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What is a Role of Occupational Therapists in Inclusive Education of Tochigi Prefecture, Japan ?

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Since 2006, the prefectural government of Tochigi runs the project to promote inclusive education in primary and secondary schools. Under the project, each city and town recruit outreach consultant teams for inclusive education, and these teams visit each school to advice teachers how to support children with disabilities. Furthermore, the prefectural government forms some teams of experts on medicine or psychology, and sets up regular meetings for the outreach consultant teams to have supervision by expert teams. The first author works as a member of the expert team.

The purpose of this report is to explore concrete role of occupational therapists in inclusive education of Tochigi through analyzing agendas shown by outreach consultant teams at the supervision meetings for past 3 years.

All agendas discussed in the meetings from 2006 till 2008 are listed up, categorized by themes, and analyzed.

Every year, the meeting was held for 3 times. Total number of agendas was 65 in 2006, 57 in 2007, and 75 in 2008. These agendas were categorized in the following 6 thematic groups: 1) knowledge on specific disability 2) how to support specific child with disability 3) how to manage all children in class 4) how to support family of child with disability 5) how to organize collaboration system in school 6) how to help under-experienced/under-motivated teachers. Compared with other groups, group 2) was the biggest in every year; 28 in 2006, 38 in 2007, and 54 in 2008.

The group 2) was divided into the following 5 sub-categories: a) how to reduce problematic behavior b) how to increase appropriate behavior c) how to prevent secondary problem d) prognosis e) individual education plan. Compared with other subgroups, subgroup a) was big; 14 in 2006, 23 in 2007, and 14 in 2008.

Agendas related to "how to support specific child", especially "how to reduce problematic behavior" were the biggest concern for outreach consultant teams. Focusing only on problematic behavior would not be very helpful for holistic child development. It is necessary for occupational therapists to advise outreach consultant teams, considering such reality.