

CHINA

Improvement of Educational Practice and Environment for Students with Intellectual Disabilities --for active participation in society through employment

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In our society today, the equal and free rights of the crowd with intellectual disabilities are valued highly along with the human rights attached importance to. Under the acceleration of the trend of thought about educate for all, lifelong education, inclusive education, we are pursuing raising the quality of life of the students with intellectual disabilities perseveringly. This report will discuss the question on “*improvement of educational practice and environment for students with intellectual disabilities --for active participation in society through employment*” in China during latest years from the aspects of *background, experience, result and suggestion*.

1. Background

According to the sampling statistic data from the census of Chinese national scope in 1987, 13 hundred million people exist in China now and 51.64 million are with disabilities by reckoning. And there are 10.17 million people with intellectual disabilities, 19.7 percent of the whole disabilities. The data investigated by China Disabled Persons' Federation shows that about 0.40 million children with intellectual disabilities are of school-age currently and more than 0.32 million among them are at school. Some children of school-age above accept the education or trainings in other organizations.

There are unambiguous laws and the systems to guarantee the educational right of the retarded crowd in China. The laws such as “*Constitution*”, “*Compulsory Education Law*”, “*Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities*”, “*Protection Law of Disabled Persons*” have the specialized items to elaborate the educational right of the disabilities. State Council establishes Disabilities' Work Coordination Committee, which consists of 34 departments, commissions or social groups like National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Civil Affairs, China Disabled Persons' Federation and so on. They draw up “five-years development program for the disabilities” every five years, hold the meeting annually, research the deployment of

the disabilities' work. The Ministry of Education also makes up of the leadership group for the disabilities' educational business to moderate the educational work of each section.

In China, except special school, there are other educational placements for students with intellectual disabilities such as the special class attached to the ordinary school, learning in regular class, education in welfare hospital, sending to teach in family. Generally, the severe ones enter the special schools, the mild ones enter the ordinary schools, some orphans study in the welfare hospital, and a few ones that can't take care of themselves completely are sent to teach in family (in some regions). The students with intellectual disabilities who live in the villages or in the remote regions, however, can enroll in the nearest ordinary school regardless of the degree of the intellectual disabilities by considering the condition of running a school or transportation there and child's behaviors and parents' wills.

The educational system for students with intellectual disabilities is divided into 3 stages, namely infant education stage (below 6 years old), compulsory education stage (6 to 16 years old) and vocational education stage (above 16 years old). The education on occupational career development for the retarded students is strengthened in the field of special education based on the knowledge tutoring and rehabilitation training. For this, the course construction has been changed from the subject curriculum (focusing on knowledge and information) to functional curriculum (to adapt to society and form the abilities). Currently, ecotypes curriculum has been advanced. Program on vocational and prevocational education are set up for the students' occupational career development in the national course plan.

Recently, China has improved the educational system of the students with intellectual disabilities by developing compulsory education, expanding to interfere in early days and infant education, developing the vocational education strongly; and they have promoted the way of learning in regular class, universalized the education for the retarded students, guaranteed each student to possess the educational right; provided the tracking service for the students who have already take up an occupation after graduation, strengthened the adaptation ability by giving them the education opportunity continuously.

Based on the background above, we conclude that we face several problems to be solved such as how to establish the target, contents or methods of the occupational career education, how to set up the goal of labor technology and the method of employment to satisfy with each student's demand, and how to create the educational environment which is propitious to learn labor technique, and with high-quality, durative and zero-reject according to the students' various characteristics in physiology, mental development in the different stage.

2. Improving the practice and environment of the occupational career education for students

Presently, special education schools in some big or moderate cities try to change the environment of learning and practice during compulsory education stage or being graduated, and carry on the

occupational career education, seeking the methods and the assuring systems to enhance these students' ability to participate in social activity (the students with intellectual disabilities who study in ordinary schools are included in the liberal education system. the report will not provide unnecessary details)

2.1 The practical experience on the prevocational career education during compulsory education stage.

2.1.1 Object

At present, the students with intellectual disabilities of 6 to 16 years old are considered as the students who will be offered to the compulsory education in the special schools. And they will keep 9 years at school. These schools will mainly accept the moderate or severe children, including Down's syndrome, phenylketonuria, autism, cerebral palsy, X-brittleness syndrome and so on.

2.1.2 Goal

Final goal of the compulsory education is to enhance the skill of the students with intellectual disabilities to accommodate to society and be included by society.

2.1.3 Curriculum framework

(a)The curriculum for mental retardation in compulsory education goes through three stages.

First stage (before the middle of 1990s, more mildly retarded students) - subject course. The special schools mostly adopt the subject course, which emphasizes that the students must possess the practical knowledge and technical abilities through the language, mathematics and so on.

Second stage (the middle of 1990s to early in 21 century, more moderately or severely retarded students) - functional course. The special schools mainly depend on the functional course - it is divided into 6 realms, stressing that developing and culturing the student's ability in 6 realms. All the learning contents and learning methods are served to form ability and become a habit.

Third stage (early in 21 century, more moderately or severely retarded students) - ecotype course. The school emphasizes that the students study in the natural and social condition, and the learning contents come close to the student's "proximate development area" (the ability point of departure). The new course standard is drawing up now, which puts forward the purpose of improving the students' quality of life.

(b)The content of functional course and the vocational career education

The functional course is divided into 6 realms, namely social skill, cognition, communication, laboring, sport, leisure and amusement.

- Social skill (mainly pointing to adapt to the society): Include the contents such as social interaction (skill of family life, human interaction), environmental accommodation (house, school, community) and safety (individual, home, transportation) and so on;

- Cognition: Involve the contents such as thinking training, mastery of the number, and practical knowledge (comprehending the time, paper currency, length, weight, unit, calculator) and so on.

- Communication: Include the contents such as non-language (pre-language, non-language communication), basic sentence (comprehending, expressing, reading, writing), social intercourse and conversation (contact, comity and communication skills) in order to rectify the language barrier and express their personal thought and needs;

- Laboring: Consist of the contents such as the self-service (eating and drinking, going to toilet, dressing), housework (shopping, cooking, cleaning, using home appliances), pre-training (service working, art designing and handicraft, occupational labor, working attitude and habit, the understanding of the job and other) for the purpose of enhancing the student's ability on self-management or self-service;

- Sport: Include the contents such as basic movement and skills for the sake of forming a habit, strengthening the constitution, and improving the ability of body coordination and flexible degrees;

- Leisure and amusement: Include the contents such as music and rhyme, art designing as well as leisured life for the sake of training the students to dominate leisured time, fostering the good personality. These realms are carried on independently, but integrated according to instance and extent of mastery at any time.

According to implement principle of the course plan mentioned above –livingly, actively, and synthetically, these courses are full of the contents of the prevocational education and training on accommodation in society.

2.1.4 Improvement of educational practice and environment

(a) Exploring curriculum pattern based on integrative topic

For helping the retarded students to possess the abilities of 6 realms in the course above, the special schools concentrate on exploring the curriculum pattern based on integrative topic, which involves a kind of living problems that the students likely face to in future. These topics which contain all the correlative knowledge and skills that they would contact with possibly are integrated and shown to the students in the form of activity. For example, the teachers divide all courses to more than ten big topics related with the students' living directly based on 6 realms, such as knowing myself, our school, clothes, food, transportation and safety, lovely animals, festival and so on.

(b) Establishing the learning environment livingly

In order to insure the valid implement of the curriculum based on integrative topic, the teachers attempt to select the learning resources from the life, daily activity, medium (information and technique), book, community and so on and adopt the ways of grouping and layering, teaching with cooperation, individual training to investigate the living learning environment. Concrete methods are as follows:

A. Establishing learning environment livingly means all the environment of the learning and living ultimately served for the retarded students. For example: opening the topic classrooms (designing the learning environment by the learning topic), building the functional classrooms (such

as family room, rehabilitation room, recreation room, individual training room) and establishing the functional or individual learning area in some classrooms.

B. Creating the learning environment to develop the students' emotion, attitude and human interaction, which are beneficial to help the students to communicate or develop their self-confidence.

C. Setting up the learning environment which fits to the society, contacting with the restaurants, supermarkets, cinemas, and service organizations around as well as providing the actual surroundings to train the ability of existence.

(c) Strengthening environment with the support relations

A. Reinforcing guidance and training – Adding the personnel of teaching, education or rehabilitation, who will make the IEP for the retarded students together. The contents of teaching are various because of combining with the learning, training and rehabilitation.

B. Using the cooperative teaching – Increasing one or more teachers in each class, who should complete different task of guidance and training respectively according to the goal of learning.

C. Adopting the method of learning by grouping or layering - Teachers make certain the learning goal or method by grouping or layering according to the students' abilities. In the same of contents, each student will learn those contents they can. The important or deep contents are separated, which is easy to give different students different guide respectively.

2.1.5 Result

- The equal right of education is carried out and the education with high quality is acquired.

For example (photograph):

- The potential abilities of the students with intellectual disabilities have been enhanced;

For example (photograph):

-The degree of social approbation is raised, and the students' self-confidence to exist independently is strengthened;

For example (photograph):

-The burden of the retarded students' parents is lightened;

- The teachers' self-consciousness and creative ability is advanced.

For example (photograph):

2.1.6 Problem

- The related policies everywhere are different, and it is greatly different among the regions. So the compulsory education of the retarded students develops without balance. Some are still in the stage of adopting "the subject course", but some have already followed "the ecotype course";

- Because of the restriction of the budget, research ability of the teacher as well as time, there are not enough support tools to be applied in learning or tutoring which is studied for lightening learning difficulty

2.2 Vocational education practice

2.2.1 Object

At present, the age of the mental retarded students who have finished their compulsory education and enrolled in vocational education is beyond 16 years old, and this school life span is 3 years. Because of the obvious difference in the degree of intellectual disability and the students' development level, school must choose and design different contents and aims on vocational training .

2.2.2 Goal

The general aim of training for the vocational education are to master corresponding professional knowledge, to promote mental retarded students' vocational skills, ability and vocational moral quality.

The concrete training goals are as follows:

- Living in the community independently or half independently;
- Experiencing or mastering one or more vocational skills, being qualified for the vocation in personality and ability;
- Obtaining employment in the form of refugee pattern and supportive pattern based on the vocational education of preparing and supportive pattern, he or she can;
- Owning the ability of lifelong learning, adapting to the continually changing environment, and owning some sense and ability to run an enterprise.

2.2.3 The curriculum setup of vocational education

For the moment, the curriculum of vocational education for the mental retarded is classified into 3 kinds, namely the basic, professional or comprehensive practice curriculum. The basic curriculum contains 6 courses: Chinese language in daily life, mathematics in daily life, social adaptation, music and leisure, sports and health, and computer; The professional curriculum consists of housekeeping, cooking popularized, cooking advanced, handcraft, machine weaving, sewing, mental working and carpentry, comprehensive service; The comprehensive practice curriculum is made up of following courses: community service and social practice (including practical training), class pioneer activities, social activities, activities concerning students interest and hobbies, and activities of mental health.

The curriculum of vocational education is made up of subject curriculum and comprehensive practice curriculum. And 80 percent of whole teaching hours is for course of laboring skills and practice, while 20 percent is for the curriculum of knowledge and rehabilitation, which is just opposite to the stage of compulsory education.

2.2.4 To improve the educational practice environment

(a) Establishing the vocational education pattern of market-oriented

- School for Mental Retarded in Xuanwu District in Beijing makes great efforts to probe a new vocational education pattern, *multi-level, wide foundation, flexible module, multi-ability*, to proceed to obtain employment through vocational education.

“Multi-level” reflects the education thoughts of individualization; “wide foundation” and “flexible module” are mainly reflected in the setting up of the disciplinary and curriculum, and they are the contents of the whole pattern; “multi- ability” refers to students’ abilities. Only achieving the standard of being “wide” and “flexible”, can it be described as an “individualized” vocational education to cultivate students with “multi-ability” and to realize the target of “multi-level”.

- Yuanping Special Educational School in Shenzhen comes up with the idea that “*the integrated pattern of education, rehabilitation, and employment*”. Because the vocational education contacts the market economy closely and immediately, the qualified graduates can obtain more job opportunities. These patterns, as mature experience, are beneficial for the mental retarded school to cultivate qualified graduates systematically.

(b) Making use of proper methods for educational training

The common ways of vocational education are stratified tutorship and individual tutorship.

Stratified tutorship- It emphasizes that the aims of vocational education must account in students’ individual difference, and put prominence on the stratification. Except the basic teaching methods, it begins to pay more attention on teaching practice and social practice. For instance, the vocational education section in Xuanwu School for Mental Retarded advocates explicitly that schools should decide different levels of vocational training aims according to the students’ difference; Self-support School in Dongli District in Tianjin takes diverse training measures for the mild, moderate and severe students when they carry out the cooking, or sewing training. Some schools open their own enterprises, which provide a convenient training place for their students.

Individual tutorship- Teachers must tutor the vocational skills individually for each student. The individual career program is designed firstly, and a pretest on professional ability is given then so as to make a decision about the learning content for the student. The forms and ways of tutorship are various. One is to carry out the program in group or class. That is to say that when one vocational training task is completed in the group, the teacher must teach students one by one according to the students’ different task requirements. For example, when making wooden dolls, each student can master one or two courses, so teachers have to tutor them respectively so that they can complete the task at the same time. Another way is one-to-one teaching. According to the students’ learning need, individual teaching is given. For instance, in the house holding class, the teacher trains the student to tidy up the wardrobe, from classifying the clothes and shoes, folding them, and placing them, until completing the whole contents of the teaching unit.

(c) Implementing the supportive vocational education and providing the tracking service.

According to the present situation, because some mental retarded students can not adapt themselves to the job after graduating from school, they are refused in the intern period. For this, some schools develop supportive education, not only training various vocational skills but also cultivating them to enhance social communicating ability, spirit of group, responsibility and so on. Through the

tracking service for the students who have obtained employment, we can solve the problems they will confront at work in time so as to ensure them to keep their job.

Case: XX is competent for the job by training, but he lacks the ability to take care of himself, like being not capable to go to toilet, and making the toilet dirty and smelly. The other workers don't accept him and the factory prepared to resign him. After knowing the information, the school suggests that the school and the parent cooperate to carry on retraining for the child, making sure the child stay in the factory.

(d) Striving for social support of other sections

Unfolding the occupational education of the retarded crowd need the support of the government. Therefore, the government is strongly requested to promote the working with the administrative power, and cause the schools to cooperate with Disabled Persons' Federation, Personnel Bureau, Labor Bureau as well as the factories and enterprises in order to support the vocational education of the retarded crowd.

2.2.5 Result

- The formed training environment mentioned above lays the foundation for the employment of the retarded student;
- The training pattern mentioned above exploits the foreground of the employment widely;
- The occupational skill and the quality are exalted, the student's attitude on living and quality of life get improved, and the students' feeling in social achievement is built up.

3. Discussion

According to incompleted statistics, although great efforts have been made for the retarded students' occupational education, 81.34 percent of them are still brought up by family, 0.94 percent of them are given amls by the nation and collectivity, and only 17.72 percent live by their own income from personal labor. Except the multi-disabilities, the employment rate of the retarded crowd are the lowest. The prevalence of the retarded crowd is high and they earn little by themselves, which become heavy burden for the nation, society and family, as the problem without neglect. Seeing to the actual experience, there are many problems to be changed in the retarded students' vocational and prevocational education. For example, the conception of the occupational education is more conservative. The career developmental programming for the moderate and severe students is lacking. The pattern of running a school of occupational education is not open or diverse enough. The adaptability of the retarded students in transition from the compulsory education to employment is neglected. The occupational training is not scientific enough, and not aimed at. There are just a few institutions for professional training. And the tracking service does not go on well. To solve these problems, we need not only renew our idea in time, but also fight for the strong support in manpower, material resources, and financial power. It is a continuous but urgent work, which needs the comprehend and support from each social section.