

PHILIPPINES

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

by

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Introduction

The term “multiple disability” is used in different ways in different contexts, but is commonly connected with the basic concept of disability. Multiple disability is often referred to as having “two or more disabilities in the same person.” From an educational point of view, multiple disability can be regarded as a closely interwoven network of conditions. It is not simply the sum of various disabilities, but a structure that is complicated by the fact that its elements affect each other in ways that are frequently obscure. Children with multiple disabilities is a rather complicated group as it includes various combinations with respect to the number, kind ! and profoundness of their disabilities. Although, there is always one leading disability in every case. In the Philippines, the general classification of this category of children is usually based on the leading disability.

Educational Supports for Children with Special Needs

The fundamental principle of inclusive schools is that all children should learn together, whenever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. The Department of Education in the Philippines has responded to this by institutionalizing Special Education as early as the 1960’s. The Special Education Division is tasked primarily to formulate policies, plans and programs for the preparation of instructional materials, and the evaluation of programs in special education; conduct researches and develop standards of programs and services for special learners; plan prototype in-service education programs to upgrade the competencies of all support staff directly or indirectly involved with the implementation of the programs; and establish linkages with agencies concerned with the education and welfare of children with special needs.

However, due to the country's economic situation - among others, such programs and services are still limited and are not readily available to children with special needs. Children with disabilities are one major group for whom the right to education, equal opportunities and right to participate in society has yet to be won in the Philippines.

Based on the latest Department of Education 2000 report, out of 80 million Filipinos, 50% are children and youth (0-24 yrs.) The SPED Division of the Department of Education estimates that 12% of the children population in the country have special needs; 2% are gifted while 10% are those with disabilities. On the projected population of 43,303,145 children and youth (0-24 years old) for the year 2000, there were 5,196,377 children with special needs.

However, of the 5,196,377 CSNs only 2.6% or 136,523 were provided with appropriate educational service while 97.4% or 5,059,854 did not receive appropriate educational services for school year 2002-2003. Furthermore, of the 136,523 children with special needs enrolled in schools: 69,888 (51.19%) were mentally gifted/ fast learners and 66,635 (48.81%) had disabilities. (*Note: National statistical data on SY; 2003-2004 has yet to be consolidated.*)

In the Philippines, there are a total of 2105 schools offering SPED programs:

- 4 National Special Schools
- 450 private special schools
- 147 recognized Special Education Centers
- 1504 Regular schools with SPED programs

Special Education in the Government Schools

Originally established to address the educational needs of deaf students, the Philippine School for the Deaf (one of the four National Special Schools in the country) now accepts children who are deaf with multi-disability (such as deaf-blind; deaf –autistic; deaf –mentally retarded, etc.). According to Dr. Yolanda Capulong, Principal of the Special Education unit of the school, there are a total of 760 students enrolled from pre-school to high school levels this school year 2004-2005. Of these, 25-30 children (between 4-12 years old) have been diagnosed to have multiple disabilities.

While the school has established curricula for its regular deaf students, major concerns for the preparation of educational programs and support for the multi-disabled children are (1) the lack of available culture-based assessment tools in evaluating students with multiple disabilities; (2) the fast turn-over of qualified staff, (3) identification of specific direction in programs. Hence, more than the lack of available

technical equipments and funding, Dr. Capulong stresses the need to prioritize these concerns.

On the otherhand, she points out that many Filipino parents of children with special needs, especially those coming from the grassroots level, do not feel the need and importance to send their children to school due to obvious reasons. . . poverty or the fear of the negative stereotypes. This may explain why there is a great number (97.4%) of CSNs who do not receive or seek appropriate educational services. She notes that most of these parents feel that no matter what they do to help their children, they still feel that they would only end up being beggars when they grow up. Obviously, majority of these parents need education themselves, especially those who come from remote places. Thus, Dr. Capulong underscored the need for parents to be oriented to the programs or be given the opportunity to understand how the SPED program can be of benefit to their disabled children. Aside from the academic programs, the children need therapy to relieve fear from negative stereotypes and prevent them from being emotionally and socially displaced.

Foundations and Private Special Schools

Among the private special schools and foundations advocating special education, the Cupertino Center for Special Children is the country's oldest private special school. Through a clinical team approach, special education teachers, occupation and speech therapists, and psychologists help moderately retarded children to cope with life through enriching educational activities. This school year, Cupertino's enrollment of 60 students is predominantly made up of those who are mentally retarded with Down's Syndrome.

Dr. Ma. Therese Macapagal, Executive Director of Cupertino, explains that children with severe or profound multiple-sensorial disabilities can hardly cope with any educational program and are thus usually confined to home care. These children are trained primarily for self-care. Parents are likewise oriented on how to care for these children. Most students on the otherhand, who benefit from therapy, are somehow able to become productive members of the society.

Since Cupertino Center focuses mainly on the education of the disabled and mentally retarded, interaction of these students to their environment is limited among themselves, development of social skills is therefore not readily addressed. Because of this, its graduates had a difficult time finding employment in the real world. Cupertino Center then launched in 1982 its "sheltered workshop" which primarily produces hand-made paper. The Cupertino Paper Center now has a work force of 15, most of whom are graduates of the 39-year old Center.

Special children whose parents belong to the upper and middle-income bracket seek to enroll their children in private special schools such as the Cupertino Center. However, admission to these private special schools is still restricted due to the high tuition fees, limited slots and qualified staff. Thus, accessibility to educational supports and services are still limited even for those who can very well afford it.

Special Education in Regular Private Schools in the Philippines

Despite with the offering of Special Education courses in the different colleges and universities in the Philippines since 1964, it has only been of late that regular private schools have opened their doors to special students. In most cases, however, they are admitted only to their special programs/classes. Mainstreaming, integration or inclusion of special children in the regular programs, much more for those with multiple disabilities, is not usually adapted in these schools.

Hence, Filipino parents have very little choice with regard to the education of their special children. They either send them to public schools that offer special education or enroll them in private special schools. The major factors that influence their decision would often be their financial and educational status, as well as their level of awareness of the programs accessible to their children. Sadly, special children who have the potential to be mainstreamed or integrated in regular schools are usually denied access not only to quality education, but also to develop emotionally and acquire social skills in regular schools.

Mainstreaming Special Students in a Montessori School

The O.B. Montessori Center Inc. (OBMCI), for the past 37 years has been accepting children with special needs be it physiological, psychological or emotional. They are fielded in regular classes to enable them to normalize within the environment. This is made possible because of the Montessori Prepared Environment, which is a non-traditional set-up and allows room for interaction between the trained teacher and the child, its standardized materials and curriculum and the training of its teachers.

Children with special needs are admitted to OBMCI thru its Guidance Support Program (GSP) where the children are classified accordingly.

The school requires parents of special children (with disabilities; specific learning difficulties; etc.) to submit evaluations from their professional consultants (including neurologist psychiatrist; psychologist, SPED teachers; speech/ language therapist) before they are admitted. It is very important that professional diagnostic

assessment be made prior to the acceptance of these students in order to (1) identify the child's sensory potential (determine the level of development of the senses that can be used); (2) identify the individual needs of the child; (3) development of the individual educational program. A thorough assessment of the child's cognitive, sensory, motor skills and emotional profile will help determine the strengths and limitations of the child which in turn influences the design of his/her educational program.

New students may be required to undergo 2-3 weeks trial period to closely observe the behavior of the student in an actual classroom set-up prior to final acceptance. All special students accepted in OBMCI are integrated or mainstreamed to its regular classes. There are no special classes exclusive to special students in the school.

However, it is important to note that while the school accepts students with multiple disabilities, the school may ask a parent to transfer their child if the behavior (aggression, physically hurting others, etc.) of the child affects the over-all well being of the class/ school or if the school ascertains that it will be unable to provide the necessary intervention that the child needs.

Under the GSP, OBMCI provides the following programs to special students:

A. Regular Academic Program

- In this program students are enrolled in the regular academic program despite their disabilities, or learning difficulties. Special students who are placed in the regular academic program are required to meet all the academic and behavioral expectations/ standards of the school like any other regular student.
- However, they are closely monitored and guided with regard to their behavior and how they may respond to everyday situations taking into consideration their learning/ psychological difficulties.
- Special students in this program are considered fully integrated.

B. Modified Program

- When the special students are unable to cope with the regular academic program they are mainstreamed thru a modified program. These students are required to meet the minimum academic expectations/ standards of the school.
- Modifications in the program may include (a) content and scope (quota of work output) (b) implementation – pace of work; giving of quizzes;

seatwork, exams, projects, other written work, etc. (c) special schedules for tests and tutorial sessions.

C. Non-Graded Program:

- Students who have minimal potential to cope with either the regular or modified program are placed in a non-graded program.
- Their program is usually prepared in consultation with psychologists/ educational specialist. Teachers implement the individualized learning program in the classroom in lieu of the regular academic program.
- Usually, the students in this program do not receive a quantitative progress report card. Instead, a descriptive report card is prepared to evaluate and record the progress of the student based from his/ her individual program.
- At times, a “shadow teacher” or SPED teacher may be allowed to stay in the classroom to assist the student.
- The major consideration for children under this program is to provide opportunities for the child to interact and develop socially within a normal environment and identify possible vocational options that would allow the child to eventually become a productive member of the society.

This school year 2004-2005, OBMCI has 73 special students enrolled in the Guidance Support Program from its 4 schools/ branches:

Difficulty	Number of Students Enrolled	Percent
ADHD	32	43.8%
Autism	8	10.9%–
Cerebral Palsy	2	2.7%
Dyslexia	7	9.5%
Hearing Impaired	2	2.7%
Learning Disabilities	11	15.0%
Language Delay	7	9.5%
Asperger’s Syndrome	2	2.7%
Visually Impaired	1	1.3%
PDD	1	1.3%
Total	73	100%

Normalization of Children with Multiple Disability in a Montessori Prepared Environment : (Case Studies)

CASE STUDY #1:

Emmanuel's Case: Hearing Impaired (Moderate to Severe) with Mild Cerebral Palsy, Attention Deficit Disorder and Learning and Speech Disabilities

When Emmanuel was 5 years old he was brought to OBMCI by his parents. They were very anxious that he may not be admitted because he was a child with multiple disabilities. His medical records and evaluations from psychologists and other consultants revealed that he had moderate to severe hearing impairments with mild cerebral palsy and was at risk for attention deficit disorder as well as learning and speech disabilities.

During his first school year, Emmanuel's pre-school teachers observed that he particularly liked the Practical Life exercises like mopping and washing activities. He persisted in doing the cutting exercises (despite his very unstable grip) and can work with most of the Montessori materials with guidance.

The materials also provided exercises in movement, which instilled concentration, order and discipline. They provided training for purposive behavior, which led to his well-disciplined and orderly personal development.

Sensorial Arts materials for the refinement of senses helped him to distinguish dimension, sound, basic shapes, textures, etc.; Language Arts provided exercises in grammar and reading, while oral exercises are activities that helped satisfy Emmanuel's needs for self-expression which facilitated the development of his communication skills. The Math materials and exercises helped Emmanuel develop his "mathematical mind" which led to order, precision, and logical thinking. And the materials in Cultural Arts, which includes History, Geography, Botany and Zoology introduced him not only to his immediate environment but also to the vastness of the world.

Although he often had a blank look during collective activities and he could not readily verbalize his thoughts and needs, Emmanuel was able to gain friends and they readily assisted him whenever he needed help.

By the end of the same school year, Emmanuel was provided with a hearing aid and was attending speech, physical and occupational therapy. These along with regular consultations and case conferences with his therapists and doctors help specialists to align the interventions given to Emmanuel with his lessons in school. By the time Emmanuel entered Grade 1 (at 7 years old), he was able to read simple sentences and was able to articulate his ideas so much so that his teacher would remind him to finish

his work as he loved talking to his seatmates. We also discovered that he has great talent for drawing .

Emanuel is now in 3rd grade. He is fully integrated in his class. His teachers note that he is able to complete his notes, his calligraphy writing is good although pace in work needs improvement. He participates in class discussions and can readily articulate his ideas and feelings. He is able to perform the 4 basic mathematical operations therefore his math skills are fair. Although his attention still needs to be called every now and then in order to stay focused on his work, Emmanuel manifests a happy and well-adjusted personality.

CASE STUDY #2:

Joshua's Case: Visual Impairment with Developmental Delays , Attention Deficits and Mobility

Joshua has visual impairments resulting from congenital corneal anomaly. He can only see a degree of light, shadows and color when the object is placed at a close distance from his right eye. He wears eye glasses only for protection. Evaluation reports from his psychologist then indicated developmental delays, attention deficits and mobility.

He started schooling at OBMCI when he was 5 years old. In December 1997, he started undergoing occupational therapy side by side with his studies at OBMCI. After a year, his therapist observed significant achievement in all areas of intervention: work behavior; fine and gross motor skills; tactile discrimination; visual discrimination (residual vision was facilitated by having him sort objects according to high-contrast colors- he could do this with minimal difficulty); self-care and pre-Braille skills.

The pre-school (Casa) Montessori materials in Practical Life intended for independence in movement (such as the button and ribbon frames, pouring exercises, etc). provided Joshua with training for self-care and care for of the environment. Socially, Joshua is able to deal with most daily situations in his class and in the campus. He has established good relations with his peers.

Joshua is now 11 years old, this school year he is in Grade 5. The Montessori cosmic curriculum and its standardized materials continue to help him cope with the lessons in his level and allow him to be fully integrated in the regular class. The Barn House which is a Language material help Joshua master the different parts of speech. Concrete materials in Math and Geometry reinforce concepts for higher lessons.

The cooperation and support of the team members working with him (occupational therapists, special education teachers, psychologists, teachers the guidance counselor and the parents) have helped him to normalize in school.

The effectiveness of the OBMCI Guidance Support Program, depends on: (1) the correct and proper identification of the child's disabilities- periodic case conferences with consultants allows for regular evaluation on the child's progress and help identify interventions needed to maximize learning potentials; (2) flexibility of the programs – allows room for the child to progress in his own pace and utilize instructional materials suited to address his needs; (3) the standardized Montessori materials and its non-traditional classroom set-up which aid the learning process of the child; ; (4) and the realistic perspectives about the child's future. Through these children with multiple disabilities are able! to achieve results relative to their condition.

With the admission of children with special needs to its regular classes at OBMCI, parents are given new hope.