

Should Japan Introduce Gifted and Talented Education to its Educational System

Introduction

In the year 2000, Sho Yano, an eight year old child who has a Japanese-American father and Korean-American mother, made headlines throughout the United States for being the youngest ever matriculate of Loyola University (CBS news, 2001). Although Sho's case is an exceptional example, he is one of the many children who are known as the gifted and talented. The so-called Marland Report, a well known study on gifted and talented education, or GATE, defines gifted children as those "who have outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance and who require differentiated educational programs (beyond those normally provided by regular school programs) in order to realize their contribution to self and society (Marland, 1972)". While many developed countries have already established educational facilities that specialize in the education of gifted and talented children, our country is far behind in this field of education. Gifted education is in need worldwide because according to Hollingworth, "based on a three-year measurement, we know that a child of 140 IQ can

master all the mental work of provided in elementary school in half the time allowed, and a child of 170 IQ can do so in one fourth the time and attain top marks (Hollingworth, 1936)". This implies that these gifted children can use at least half their school time for doing other activities. Containing them in regular curriculums has a possibility of depriving them of the chance to use the leftover time effectively.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the present situation, the results, and the problems of gifted education in countries which have already introduced such systems, in order to plan an effective way of introducing a government-led educational system for the gifted and talented to Japan. Because gifted education has already been introduced in many developed countries, it would be difficult to examine the systems of every single country in only one essay. Therefore, as a case study, I would like to look at the gifted education systems of the United States and Korea. I have chosen the United States, because it is considered that the United States is one of the most advanced countries in the area of gifted education, and Korea, because according to Kitamura and Kuramoto of Tohoku University, Korea has a similar educational climate to Japan (Kitamura & Kuramoto, 2005). I would like to analyze each case by examining the history of GATE in each country, the specific structure, and the problems of each system. In addition to this, I would like to adopt Ishikawa's method of analyzing the extent,

method, target, and institution of enforcement (Ishikawa, 2005). Also I would like to classify if the special education offered places its importance in enrichment or acceleration.

Upon writing this report, I would like to distinguish the definitions of the terms “talented” and “gifted”. Although this is a more of an idiomatic definition, the term “talent” is used to describe how a person exceeds in various areas, for example, music, academics, and art. On the other hand, the word “gifted” is used to express a talent in one particular area (Muramatsu, 2003). Therefore in this thesis I would like to distinguish the terms, “gifted and talented education”, and “gifted education”, because this type of gifted and talented education often specializes in expanding a child’s ability in a specific field of study.

Gifted Education in Japan

Before examining each case, there is a need to deepen our understanding towards Japan's systems of gifted education. Needless to say our country is far behind occidental countries in this area of education, but this does not mean that our country has not tried and applied any such systems at all. Although the extent of enforcement is fairly limited, some institutions allow early admission and graduation in universities, and recently, symbolized by the newly established Science Frontier High School in Kanagawa, some high schools are designated as Super English High Schools or Super Science High Schools, which are some examples of enrichment programs. However these programs only apply to High Schools or above, and cannot be applied to compulsory education. In Japan, special education has not been introduced to compulsory education from the belief that special treatment should not be allowed, because every child should receive equal education. This can be implied from the government guidelines for teaching (*Government Guidelines for Teaching*, 1998). However I would like to note that this belief, on the other hand, deprives talented children from an "equal opportunity" of education. Winstanley (Winstanley, 2004), states the importance of "having the opportunity to challenge". Gifted children in normal schools are deprived of the opportunity to challenge in more advanced content.

The root of the problem lies in the people's critical belief that since compulsory education is administered based on tax income, it is inappropriate to spend a large amount of money on a handful of gifted children. This comes from the thought that special education might recur the feudal social standings of the Edo era (*Japan's Modern Educational System*, 2009). However as stated later in this essay, there is little criticism of such systems in other countries. I feel that there is a need to change the public opinion towards special education in Japan for a new system to be accepted. Also, academic studies in this area have virtually halted since the 1970's (Muramatsu, etc, 2004), and most new reports on gifted and talented education consists of case studies of institutions in the United States. In the white paper issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, although the importance of science and technology is acknowledged, the white paper mainly focuses on the enrichment of university-level research facilities and does not say a single word about gifted education for children in earlier stages of education (*The Educational, Scientific, and Technological White Paper*, 2008). The status quo is as follows; accelerative education is allowed to a limited number of university applicants and undergraduates, and although enrichment education has started a regional spread, both are only limited to high schools and above. Factors such as public opinion make it difficult for gifted and

talented education to be introduced in compulsory education.

Gifted Education in the United States

Without doubt, the United States leads the world in gifted education, in its substantial systems of GATE. The United States started introducing gifted and talented education to its educational system after the Second World War. Prior to the war, there had been states and local-governments that had their own unique systems of gifted and talented education, such as grade-skipping. However this can also be said to pre-war Japan, and therefore I feel that this is not of any significance. What triggered the development of gifted and talented education was the Sputnik Shock of 1957 (Muramatsu, 2003). When the Soviet Union succeeded in the launch of the Sputnik, the world's first ever satellite, the United States, being engaged in the cold war, became keenly aware of their insufficiency of scientists and technicians. Therefore it could be said that the first programs of gifted education were established for homeland security related reasons (Tannerbaum, n.d.). After this incident it has been a repetition of cost curtailment and cost enrichment of program budgets. In the mid 80's the diminishing levels of normal education were pointed out, and more funding was poured in to the enrichment of normal education, for example the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" is one scheme. Currently, it is still considered by many experts that the money used for gifted education is far below the ideal budget (U.S. dept. of Ed., OERI, 1993).

The current systems of gifted education are highly diverse in the United States, because the enforcement of gifted education is mainly entrusted to States, therefore ingenerating a difference of systems amongst them (Gross, 2004). However it can still be said that the United States has one of the most sophisticated systems in the world, especially in its acceleration education (Muramatsu, 2003). Acceleration strategies mainly consist of replacing gifted children in higher grades, or grouping gifted children and offering them education at a faster speed. Acceleration strategies that are currently in play are grade-skipping, telescoping, early entrance to school, early entrance to college, and early college (Southern, Jones, & Stanley, N.D.). Telescoping is the method of putting highly talented individuals in one class and moving through the curriculum faster than normal schools, therefore shortening the time they spend in secondary education. Early college is a school in which children that have already graduated high school by the 11th grade. The Simon's Rock College in Colombia University is one of the most famous early colleges, being a four-year college of liberal arts. Enrichment programs are less common in the United States, because grade-skipping has already provided an easy way of engaging in higher leveled education. There has been a long debate of acceleration against enrichment, and many have favored acceleration because of its low costs (Southern, et.al., n.d.). Examples of enrichment programs in the United

States are contests, summer schools, Saturday schools, and other special programs.

Because acceleration strategies are so common in the United States, the psychological difficulties that gifted children experience when they are promoted to higher grades have been deeply inspected. The main problems that children have as a result of acceleration strategies are social and emotional issues and underachievement. It has been a concern for long whether or not a gifted child can fit in to their new class. However, studies by Erdwins et.al., show that contrary to popular belief, most gifted children prove to be more socially mature than their classmates (Erdwins, et.al, 1981). In most cases they feel more comfortable in their new classes because the children of higher grades, being mentally mature, fit the mental age of the gifted better (Erdwins, et.al, 1981). However a few studies on the sociality of gifted students, like such of Cornell, have proved that gifted children that differ in family social status, social self concept, and academic self-esteem, tend to be unpopular in class and need to be cared of (Cornell, 1990). This kind of unpopularity amongst peers lead to loneliness, which can further lead to mental disruption such as feeling rejected, alienated, excluded, and socially deprived. Being in such state will lead to behavior such as being violent and depressive. According to studies, nearly one in eight children was reported to have been in significant loneliness, depression and anger (Berndt & Kaiser, 1985).

What is most important in mitigating this problem is counseling. This is because there is a need to “comprehend the complex inner lives of the gifted as well as their difficulties living in a world in which they feel alien (Silverman, n.d.)” Davis and Rimm states an ideal system of counseling as follows; “A gifted and talented program for students of any age should include a counseling component. There are three traditional counseling areas; students’ personal concerns and adjustments, plus the interrelated components of educational and career counseling.” Although various counseling programs have been examined by scholars, there is still no correct answer on how gifted children and their parents should be counseled (Feldhusen, et.al., 1997). A study by Moon, Kelly, and Feldhusen examines the importance of a university-based counseling center to offer gifted youth and their families the necessary counseling. According to their survey, what was highest in need was counseling for the parents of gifted children. Many replied that they would receive moderately strong benefits from consultation with professionals that are trained to give counseling in peer relationships, emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and stress management, which were the four areas in which the greatest need was expressed. However it appears that there is still a shortage of counseling personnel that have been trained to work with the gifted and talented (Feldhusen, et.al., 1997). Even in the United States, being considered as one of

the most advanced countries in gifted and talented education, there is still a shortage of professional personnel, and an effective method of counseling is yet to be established.

Gifted Education in Korea

The start of gifted education in Korea dates back 20 years to the late 1980's, but the direct catalyst of its development can be clearly identified as the IMF shock in 1997. Until then, although gifted education had started in the 1980's and the need to develop legal systems had been suggested, because of Korea's strong egalitarianism, there had been no significant progress (Ishikawa, 2005). Prior to the crisis, the Korean government had been promoting an education equity act for secondary education, meaning middle and high schools. However after the IMF shock, the economic crisis triggered by the devaluation of Asian currencies (IMF, 2009), completely changed the peoples' consciousness towards gifted education. Ishikawa (2005) quoted the *Sekai Nippou*, a Korean newspaper, for saying that "gifted children are our most important national treasures". It has been about 12 years since the IMF shock, and in these years, Korea has established a fairly sufficient gifted education system.

The gifted education system in Korea consists of three types of institutions. They are; the special schools at senior high school levels, enrichment programs during after-school hours in elementary and junior high schools, and government funded institutions of university levels (Cho & Wu, n.d.). The most significant of these three are the special school at senior high school levels. These schools are operated by states

or provinces, and therefore are able administer entrance tests that are unique to each school (Ishikawa, et.al., 2004). Also, because it is not government run, it does not incur any effects from national institutions, making it relatively free from political intentions (Kitamura & Kuramoto, 2005). Requirements for entering are: (1) to be in the top one percent in academic achievement for the last two years; (2) to perform well in specially set entrance exams which highly emphasize math and science (50%); and (3) to be in good physical condition. In quantity, less than ten percent of the children who were enrolled in junior-high gifted education are allowed entrance (Cho & Wu, n.d.). From this you can imply how academically prestigious these institutions are. These schools also show good advancement rates to government funded universities such as Seoul University and KAIST (Korea Advanced Institution of Science and Technology) (Kitamura & Kuramoto, 2005).

However it is these high advancement rates that are posing to be problems. Because of the high interest in the entrance exam situation, these special high schools are starting to be used as gateways for prestigious universities. This has caused a problem that was beyond expectations. More students are entering these schools by studying in cram schools. Some of these students are not as motivated as students that selected these school because of a desire to learn more. These not-so motivated students

have caused an increase of underachievement and drop-outs (Ishikawa, 2005). Good advancement rates have also caused a rapid increase in the number of applicants. Although varying from year to year, the number of applicants was approximately 13 times the capacity in 2004 (Kitamura & Kuramoto, 2005) and the number of applicants are increasing every year. Because of this phenomenon, it can be said that these special high school have lost its original objective: a gifted education institution for enrichment education. They have turned into mere prestigious public high school, attaining high advancement rates to prestigious universities.

Conclusion

Through this thesis, I have roughly examined the GATE systems in the United States and Korea. Both systems had different characteristics; the United States being advanced in acceleration strategies and Korea being advanced in enrichment strategies. Both systems were far from perfect, as they both face a few serious problems. Upon introducing full-scale gifted education programs to Japan, there are three points that need to be considered.

First, from the examination of the United States' and Korea's history of gifted education, it became clear that both countries had experienced a national crisis; the United States having experienced the Sputnik shock, and Korea having experienced the IMF crisis in 1997. These incidents were the cues for a climate change in people's consciousness towards gifted education. For Japan, peaceful and prospering, to convince its people to believe in the importance of gifted education, a considerable degree of effort will be needed. It is clear that the understanding of the public is essential to the development of sophisticated gifted education systems.

Second, through the investigation of the United States' systems of acceleration strategies, I have revealed the importance of mental care for the gifted and talented. Acceleration is most likely to be selected as a primary method of introducing gifted

education in our country because of its low costs. However unless Japan is able to establish a sufficient system of counseling, introducing acceleration should be reconsidered. Considering the fact that the United States is yet to establish a counseling system that works, this will also require a considerable degree of effort.

Third and last, by examining Korea's enrichment strategy, the special high schools, I revealed a serious flaw in its system that Korea is yet to solve. Because of the high advancement rates that these special schools hold, they are turning into mere prestigious high schools. If Japan is to establish similar institutions, there will be a need to make sure that this does not happen in our country. However this might prove difficult because as said, Japan has a similar educational system and educational climate with Korea.

Whatever the setbacks, my initial stance does not change; Japan should introduce GATE to its educational system, however hard this may be. Our country will need to start with changing the egalitarianism and conservative public opinion of the public, before considering any concrete and effective educational systems.

(2949 words)

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