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Education of School Refusal Children in Asahikawa City, Hokkaido

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The problem of school refusal, first raised as an issue in the 1960s in Japan, has drastically increased in the '80s, amounting to 0.61% of all junior high school students in 1988. In addition to treatment in hospitals and counseling in schools and guidance centers, guidance in special classes for emotionally disabled children is on the rise. In Asahikawa city, such a class was set up in 1985 specifically for school refusal children, on account of a survey revealing their appearance rate to be 0.47%. This class has graduated 39 students in the 5 years since its institution. Classes are conducted by home-room teachers, while evaluations for entry and dismissal from this class, and problems encountered in the class are taken up by the "Asahikawa city committee for promotion of therapy and education for school refusal children", comprised of psychiatrists, school staff, educational administrators, child guidance center staff, and clinical psychologists, coordinating interplay and adjustments between the various institutions. The majority of students in the special classes are going to school, and finding direction in their lives, depicting the success of guidance in these classes. School refusals among elementary school children also amounts to roughly 0.1%, and special classes to account for these children were instituted in 1990. In this report, we introduce the reality of school refusals in Asahikawa city, and the actual framework and guidance provided.

(Keyword : school refusal, special education, special class)

The problem of school refusal has drastically increased in the '80s, amounting to 0.61% of all junior high school students in 1988. The rate of school refusal is four times larger than 14 years ago, as shown in Table 1. In Hokkaido, as shown in Table 2, the rate is 0.46%, three times larger than 14 years ago.

Recently, children refusing school were counseled and educated at Special Classes for Emotionally Disturbed Children (SCEDC).

An SCEDC only for school refusal children was set up in Asahikawa, Hokkaido, in 1985. Hokkaido is the northern island of Japan and the population is about 5,700,000. Asahikawa is situated in northern Hokkaido and the population is about 360,000. This report describes the practice of education at a special

class for school refusal children and the present life conditions of these children.

Asahikawa Municipal Board of Education, in cooperation with the Asahikawa Society of Education for Emotionally Disturbed Children, investigated the actual condition of school refusal in Asahikawa and the system of therapy and education to remedy it. The result was as in Table 3: the number of school refusing students in junior high school was 81, 0.47% of all students, and about half of them seemed to be cases of neurotic school refusal as described in Koizumi's thesis. As the grade level goes up, the ratio increases two or three times.

According to the results of their investigation, the Municipal Board of Education decided to set up a special class only for the emotionally disturbed school refusers, in addition to organizing the Asahikawa Committee for Promotion of Therapy and Education of School Refusing Children, which was comprised of psychiatrists, school staff, educational

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Table 1. National changes in long-term absence among junior high school students

Year 1)	No.St 2)	No.Ab 3)	Ill. 4)	Eco. 5)	Ref. 6)	Oth. 7)	Ab.% 8)	Ref.% 9)
1974	4735705	23493	12957	629	7310	2597	0.50	0.15
1975	4762442	23584	12731	520	7704	2629	0.50	0.16
1976	4833902	25116	13137	557	8362	3060	0.52	0.17
1977	4977119	26870	13134	575	9808	3353	0.54	0.20
1978	5043296	26075	11997	496	10429	3153	0.52	0.21
1979	4966972	27804	11960	516	12002	3326	0.56	0.24
1980	5094402	29653	12150	527	13536	3440	0.58	0.27
1981	5299282	32679	12327	616	15912	3824	0.62	0.30
1982	5623975	38245	12943	656	20165	4481	0.68	0.36
1983	5706810	43435	13812	719	24059	4845	0.76	0.42
1984	5828867	46887	14696	723	26215	5253	0.80	0.45
1985	5990183	49948	15487	672	27926	5863	0.83	0.47
1986	6105749	52055	15579	719	29673	6084	0.85	0.49
1987	6081330	56371	15655	571	32748	7379	0.93	0.54
1988	5896080	60756	15496	509	36110	8641	1.03	0.61

Table 2. Changes in long-term absence among junior high school students in Hokkaido

Year 1)	No.St 2)	No.Ab 3)	Ill. 4)	Eco. 5)	Ref. 6)	Oth. 7)	Ab.% 8)	Ref.% 9)
1974	249866	1279	752	36	369	122	0.51	0.15
1975	249185	1166	664	20	378	100	0.47	0.15
1976	250624	1188	682	7	406	92	0.47	0.16
1977	252278	1165	619	12	450	84	0.46	0.18
1978	251323	1120	547	14	460	93	0.44	0.18
1979	243909	1124	525	11	503	85	0.46	0.21
1980	248135	1129	474	11	533	106	0.45	0.21
1981	253879	1230	468	11	647	104	0.48	0.25
1982	263458	1644	563	13	969	99	0.62	0.38
1983	263209	1849	618	8	1048	175	0.70	0.40
1984	266244	2059	682	21	1120	236	0.77	0.42
1985	272216	2110	751	14	1090	255	0.78	0.40
1986	276593	2061	692	10	1164	1164	0.75	0.42
1987	276229	2034	675	3	1193	1193	0.74	0.43
1988	269322	2065	643	4	1238	1238	0.77	0.46

1) Year, 2) Number of students, 3) Total number of long-term absent student, 4) Absence due to illness, 5) Absence due to economic reasons, 6) Absence due to school refusal, 7) Others, 8) Percentage of long-term absent student, 9) Percentage of school refusal

Table 3. Number of school refusers in Asahikawa in 1984

Grade 1)	Primary school							Junior high school			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total	1	2	3	Total
No.St 2)	5299	5363	5279	5531	6053	5966	33491	5850	5775	5553	17178
No.Ref 3)	2	1	2	4	7	7	23	12	30	39	81
Ref. % 4)	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.07	0.12	0.12	0.07	0.21	0.52	0.70	0.47

1) Grade, 2) Number of students, 3) Number of school refusals, 4) Percentage of school refusal

Table 4. Number of school refusers among junior high school students in Asahikawa in 1985-1988

Year	No.Ref.at Sp.Class 1)			Ref.Oth. Sch. 2)	Tot.No. Ref 3)	Tot.No. St. 4)	Ref.% 5)
	Term1	Term2	Term3				
1985	(9)	(11)	14	65	79	17,183	0.46
1986	(14)	(17)	20	78	98	17,552	0.56
1987	(16)	(18)	20	82	102	17,675	0.58
1988	(12)	(17)	16	88	104	17,114	0.61

1) Number of students at special class for school refusers, 2) Number of school refusers among other junior high students, 3) Total of school refusers, 4) Total of students, 5) % of refusers.

administrators and clinical psychologists. The Committee determined which students should join the special class or return to the regular class and gave advice concerning the management of the special class. In April 1985, the new class was set up at a municipal junior high school and three class teachers who had experience in special classes for emotionally disturbed children arrived at the post. The Committee had various concerns. Some feared that the designated students, who were in the habit of school refusal, would refuse to attend the special class as well. Others thought that since one of the main causes of school refusal may lie, not in the child, but in the school itself, the problem of school refusal would be better remedied by reform in the regular schools. However, since there are many school refusing students at present it was essential to persevere in setting up the special class.

In deciding the class membership the committee respected the wishes of both parents and the school refusing children. In some cases of extreme school refusal, the children refused also to attend the special class.

The numbers of school refusers in Asahikawa

are shown in Table 4. The percentage is the same as the national rate. One fifth of Asahikawa school refusers went to the special class.

From 1985 to 1989, the number of special class graduates was 39 and the number of students who returned to ordinary classes was 7, totaling 46. Seventeen students were male and 29 were female. Twelve students entered the class in the first year, 16 in the second year, 18 in the third. The class was open to new entrants throughout the school year.

As for family conditions, 12 (26%) were recipients of public assistance, and 13 (28%) were children not under public assistance but in need of special treatment such as exemption of tuition fees. Thus more than half the families of this class had some financial assistance. Fourteen children (30%) had parents who were divorced. The rate of occurrence for each of these factors was significantly higher than the average for other school children.

After entering the special class, 29 students (63%) attended most classes, 17 (37%) were mostly absent. In the latter cases, teachers visited their homes and counseled them. Patterns of attendance were varied. Of the 26 students

(57% of the total) who attended regularly immediately after joining the special class, six gradually lapsed into habitual absence. On the other hand of the six students who initially had the poorest attendance, one gradually came to attend most classes and four others improved their attendance. Therefore we can say that two third of the students who were labeled school refusers could attend school under special educational care.

In the special class the students generally progressed by six stages:

- 1) Teachers accept students completely. Students are still nervous and uncomfortable.
- 2) Students become accustomed to the class. Teachers continue their accepting manner, respecting the students' independence but adding a little direction.
- 3) Students begin to assert themselves. They cause mischief, fight among themselves, tease, show off and talk back, as in an apparent release of emotion. Teachers deal with the trouble through individual counseling or group counseling.
- 4) Students become composed. Teachers

select subjects for each student.

- 5) Students begin to study the curriculum.
- 6) Students begin to think their future course.

Twenty students (43%) progressed to the 6th stage, two (4 %) to the fourth, 9 (20%) to the 3rd, two (4 %) to the second, four (9 %) to the 1st and 2 students (4 %) did not achieve even the first stage. Students who progressed by a different route numbered 7 (15%).

In the first stage almost all students exhibited neurotic type of behavior. In the third stage was very important in that students revealed their personalities and their ability to adapt to each other or not. Students who passed the third stage progressed easily to the 6th. After the third stage, it became apparent that some students did not belong to the neurotic type but had problems of low mentalitiy, delinquency, truancy etc. Ten students (22%) were mentally retarded or borderline, six (13%) were truants, three (7 %) were delinquent, two (4 %) were apparent victims of mental disease, one was an intentional school refuser one was infirm. The other 23

Table 5. Condition of students after graduation and at present(1990)

	Ret. 1)	Part high 2)	Cosp. high 3)	Full high 4)	Empl yee 5)	Home 6)	Oth. 7)	Total	
After the class	8	12	4	5	2	11	4	46	
%	17.4	26.1	8.7	10.9	4.3	23.9	8.7	100.0	%
Present life	—	9	8	2	11	9	7	46	
%	—	19.6	17.4	4.3	23.9	19.6	15.2	100.0	%

1) Return to ordinary class, 2) Part-time high school, 3) Correspondence high school, 4) Full-time high school, 5) Employee, 6) Staying home, 7) Others

Table 6. Number of school refusers in senior high school in Asahikawa

Grade	Drop. 1)	Temp.Ab. 2)	Ab.Ov.50 3)	Ref. Tot.(%)	Tot.St.	Ref.%
1	34	7	2	43(36.1)		
2	42	13	4	59(49.6)		
3	11	5	1	17(14.3)		
Total	87(73.1)	25(21.0)	7(5.9)	119(100.0)	14,454	0.82

1)Dropout, 2) Temporary absence, 2) Absence over 50days.

(50% of the total) were neurotic school refusers. Most of them were of the socially immature type and there were scarcely any of the frustrated would-be over-achiever type. Looking at mental ability from the view point of the experienced teachers, six students (13%) were of upper-middle ability, 30 (65%) were lower-middle and 10 (22%) were mentally retarded or borderline. Many of the students were under achievers.

The conditions of the students after graduation of return to the ordinary class and again at present (1990) are shown in Table 5. Twelve students (26%) proceeded to part-time high schools after graduating from junior high school, eleven (24%) stayed home. Five students (11%) entered full-time high schools, 3 of which later dropped out or were absent for a time.

At present, nine of the students (20%) attend part-time high schools, eight (17%) correspondence high schools, totaling 17 (37%). On the other hand there were only two students (4%) of full-time high schools. Students who had found employment numbered 11 (24%), those staying home were 9 (20%). The type of occupation were waitress, delivery man and automobile factory worker.

As previously mentioned, many of these special class students have a background of low achievement, or low mental ability, and/or problems of finances or human relationships in their families. Many of them can attend classes and get an education, if they are treated with special educational care as this class. But for some types of school refusers,

such as the frustrated would-be over-achiever, the special class approach may not be effective.

According to the Asahikawa Area Congress of School Adaptation, the number of school refusers in senior high school in 1989 is as shown in Table 6. The percentage of school refusal was 0.82%, more than the junior high school rate. In the first grade the percentage was 36%, 50% in the second and 14% in the third. The decrease in the third grade is due to the fact that 73% of school refusers dropped out in the first or second grade.

In April 1990, in Asahikawa, the Special Class for primary school refusers was opened. However different kinds of classes are necessary to meet the various special educational needs of children.

In Japan at present there are provisions for special education only for the handicapped. Therefore school refusers can be eligible for special classes only by being classified as handicapped. As most students are adverse to being so-labelled, the handicapped classification is inappropriate for school refusers.

In Japan in 1988 only 0.9% of students received special education. This is one fifth to one half the rates of Great Britain, the United States, France and West Germany. Therefore many Japanese students with special educational needs are languishing in the regular school curriculum.

Special programs, separate from those for the handicapped, need to be developed within the Japanese school system for school refusers as well as students with emotional problems and learning disabilities.

Reference Notes

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