DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 992 EC 302 463

AUTHOR Reganick, Karol A.
TITLE A Functional Curriculum Designed To Serve Students with Severe Behavior Problems.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 24p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agricultural Education; Basic Skills; Behavior Change; *Behavior Disorders; Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; Employment Potential; *Hospitalized Children; Job Training; *Prevocational Education; School Business Relationship; Secondary School Students; *Severe Disabilities; Therapy; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a functional educational curriculum for students with severe behavior disorders within a hospital setting. The program stressed the meeting of individual needs while using an established, accredited curriculum. Curriculum development considerations discussed include the curriculum's philosophical base, developmental procedures, curriculum design, and preliminary evaluation. The program developed has three objectives: (1) reduction of problem behaviors, (2) development of employability skills, and (3) development of positive lifestyle changes. These objectives are developed through three phases: agriculture therapy (which provides multi-modal education and an introduction to vocational therapy); business partnerships in which students sample various types of jobs; and on-the-job training. Integration with academic instruction is also stressed during all three phases. (Contains 12 references.) (DB)

A Functional Curriculum Designed To Serve Students With Severe Behavior Problems

Karol A. Reganick

Nova University

Running head: FUNCTIONAL CURRICULUM

A Functional Curriculum Designed To Serve Students With Severe Behavior Problems

Curriculum work occurs at many levels, covers a broad spectrum of activity, and the results yield a variety of instructional programs. Curriculum developers consider the importance of philosophical and psychological perspectives, deal with legal requirements, consider ethical constraints, and respond to the environment where programs will be implemented (Armstrong, 1989). A philosophy of education should be easy to interpret, yet profound enough to carry a lasting message to those it serves. Somewhere between the Traditional and Contemporary philosophies of education, lies an educational philosophy that will serve students in a hospital setting by preparing them to be visible, productive members of our community. Education must move toward and eventually adopt the idea of a client-centered education where the students and their parents are consumers of the education process. Students in an adolescent speciality hospital are presumably there to try and resolve their unique psychological problems, without sacrificing their education.

The the aim of the educational component within the hospital program for which this curriculum is being written, is to promote wellness while actively practicing the school's educational philosophy, which is to provide a quality education for all the students by focusing on individual needs while using an established, accredited curriculum. Armstrong (1989), asserts that a curriculum needs to be thought of in terms of its applicability to many educational settings.

Philosophical Base

Additional philosophical ideals of the program are: (a) the education staff believes that all children can learn and should be encouraged to realize their full potential; (b) by using a multi-modal approach to education, student curiosity and creativity will be fostered through problem-solving and critical thinking skills development; and (c) the hospital staff will promote self-respect, respect for others, and respect for the environment; in addition to advocating responsibility, cooperation, and a feeling of general well-being. People who teach or train others, who engage in program development, instruction, supervision, and/or evaluation in schools, businesses,

hospitals and health agencies are practicing curriculum (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993).

Clients in hospital settings possess intellectual abilities ranging from gifted to trainable retarded. Students who are being educated in a hospital setting should have an opportunity to learn what they need to know if they wish to enter a school of higher education, vocational training, technical training, or enter the world of work via on-the-job training programs. Creativity, musical ability, academic achievement, manual dexterity, physical achievement, honesty, and integrity will be rewarded. The school day may be extended for those who wish to participate in extra-curricular activities. This institution offers something for each of its clients, and is conscious of the fact that all students should maximize their potential.

The client-centered curriculum serving all children in a hospital setting, may be referred to as macrocurriculum with its broad scope and sequence; however, the majority of the students in this hospital environment would benefit from a more concise, microcurriculum with instructional unit plans geared to being functional. For students with severe problem

behaviors, the way "functional" is defined may need expansion. Brown, Neitupski, & Hamre-Neitupski (1976) have determined that an activity is "functional" if a nondisabled person would need to perform the activity if the student with a behavior disability did not.

Developmental Procedures

Ideally, this instructional program should be designed and written cooperatively by classroom teachers, administrators, and leaders in the work place, with society supporting this curriculum. Tyler (1969) identified the three primary sources of curriculum as: knowledge, learners, and society. The educators designated to implement various segments of the curriculum would possess ethical and moral values that exceed societal standards. The educators would facilitate intellectual, physical, emotional, and moral growth in students while promoting perseverance and self-discipline.

Curriculum Design

The approach to a functional curriculum would lean toward the nonscientific; which represents the experimental philosophies of education (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). The curriculum designed for high school students will include a plan with structured

activities which will be managed and evaluated by the educators, who are also committed to the student's natural development, and will work toward building a positive school-community relationship. Armstrong (1989) suggests that curriculum workers address the implications of philosophical guidelines and decide what priorities should be reflected in programs. If curriculum is to be relevant, it must take into account concerns for the individual's future (Zais, 1976). The best interests of curriculum builders lie in providing students with intrinsically rewarding experiences that are fixed on the future, and contribute to their development (McNeil, 1990). Child-centered designs should be based om student's lives, their needs, and interests (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993).

Approximately seventy-five percent of the students receiving an education in the hospital environment have been diagnosed over a long period of time, by various psychological instruments, which have produced similar results. The results indicate that these students are functioning within the low range of normal, and are exhibiting severe behavior problems They would benefit from an educational curriculum which is rooted in functionalism. While some students reside at the

hospital, others arrive at school daily from the group home, or a private residence. The primary responsibility of the therapist, parent, researcher, teacher, and significant others who work with these students, is to improve the quality of their lives as much as possible. The educational goal for these students is to teach them a functional curriculum which can be generated over multiple environments. This would involve pulling together the elements of developmental assessment, functional assessment, behavior modification plan, consumer advocacy groups, parents, siblings, the school system, and the community. This type of collaboration is needed if a functional curriculum is to be effective for the student with severe behavior problems.

Curriculum developed to function behaviorally and socially is based on social and behavioral logic which will be reinforcing for the learner. According to Horner, Sprague, Flannery (in press) education has gone from isolated sequences of skills, to clusters of skills, that result in functional outcomes. This shift in education will have major implications for all students with disabilities, but especially for those who display severe problem behaviors. Teachers now

face the task of ensuring that the content and context of instruction are behaviorally functional for the learner (Horner et al., in press).

Preliminary Evaluation Considerations

Horner, Dunlap, & Koegel (1988), claim that the effectiveness of behavioral interventions must be evaluated in terms of the extent to which such interventions solve significant problems and/or produce meaningful enhancements of a person's lifestyle. This may be interpreted as response generalization, and is generally viewed as a necessary ingredient in education because it is impossible to teach directly all of the individual behaviors that must be acquired for a successful life. Thus, the expectation is that instruction in some responses will lead to additional gains that cannot be attributed to direct instruction (Dunlap, in press).

Educators must carefully plan student programming. Teachers of students with severe behavior problems may not assume that because a student masters a skill in the classroom, the student will transfer that skill to the community (Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976). Each time a student is taught a functional skill, it might be required that the skill be performed

in reaction to, or in the presence of, at least three different persons , in at least three different natural settings, in response to at least three different appropriate language ques. Brown et al. (1976) asserts that there can be no substitute for empirical verification of the performance of a skill in the natural environments in which the skill is required.

The content, context, and evaluation of instruction is an important concern for the realization of the objectives which are derived from the main goal. Tyler (1969) combined basic techniques of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation, together with the philosophy of the school in making decisions about curriculum objectives. As a result of active participation in the functional curriculum, the learner will achieve the following objectives: (a) reduce problem behaviors, (b) develop employability skills, and (c) develop positive lifestyle changes. We are moving into an era in which durable, generalized behavior change is the standard for success, and will be viewed as among the most powerful approaches for reducing severe problem behaviors (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968, 1987).

In order for the objectives to be realized, the program would unfold in three phases: the first being agricultural therapy, the second phase being business partnerships, and the third phase being on-the-job-training. Social skills and effective communication skills training would be an integral part of the curriculum during all three phases, in addition to a formative evaluation of each.

By using agriculture therapy in the first phase, students are exposed to a multi-modal education, while being introduced to vocational training. Agricultural therapy would be used in conjunction with the subjects required at each grade level. New content units will be developed by individual teachers according to agriculture conditions and student progression toward accomplishing specified objectives. During this time, students are introduced to the basic concepts of employability skills. Pupils will benefit from agriculture therapy provided the curriculum is modified according to individual differences in cognitive ability and emotional status. Funding for this program may be obtained from the school budget or from a grant. Students will need a variety of garden tools, water accessibility, organic fertilizer, and seeds.

The functional curriculum has three objectives which should be realized via activities in each phase of the program. The child-centered and activity-centered curricularist emphasizes the needs and interests of the child involved in social processes, and it is usually organized around school activities, group enterprises, and group projects (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993). The student activities for agriculture therapy will take place on school grounds. The main activities will develop in a sequential manner, and are as follows: (a) use math concepts to measure the area to be cultivated, (b) clear the area of unwanted vegetation and fertilize according to directions, (c) plant vegetables from seeds, (d) water and use shade cloth as directed, (e) provide general maintenance and cultivation, (e) harvest and sell produce, (f) students will collectively decide how proceeds from vegetable sales will be used, and (g) cooperate with each other and authority figures during each stage of agricultural planning and execution.

Teachers will decide what additional activities are needed to successfully integrate agriculture with other subject matter by: (a) having a group discussion on the dynamics of gardening, (b) assigning students to

create their own garden using various media, (c) discussing plant care, and (d) allowing students to make decisions using the democratic process. Figure 1. is a vision of how a garden project can put children on a path toward any subject.

Ornstein & Hunkins (1993) describes formative evaluation as that which takes place at a number of specified points during the curriculum development process. Anecdotal records, student observations, and progress notes on individual behavior charts, are evaluative instruments that teachers will use continuously when developing each curriculum phase. Because teachers are committed to the outcomes of this program, it is projected that this program will be successful. After the first harvest, an informal evaluation consisting of collective dialogue from teachers and hospital staff would present a clear picture regarding the effectiveness of this project. Those students who have participated in agricultural therapy, may have learned an functional activity which can be generalized over multiple environments during the course of their lives.

The second phase of this program would involve a cooperative effort between local businesses within the

community and students identified as exhibiting severe problem behaviors within the hospital setting. Students and businesses would form a partnership and establish a mutual contract for services rendered, and payment of those services. Once the students toured the business, certain students would be assigned a job and a job coach. A job coach is a representative from the business who comes to the school, and talks to all the students about the various aspects of the job. The job coach would then take the student to his place of business for a day, where the student would shadow the job coach.

These jobs would rotate among students throughout the year, with most of the actual business work being replicated within the classroom. For example, a local lumber yard would need someone to order items that were being sold to customers. A student would simulate the job as purchasing agent in the classroom by writing orders manually, or using a computer program.

Finding businesses who would be willing to form partnerships with schools, for the purpose of educating students is a rare find. If one additional business a year is committed to providing the functional education our students need; teachers, administrators, students,

and parents would be committed to the education system. Activities, resources, materials, evaluation and funding for each business partnership would need to be developed as they are retained.

Computers in the classroom provide additional challenges our children need to be successful adults. The main activities for students who elect to participate in the business partnership phase of the functional curriculum are: (a) make an appointment to meet your job coach, (b) tour the business, (c) shadow your coach for a day, (d) learn the basic principles of various office jobs, (e) use age appropriate computer programs to learn office skills, and (f) communicate with the job coach by phone or mail on a weekly basis.

Teachers will formatively evaluate the program and modify the activities according to the student's academic achievement and severity of problem behaviors at the beginning of implementation. Once students have mastered the basic principles of business through activities, they would creatively find ways to establish their own classroom businesses such as: pet washing, car washing, selling produce, or a pancake breakfast. Students will collectively list, monitor, and evaluate the activities for their own businesses.

They will also decide how the proceeds of their endeavors would be used.

As students advance through the year, business partners would change, and business concepts would become increasingly difficult. Payment for services rendered may emerge in the form of an invitation to the company picnic at a local amusement park. The important concept of phase two is that students would realize they are accepted as business partners within the community. In addition, they would learn the basic concepts, social skills, and employability skills needed to prepare them for the world of work.

Students who are not developmentally appropriate for phase two may continue with agriculture therapy, or basic academic skills in the classroom. Some students may feel comfortable at phase two, but may feel intimidated at phase three. The curriculum is designed to meet individual needs; however, some students may not be able to meet the minimal behavioral, social, and academic challenges provided by the activities.

Students will begin the third phase by spending one day per week working with their respective job coaches at the business site. The remainder of their school week is devoted to job related academics. The

high interest, low level, job related consumable texts, will be purchased with school funds. At the end of nine weeks, students will be spending three days at the business site and two days in school learning job related academics. By the close of the first semester, students will spend the entire school day training with their respective job coaches, and rotating businesses every nine weeks to become acquainted with various trades/jobs.

If a student elected on-the-job-training at the local supermarket in the produce department, and if that particular work slot was available, the student would be assigned a job coach. The employee selected to coach students with a history of behavior problems, would have had special training or previous work experience with this type of child. He/she would coach that student in all aspects of the produce department. Students activities would include: (a) learning to pronounce, spell, read, write, and weigh produce; (b) practicing how to weigh, package, and display produce; (c) developing communication skills with customers, coaches, supervisors, and fellow employees; (d) reading the work schedule, understanding payroll deductions, and punching a time clock, are a few of the main

activities required to prepare the student for work in the produce section of the supermarket.

The formative evaluation for main activities of the various jobs, will involve the educators in an informal discussion of the student's strengths and weaknesses as needed. On a biweekly basis, the job coach, teacher, and student would discuss the following: (a) appropriate work attitudes and habits, (b) self-reliance and initiative, (c) application of safety procedures, (d) utilization of appropriate decision making, (e) specific job related skills, and (f) appropriate hygiene and grooming. The discussion is to determine if the student is progressing.

To discover the impact this project has made on a student's behavior, employability skills, and lifestyle changes, a summative evaluation will occur as the student completes each phase of the curriculum. Teachers, administrators, job coaches, students, and parents would offer input into the summative evaluation. A failure of student progression through the phases would simply mean that he/she is not developmentally ready to move forward. Ornstein & Hunkins (1993) assert that a summative evaluation will enable the involved parties to draw conclusions about

how well the curriculum has worked. A summative evaluation checklist as shown in Table 1, provides teachers and students with a full array of processes from which to gather observable data.

Student performance, as it applies to either the first, second, or third phase will be observed and measured according to the following:

1. Students will demonstrate an increase in the use of newly acquired prosocial skills as they cooperatively complete the agriculture, business partnerships, and on-the-job-training activities.

2. Students will demonstrate increased concept development in academics and employability skills, as they apply to agriculture, business partnerships, and on-the-job-training.

3. Students will demonstrate an increase in developing a positive lifestyle by: attending cultural fieldtrips, experiencing meaningful job opportunities, and working with people who know the meaning of success.

Those students who have participated in each phase of this functional curriculum, will have learned activities which can be generalized over multiple environments during the course of their lives. Brown

et al. (1976) found that a comprehensive exposure to the community environment will enhance the probability that the skills, attitudes, and values so necessary for tolerance, understanding, and absorption to be realized. Teachers need a vision of what is possible and an understanding of the service funding and delivery that can realize that vision. (Bellamy & Horner, 1987).

A functional curriculum may be referred to as the ever changing, expanding, localized, and personalized cluster of factors that each person must possess in order to function productively and independently in integrated community environments. The concern for new treatments and remedies for students with severe behavior problems may not insure they will achieve adult independence. Education, public awareness, and community involvement may be the only ingredient students need to achieve a successful lifestyle.

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Table 1

Summative evaluation checklist for teachers and students.

Teacher checklist for students

Academic
teacher observation
daily class work
completion of assigned work
group work
use of short-term objectives on IEP
communication with parents (how does the parent think the child is progressing academically)
student interest
preskills testing (could be teacher-made)
conversations with students
progress on level system

Social
level system
interacation with others
teacher observation at public facilities
intensity of support services
student-teacher interaction
placement on continuum
amount of mainstreaming
graphing of behavior points weekly and yearly
number of referrals
hygiene and appearance
phone communication with parents

Vocational
communication skills with each other and with adults
employability skills
interest inventory (formal and informal)
observation by the teacher and the job coach
establishing realistic career objectives
on-the-job training (OJT)
employer satisfaction
readiness for employment
life-skills testing (curriculum based)
consumer math skills
personal hygiene
quarterly reports from job

Student checklist for teachers

Academic
B. check their work immediately
D. move to a higher level book
H. rewards students for progress (games)
E. monthly grade report
I. make you practice until mastery
C. teacher tells you you're doing better
A. check own work
G. daily self-report
F. self-report (you can see it in yourself)
K. physical activity every day

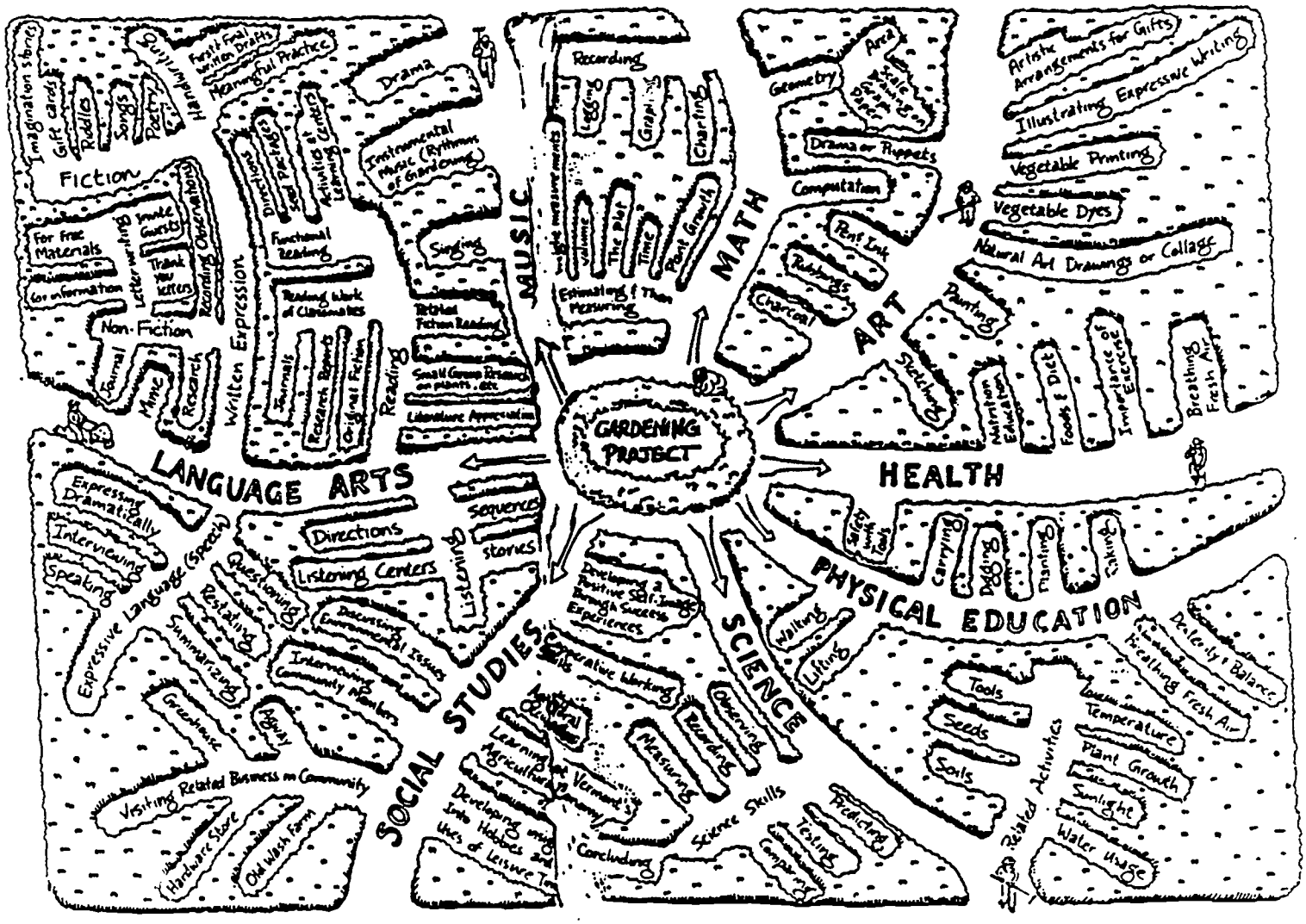
Social
g. talk to other teachers
e. work on behavior
n. private session with guidance counselor
s. change seat
h. buy things with points
o. notes home (daily?)
d. use point system
j. your daily group
c. use level system
i. input about reward

Vocational
a. how to get a check
b. know about taxes
c. work with businesses
d. show them how to use tools and machinery
e. show them how to make and build something
f. prepare for SAT so that you do well
g. help you stay in school
h. how to take care of your house and family
i. prepare you for sports

Source: Piechura, K., & Rennells, M.S. (1993). Outcome measures checklist. Unpublished manuscript, University of South Florida, Tampa.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. This is one teacher's vision of how a garden project can send children on the path toward any subject.



Source: Greenhouse, Vickie. (1990). Developed for students in Lincoln, VT.