

**Recent Curriculum and Instruction Development
for Students with Mental Retardation in Taiwan, ROC
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I. Introduction

Inclusion is the current trend in developing the education for individuals with special needs worldwide as well as in Taiwan. Not only the newly revised Special Education Law (Ministry of Education, 2004), its Regulations, and related Acts (Ministry of Education, 2003) but also the Welfare Protection Law for the Disabled Individuals (Ministry of Interior Affairs, 2004) and its regulations all centered the importance of inclusion. Back to the history of our special education development, we also have gone through the periods from segregation to integration, to inclusion as that of the world trend has. The definition of inclusion in Taiwan means to put children with special needs into the regular settings with the supports / assistances of special education and related services. Under such circumstances, the adaptations and alternatives of curriculum and instructional designs is becoming a very crucial issue for students with special needs, especially for those with mental retardation. In this report, the presenter will focus on the curriculum and instruction policies and provisions in the last few years and the visions and prospective for the coming years for students with mental retardation.

II. Current Policies

1. Early Intervention

The newly revised Special Education Law clearly stated that all children with special needs at age 3 could receive the free and appropriate education and the education settings should be in regular kindergarten with regular children and should be fully implemented within 6 years. At present, children with special needs including mental retardation at age 3 to 5 can attend both the public and private kindergartens for all children with subsidies provided by the ROC government. Some other free early intervention programs by integrating the educational, medical, and social welfare disciplines in metropolitan areas are also rendered for children with special needs under age 3. Currently, preschool programs around our whole country have to accept the disabled children and include them with the regular children with normal ratios by rendering special education personnel as coordinators and remedial teachers. The label of all these children was the developmentally delayed instead of the mentally retarded, learning disabled, hearing impaired, autistic, or other categories before age 8 unless their disabilities are very obvious and definite. For these age range students, the curriculum and instructional designs focus on implementing the developmental curriculum by letting the children with mental retardation learn together with their same age peers to gain the friendships and social skills as the main goals. In addition, the special educators can provide them remedial skills or life skills using functional curriculum in cognition and other areas using co-teaching or teach them separately in the resource rooms.

2. School-age Education

For school-age children, mandatory Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) have to state the extension of including them in the regular education and provide the needed supports and aids in regular education settings. Although resource room programs for mild disabilities, special classes and special schools for moderate and severe disabilities, and some programs affiliated with the hospitals or institutions for

profound and multiple disabilities are still existed in current educational systems, the spirit of inclusion is still the guideline and the regular setting should be the first priority while doing the educational placement. Besides, providing the curriculum and activities to interact with their age-appropriate peers as possible as they can is the major concern while planning the IEPs. In addition, an annual IEP is required for each of the disabled and needs to be documented within 30 days after placement by an IEP team, which should includes teachers both in regular and special education, administrators, parents, and professionals in related services (i.e., OT, PT, & ST). Also, the IEP has to be reviewed at least once in a semester. At present, non-categorical resource room programs for the disabled including students with mental retardation at the elementary, junior high and senior high level by providing direct teaching to the disabled students or indirect services with consultation to the general teachers or providing aids to various disabled students is the main education program for the mildly disabled in Taiwan. For example, many elementary and junior high schools in Taipei area let children with mental retardation educate in the regular classroom as much as possible. As a result, the Special classes for placing students with mental retardation have reduced and the resource room programs have increased. At present, each public school at elementary, junior or senior high levels has a resource room and special education section with full time staffs in charge of the special education and related services for students with special needs, including mental retardation, in its own school.

In these age range students, general curriculum will be the first priority while doing curriculum decisions for students with mental retardation. It can be taught with or without adaptation based on an individual's strengths and weaknesses. Only after this consideration, the functional curriculum such as life skill curriculum could be implemented.

Besides, the Ministry of Education has implemented a policy by extending the nine-year compulsory education to twelve years for students with disabilities (including mental retardation) for preparation to implement the twelve-year compulsory education policy in the near future. So the students with mental retardation can choose to enter the special classes affiliated with regular schools or the special schools for students with mental retardation at the senior high level. In this program, curriculum for them focused on the functional knowledge such as really life language and real life math, and the life skills including occupation, leisure, social, community, self-care, and transition skills.

III. Adult Education

ROC government also mandated an act for rendering free and appropriate education to the disabled adult who has not received or completed the nine years compulsory education before in the regular adult remedial education system by providing needed supports. So, the disabled adults can finish the nine-year compulsory education in the remedial schools. These adult school programs are using functional or life-skill curriculum as their major concerns for adults with mental retardation.

III. Current Curriculum Development

In the recent ten years, three curriculum guidelines only for students with mental retardation have been edited and published by the Ministry of Education consecutively. In addition, a handbook to adapt and implement our new general curriculum (Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines) for students with special needs is published recently based on the inclusion needs.

1. Curriculum Guidelines for Elementary and Junior high students in Special Classes and Special School (Ministry of Education, 1999)

Although the new law and its regulations does not categorize the students with mental retardation in mild, moderate, severe, or profound level as that of the old

one did. The placement, however, is different according to the deficiency degree of the student's intellectual or cognitive ability. This curriculum focuses on students with moderate, severe and profound mental retardation in special classes and special schools at elementary and junior high levels. It is a domain-based curriculum, which includes functional reading and language arts, functional mathematics, leisure education, society adaptation, self-care skills, and vocational education as its major core. The goal of the curriculum is to cultivate independent living skills for students with mental retardation to be good citizens in the society.

2. Curriculum Guidelines for Senior High Students with Moderate and Severe Retardation in Special School (Ministry of Education, 1999)

This curriculum is focused on the students with more severe cognitive dysfunction. As one of the editors, I clearly know that this curriculum hope to do the curriculum integration as much as possible to avoid the subject-centered or pieced knowledge and skills that is not so useful for the students or persons with mental retardation while transits into the society. It is the reason why the curriculum only covers personal daily living, community living, and vocational training domains instead of six domains as the above curriculum.

3. Curriculum Guidelines for Senior High Students with Mild Retardation in Special Classes affiliated with the Regular Schools (Ministry of Education, 2000)

This curriculum mainly designed for the students with mild cognitive dysfunction. The major construct is followed the general curriculum for the senior high vocational school students. Credit system is implemented instead of the learning hours/per week. Vocational or job training is the major concern of the curriculum. Other core domains include functional reading and language arts, functional mathematics, leisure education, society adaptation, and self-care skills in transition with the above elementary and junior high curriculum guidelines.

4. Handbook on implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum For Students with Special Needs (Ministry of Education, 2004)

The above three guidelines basically are life skills or functional curricula. However, Regular education reform, which caused the curriculum reform by publishing the Nine-year Curriculum Guideline, also arose the issue for inclusion. The Nine-year Curriculum Guideline, which focuses on “taking good care of every student” and “to cultivate the competence that students can take to go”, made the general education curriculum adaptation more easier for the students with mental retardation.

This handbook was published by the urgent requests of teachers teaching regular classes and those teaching special classes as well. As the main editor, I thank the Ministry of Education and the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Committee for their supports on making this dream possible. It was divided into three parts. The first chapter introduces the whole concepts and implementations of the handbook. The second chapter focuses on the checklists of the competence indicators and guidelines of implementing the Grade1-9 Curriculum for students with special needs. The contents included the Mandarin, English, Health and Physical Education, Mathematics, Social Studies, Arts and Humanities, Science and Technology, and Integrative Activities. There are eight learning areas in total. The final part, Curriculum of Information Technology Education and Special Education, was added to cope with the various needs of students with special needs. The Information Technology Education was the original part of Grade 1-9 Curriculum but needed to use the alternative learning periods by the request of Ministry of Education. So we put it in this part with including the technical and assistant devices information and guidelines for using with special students. In addition, we added Communications, Social Skills, Learning Strategies, Vocational Education, Braille, and Motion and Orientation Trainings.

These added curricula were written according to the structure of Grade 1-9 Curriculum with competence indicators in each of the learning stages.

At present, Taipei city and county have already printed and given this handbook to the special education teachers. Also, I have been invited to various cities and counties to disseminate and introduce this handbook. I anticipate that this handbook can be the linking bridge of the regular and special education. Also, I hope this handbook can assist both regular and special educators working hand in hand to achieve the inclusive education goals.

IV. Current Development of Instructional Designs

V. Future Trends

Although the inclusion train is on the way in Taiwan now, there are ample of difficulties and problems need to be solved in the development of curriculum and instructions in the future. Main suggestions are:

1. To make the IEP realistic and practical

Right now, still many IEPs look like Individualized Instructional Plans (IIPs) but not the management tool for both administration and instruction. Hopefully, it will become an in-advance plan for the educational program according to each individual's needs. Also, put IEP as the first consideration instead of the Curriculum Guidelines. That means one student with mental retardation can use various curricula for designing IEP. He/she may need to receive the general education curriculum without any adaptation in physical education, receive the general education curriculum with adaptation in social studies, receive the life skills or functional curriculum in math and transition, and receive the curriculum in modified means or communication and performance in all of the above areas as suggested by Bigge and Stump (1999).

2. To design the universally designed curriculum as soon as possible

Although the general curriculum is still largely designed to serve a core group of students exclusive of students with mental retardation, we need to consider the general education curriculum as the first priority while doing the curriculum decision for students with mental retardation. The educators of USA began to apply the concept of universal design to curriculum materials and methods and coined the term “ Universal Design for Learning”(UDL). This UDL framework helps us to see that the inflexible curricular materials and methods are barriers to diverse learners just as the none-barrier free environment or architectures. So the universally designed curriculum emerged by providing a range of options for accessing, using, and engaging with learning materials. Creating alternative versions, employing assistive technologies, and rendering curriculum adaptation in advance are the crucial elements while doing universal design. So if the general curriculum can be universally designed, students with mental retardation can be included in the general education.

3. To implement effective teaching strategies such as co-teaching, cooperative Learning, and Direct Instruction

To make inclusion possible for not neglecting the regular students' educational rights and qualities, co-teaching by cooperate the regular and special teachers in one classroom with multilevel instructions are needed. Cooperative learning is also the major strategy both good for the academic gains and the interpersonal skills. In addition, Direction Instruction (Engelmann and Becker, 1968), which believes all children can learn, teacher should take the full teaching responsibilities, and never underestimate the child's capacities, is an effective teaching strategy as the presenter has been researched on disabled students before.

4. To teach survival and study Skills

Although direct remedial teaching in academics by the special education teachers are still needed in the future, some survival and study skills should be taught before including the disabled students into the regular class or ongoing taught while they are in the regular settings. For instances, teaching note-taking and test –taking skills, training them to be good listeners, teaching them how to behave, social skills, and teacher-pleasing behaviors are all very important for success in the regular classrooms.

5. To improve the assistive technology devices

Inclusion happens only the living and learning environments are universal designed and barrier-free. The advanced technological devices such as computer, eating and drinking system, electric mobile instruments, augmentative communication devices, and special switches, could fulfill our hope. The ROC government now sponsored a lot of research on developing the assistive technology. Hopefully, it will be very fruitful in the near future.

6. To implement ecological and dynamic assessment

For persons with mental retardation, we need to change the environment but not only the person himself/ herself to make the desired behaviors emerged. The ecological and dynamic assessment could let us know what kinds of changes we need to do to make them at least partially participated into our societies.

7. To train both the regular and special educators

The teacher training is the key issue while doing the inclusion. We need to provide both pre- and on-service ongoing training. Let the regular teachers know about the special education and vice versa.

8. To emphasize on the gifted-disabled individuals' educational needs

For these twice-exceptional individuals, we need give them both the special and gifted education to fit their both characteristics. They are many students with

mental retardation can not read and calculate, but can draw, sing, dance, and remember well. We shouldn't neglect these savants' talents but only concentrate on their academic weakness.

VI. Conclusion

We have seen the beauty and benefits of inclusion, but now we need to implement it into the reality. We all know this is the hardest part especially for a country that has been gone through segregation, and integration periods like Taiwan. Resistance to change has been aroused by the teachers of the general education and special education, the administrators, and even some parents as we anticipated. So there is still a long way to go, the consultation given by the special education staff to the general education staff, related services provided through IEP, and co-teaching in the regular classrooms through planning and teaching together of the special and general education teachers can be the accessible and effective strategies for making this goal possible. The long-term goal for the curriculum development is publishing the universally designed curriculum to make the le