DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 279 EC 202 062

AUTHOR Sobsey, Dick
TITLE Using Transitions in Program Planning: A Practical Approach.
PUB DATE Sep 87
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the American Association on Mental Deficiency Region IV Conference (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, September 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adaptive Behavior (of Disabled); *Adjustment (to Environment); *Curriculum; Developmental Stages; *Disabilities; *Ecology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Individual Development; Individualized Education Programs; Mainstreaming; Models; Normalization (Handicapped); Program Development; Special Education; Student Educational Objectives; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Ecological Assessment; *Ecological Paradigm; *Transitional Activities

ABSTRACT

Several models have been developed to aid in selecting appropriate educational content for special needs students. These include the developmental model, behavioral model, categorical model, and environmental or ecological model. The ecological model involves determining the skills that a fully functioning member of society normally performs in the environments that the learner inhabits, analyzing the discrepancies between those skills and the learner's current performance, and making those discrepancies the learner's curricular objectives. The ecological inventory of skills involves five levels: domains, environments, subenvironments, activities, and critical functions. The central focus of an environmental approach to curriculum is the individual's adaptation to transitions, or changes in environmental requirements that an individual experiences. Transitions may be predictable age-appropriate transitions, normalizing transitions, or backward transitions. Steps are outlined for using transitions in program planning, focusing on: 3-year plans; types of potential transitions; use of a least restrictive environment; and teaching of critical skills as well as additional skills that may enhance adjustment, such as social skills. Instructional methods emphasize social integration and behavioral teaching strategies. (JLD)

USING TRANSITIONS IN PROGRAM PLANNING:

A PRACTICAL APPROACH

DICK SOBSEY

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Paper presented at the American Association on Mental Deficiency Region IV Conference, September, 1987, Edmonton, AB, Canada.
For additional information contact Dick Sobsey / 6-102 Education North / University of Alberta / Edmonton, AB T6G 2G5

Using Transitions in Program Planning: A Practical Approach

Individualization of curriculum results in the need to answer fundamental questions about curriculum content. This paper presents a theoretical framework and practical suggestions for determining what to teach students with severe and multiple handicaps. A focus on life transitions, changes in environmental requirements is discussed as a critical requirement for determining appropriate instructional content.

Curriculum Models

Curriculum refers to the content of education. Simply stated it describes what will be taught in an instructional program. As such, it is a fundamental question for any teacher and student. In general, education has responded to this question by identifying curricula for large groups of students (e. g., the high-school geometry curriculum, the third grade reading curriculum). The methods of teaching these may differ, but the content remains the same for all students in the designated group. Some students, however, have special needs that require individualization of the curriculum. The set of objectives that make up a student's Individual Education Program may be thought of as a private curriculum guiding that student's instruction.

Educators require guidelines for determination of appropriate content. Several models have been used to help select this content. A ***developmental model*** determines curriculum content according to the most common sequence of development (Brinker, 1985). A major assumption is that although the rate of learning may differ, the sequence remains the same for all people. By studying normal human growth and development we select curriculum content. The model has some major disadvantages. First, if we assume that the rate of learning is slowed for handicapped learners, but the sequence remains the same, the gap between the normal and handicapped learner grows larger over time This learner must learn all of the same content at a slower rate and therefore falls further and further behind. Second, the content of the training program may be inappropriate for the age of the learner. For example, teaching a young adult to crawl, merely because this skill has not previously been mastered, may provide no functional advantage, contributes to the deviant appearance of the individual's behavior, and use valuable instructional time that might be spent on another more age-appropriate objective. As a result of these factors, the developmental model becomes less acceptable with increasing age and with increasing severity of disability.

The ***behavioral model*** has been discussed as an alternative to the developmental model. It does not require that objectives follow a developmental model. Behaviorism, however, is a method of instruction, not really a curriculum model. It can be used to teach any curriculum content and therefore provides little direction in selecting appropriate instructional content.

A ***categorical model*** attempts to determine curriculum content based on the nature of the learner's disability. Thus all blind students are taught the same objective, all deaf students are taught the same objective, and all severely handicapped students are taught the same objectives. Undeniably, there is some logic to this process. Many deaf students will benefit from learning a manual language, many blind students will benefit from learning braille, and many students with severe handicaps will benefit from learning to dress themselves independently. Still, this approach fails to adequately individualize to meet the needs of specific students and their environments. For example, some deaf students also need to learn braille.

An ***environmental model*** sometimes called an ***ecological model*** bases curriculum content on the individual and the requirements of the individual's

environments (Brinker, 1985). Since the primary focus is on the requirements that the environment places on those that inhabit it, it is referred to as a "top down" approach (Sobsey & McDonald, 1988), one that It is consistent with the principle of normalization and the practice of maximizing integration. Ecological inventory is a form of assessment used determine the skills or critical functions that a fully-functioning member of society normally performs in the environments that the learner inhabits. A discrepancy analysis is used to determine the differences between the the learner's current levels of performance and those identified as important in the ecological inventory. These become the objectives for the learner's Individual Educational Program, a private curriculum, relevant to the learner's own needs.

Ecological Inventory

The ecological inventory involves five levels (Orelove & Sobsey, 1987). One, the environments are grouped into major functional areas. Two, these areas are broken into specific environments in each domain. These should include all current environments plus those which the person is expected to enter in the future. Three, environments are broken into more specific subenvironments. Four. activities that normally take place are identified for each subenvironment. Five, skills or critical functions are identified for each activity. This may be best illustrated in the partial examples in Table 1.

DOMAINS:
- DOMESTIC
- VOCATIONAL/EDUCATIONAL
- LEISURE/RECREATIONAL
- COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS:
- SHOPPING MALL
- BUS STATION
- McDONALDS
- STREETS
- SIDEWALKS
- GROCERY STORE
- ***AND SO ON...***

GROCERY SUBENVIRONMENTS:
- ENTRANCEWAY
- DRY GOODS SECTION
- DAIRY CASE
- MEAT DEPARTMENT
- FROZEN FOODS
- BAKERY
- CHECK OUT
- ***AND SO ON....***

CHECK OUT ACTIVITIES:
- WAIT IN LINE
- BUY PERIODICAL
- SOCIALIZE WITH CLERK
- PAY FOR GROCERIES
- ***AND SO ON...***

PAY FOR GROCERIES FUNCTIONS:
- LISTEN TO PRICE
- GET OUT CHECK BOOK
- OPEN TO NEXT CHEQUE
- WRITE IN AMOUNT
- ***AND SO ON....***

Table 1. Partial examples from an ecological inventory.

Many similar partial examples of ecological inventories can be found in the literature, but complete examples are more difficult to find (e.g., Falvey, 1986; Orelove & Sobsey, 1987; Sobsey 1987). This may be a related to the demanding requirements of completing one. In reviewing over sixty partial ecological inventories, the author found some characteristics data that may be useful in estimating how extensive a complete one would be. Table 2 lists mean numbers of entries in various categories of entries in the

partial examples found.

ECOLOGICAL INVENTORY COMPONENT	MEAN ENTRIES
DOMAINS	4.0
CURRENT & FUTURE	2.0
ENVIRONMENTS	15.4
SUBENVIRONMENTS	11.7
ACTIVITIES	7.8
FUNCTIONS	12.9

Table 2. Mean number of entries in component categories for ecological inventories.

Based on these figures the average complete ecological inventory would have four domains, eight current and future domains, 123 environments, 1,441 subenvironments, 11,243 activities, and 145,038 critical functions. The average instructor preparing complete ecological inventories for 6 students would write 4,549,632 words equivalent to about 75 novels of 60,000 words each and require 1,516 hours to type at 50 words per minute.

Even if it were possible to generate such a huge list of objectives, attempting to teach them all would be a much larger task. Some strategy would be required for narrowing down the curriculum content to the most essential objectives.

With these figures in mind, it is no longer surprising that it is difficult to find more complete examples, and the practical utility of the entire process may be legitimately questioned. Still it would be extremely unfortunate if this promising method for determination of curriculum were abandoned.

One promising solution lies in the limiting the ecological inventory to a smaller number of environments, subenvironments and activities. Transitions may be used as a key to determine which environments to study. By determining a primary focus for instruction, they can shape the entire curriculum process.

TRANSITIONS

In the last ten years, life transitions have become a focus in society and more specifically in special education. ***Transitions*** refer to changes in environmental requirements that an individual experiences. The individual may be exposed to a new environment or the requirements of an existing environment may be altered. In either case the individual must adapt.

Everyone in society experiences transitions and must adapt to them. People with severe disabilities often experience greater difficulty and require more time adapting, but the process is generally the same for all members of society. In an environmental approach to curriculum, this adaptation is the central focus of the educational process.

Predictable, age-appropriate transitions are part of everyone's life. Many children move from home to day care, day care to elementary school, and elementary school to middle school. Youth and young adults move from middle school to high school, and high school to work or university. They also move from supervised living with their natural families to an unsupervised apartment or house. Still later in life, they may make the transition from work to retirement.

Normalizing transitions are moves to less restrictive environments. These may include a move from a foster home to the natural family, a group home to foster home, or institution to group home. Similarly, the move may be to less restrictive educational, vocational or recreational environments.

Backward transitions are moves to *more* restrictive environments Although undesirable, they are facts of life for many

individuals with disabilities when they can no longer be maintained in their less restrictive environments. For example, if an individual can no longer be maintained in his or her natural family, a transition to foster care, a group home or even an institutional setting may follow. Curriculum content should be aimed toward prevention of backward transitions and facilitation of predictable, age- appropriate, and normalizing transitions. Therefore, the recognition of approaching transitions is vital to the determination of focus for the curriculum.

PROGRAM PLANNING

A number of steps are useful in program planning. [1] Use a period of about the next three years for considering transitions. [2] Check for potential backward transitions. [3] If the potential for a backward transition exists, determine the skills or functions that would be most useful in preventing it using ecological inventory and discrepancy analysis, if required. In some cases the required skills or functions may be clearly identified by the decision makers and caregivers in the current environment. These skills and functions become the primary focus of the curriculum.

For example, if parents report that they don't know if they can keep there child at home for another three years and institutionalization may be necessary, determine what skills would decrease the probability of institutionalization. If it is determined that toilet-training would decrease the probability of institutionalization, it becomes an important component of the curriculum.

[4] If no potential backward transition can be identified or if additional space remains in the student's curriculum, the same three year period is assessed for predictable age-appropriate transitions. [5] If such a transition is forthcoming, environmental alternatives are identified , and the most normal, optimistic, but possible alternative environment is selected. [6] Ecological inventory of this environment and discrepancy analysis follow to determine the skills or functions that are most essential to facilitating the transition to this environment.

For example, if a child will reach high school-age in the next three years. An ecological inventory and discrepancy analysis may be used to determine what the student must learn to adapt successfully to the high-school environment. If no, age-appropriate, predictable transitions seem likely in the next three years, or if there is more space in the student's program, the potential for movement to less restrictive environments should be considered.

[7] The student's current environments should be examined to determine if they represent the least restrictive alternatives. [8] If not, transition must be considered to a less restrictive alternative. Although there has usually been an assumption that the progression should be step-by-step, there is little data that suggests that intermediate, "semi-integrated" environments are necessary or even very helpful in facilitating ultimate adaptation to more normal alternatives. Therefore, the most normal alternative should be considered before a smaller step. [9] In either case, the transition will require planning. Ecological inventory and discrepancy analysis should be applied to determine the most useful objectives to facilitate the the transition to the new environment.

The question arises regarding what to teach students who are not facing likely backward transitions or predictable age-appropriate transitions, and are already fully integrated into normal, least restrictive environments. This question will generally be theoretical, because most individuals will face transitions related to at least one of these three areas in the next three years. If not, however, two planning strategies should be considered. First, the three year period may be extended slightly in some cases. If a major transition seems very likely in four or even

five years, and no more immediate transition has been identified, the planning period may be extended to the next transition. Alternatively, attention should focus on enhancing adjustment in one or more current environment. The initial focus on preventing backward transitions stresses those *critical skills and functions* required for minimal acceptable behavior in the current environments. Where these minimal levels are met or surpassed, additional skills may still enhance adjustment.

For example, a child may be accepted in his or her natural family who sits quietly and does very little. Although this behavior is tolerated, more active participation may enhance adjustment and improve the quality of life for the child and family. Smiling and carrying on a simple conversation may not be a minimum requirement for maintaining this child in the home, but it might make life a little more enjoyable for the entire family.

Even when determining functions for facilitating transitions or preventing backward transitions, it may difficult to decide which are most critical for adaptation. Special education has generally defined on motoric, self-care skills as functional, but failed to recognize the importance of social skills. Being able to smile and play may contribute much more to a child's adaptation to the home than being able to put on a shirt independently.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

The environmental approach to curriculum also has implications for instructional methods.Social integration should be the major goal of education for students with disabilities. It is the major goal of public education for all students. If we are going to teach them to participate in society, we must use methods consistent with this goal. Taking students out of natural environments is not a sensible way of preparing them to function in those environments. Immersion in fully integrated school and community settings can be an extremely powerful instructional strategy, even without supplementary support or intervention. Integration is a necessary component of meaningful instructional design in an ecological model. Integration alone is not sufficient, however, to ensure appropriate instruction or adequate learning. Strategies must be developed for applying the power of traditional behavioral, repeated practice programs along with immersion in appropriate environments.

Gradually methods for combining the best aspects of these strategies are emerging. Environmental immersion is being combined with incidental teaching, delay procedures, graduated guidance, small group instruction, positive approaches to behavior management, interrupted sequence procedures, graduated guidance, and a wide variety of additional procedures.

Such combinations show great promise for future instruction within an environmental framework. Instruction aimed at facilitating transitions may use such combinations, providing at least partial participation in the future environment whenever possible.

SUMMARY

This paper has presented information on the environmental curriculum model. This model has many strong points in determining curriculum content, but becomes impractical to carry out comprehensively. Transitions may be used to focus environmental assessment and curriculum development on a few critical environments and skills. Backward transitions, predictable, age-appropriate transitions, and normalizing transitions must all be considered in planning relevant instructional programs.

REFERENCES

Brinker, R. P. (1985). Curricula without recipes: A challenge to teachers and a promise to severely mentally retarded students. In D. Bricker & J. Filler (Eds.), ***Severe mental retardation: From theory to practice.*** (pp. 208-229). Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Falvey, M. A. (1986) ***Community-based curriculum: Instructional strategies for students with severe handicaps.*** Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Orelove, F. P. , & Sobsey, D. (1987). ***Educating children with multiple disabilities: A transdisciplinary approach.*** Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Sobsey, D. (Ed.). (1987). ***Ecological inventory exemplars.*** Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Sobsey, D., & McDonald, L. (1988) Special education comes of age. In B. Ludlow, A. Turnbull, & R. Luckasson, (Eds.)., ***Transitions to adult life for persons with mental retardation.*** Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.