Some of them have established an open college at Mukogawa Women's University, St. Andrew's University, Miyagi University and Tokushima University, and others are planning one at some other universities<sup>3)</sup>. At present, however, such efforts are made by faculty members and others with sympathetic views on a private and trial basis, using the facilities of the Universities. I sincerely hope that in the future, at least one such college will be set up in each prefecture.

The course inaugurated at our College was covered by one newspaper, which gave it the suggestive headline: "The highest seat of learning only during the summer season". Since then, six years have passed; we have been continuing the project while increasing the number of days of the course, admitting ad-hoc students and reviewing the contents of lectures. All the students on the course will enter the final grade this spring. To complete the course, they will have to meet the following requirement in addition to attaining the required credits: at the graduation presentation, they must present a thesis, produce a piece of artwork, play a musical instrument or give any other performance, which they can choose freely to best represent themselves.

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I, together with their families, look forward with much anticipation to celebrating their graduation.

### (引用・参考文献)

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