İLETİŞİM SORUNLARI OLAN ÇOCUKLAR İÇİN ÖĞRETİM PROGRAMI PLANLAMA
PLANNING A CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Assis.Prof.Dr.Mesude ATAY
Hacettepe University,
Department of Children Development and
Education

Özet

Eğitimde en temel nokta iletişimi öğrenmektir. Dil, ayrıca öğretilebilen bir konu değildir. Bu görüşten yola çıkarak, iletişim problemi olan bir çocuğun yaşıtları ile kaynaştırıldığı sınıf ortamı içinde bu çocuklara uygun ders programının ne olabileceği tartışılabilir. Bu makalede, iletişim sorunu için destek eğitim (bireysel eğitim) alan bir çocuğun 'normal' sınıflara kaynaştırılması durumunda ders programlarının planlanmasına etki edebilecek faktörler belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Yapılan analiz sonucunda bu çocuklar için eğitim programlarının içeriği ve eğitim teknikleri ile ilgili köklü bir değişiklik yapılamayacağı görülmektedir. Ancak, dikkatli yapılan değerlendirme ve detaylı gözlemler, her bir çocuğun ihtiyaçlarının ve özel problemlerinin belirlenmesini ve eğitim programlarının planlanmasındaki çerçeveyi ortaya çıkarabilecektir.

Abstract

Learning communication is at the heart of education and the language of this communication is not a subject which can be taught separately. On the basis of this view one may ask "what kind of curriculum would be appropriate for children with communication problems in an integration setting?" This article aims to identify some fundamental factors which can affect the curriculum planning for children with communication problems who also attend a language unit. In conclusion, it is shown to be neither possible nor necessary to make a radical change in curriculum content or in teaching styles for those children. However, carefully made assessments and detailed observations will help the illumination of each child's particular problems and provide a framework for curriculum planning.

Introduction

When one talks about "the school curriculum", the first meaning would probably be "the teacher's plan for the advance of the pupil's learning". However, if the curriculum is only considered as what the teacher intends, there may not be too much achievement in learning (Barnes, 1976). The characteristics and differences of individual pupils and their lives outside the school can be taken as salient aspects of curriculum planning, and the objectives, beliefs and values of any particular pupil must be considered to be as crucial as the teacher's own plans in the curriculum. In this respect, the starting point of the curriculum should be the child. The child's place in the curriculum appears as the cardinal concern for the success of the curriculum.

As far as the education of children with special needs is concerned, there seems a need to make such children's place clearer in the curriculum by paying attention to differences (i.e., their weaknesses and strengths) in the process of education. All pupils enter the process of learning with their different characteristics such as abilities, interests, feelings, first hand experiences, environments, resources, expectations, needs and thoughts. In the classroom setting, one of teacher's vital responsibilities is to meet and differentiate between the pupil's needs (Barthorpe and Visser, 1991). In this context, Brennan (1985) defines special education as the "combination of curriculum, teaching, support and learning conditions necessary in order to meet the pupil's special educational need in an appropriate and effective manner".

This combination might be designed in the light of what the child needs and what the curriculum demands from the child. If there is a gap between the former and the latter, then extra support and help for the child might be necessary. If the gap is made clear by a detailed assessment before starting to plan the curriculum, the planned curriculum is most likely to reach the appropriate end in effective teaching. As Brennan (1982) indicates, special needs require a very carefully planned curricula.

According to Webster and McConell (1987), a "well-planned curriculum is the cornerstone of the successful integration programme". Brennan (1985) asserts that the well-planned curriculum may bring the advantages summarized as follows. It;
- assists efficient integration of main and special curricula,

- fosters the flexibility required to meet intrusions required by special needs,
- allows modification to offset absence caused by special needs,
- facilitates observation and recording of pupil progress,
- is a basis for curriculum/teaching modifications to promote progress,
- clarifies the concepts of teachers about the purpose of their teaching,
- allows evaluation by teachers.

If the curriculum is a form of communication, learning this communication is at the heart of education and its language is not a subject which can be taught separately (Barnes, 1976). On the basis of these arguments, the question can be raised as "what kind of curriculum would be appropriate for children with communication problems in an integration setting?" This article will attempt to identify some fundamental factors which can affect curriculum planning for children with communication problems who also attend a language unit.

How Can Language Enter Into the Curriculum?

All communicative interactions include oral or written signs or gestures. Most language disorders can be divided into five categories as follows: phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, pragmatic (Beveridge and Ramsden, 1987).

Language might enter into the curriculum in two ways:
1. as the communication system of classroom and school
2. as a means of learning

The former gives the learner a passive role, whilst the latter takes the learner into account as an active participant. If the child has acess to the curriculum through both these ways, then this could be considered an achievement of the planned-curriculum (Barnes, 1976).

Identifying the Child with Communication Problems

As far as the planning of the curriculum is concerned, the first problem encountered is how to identify the child with communication problems and what kind of characteristics such a child has.

It is possible to see young children sometimes reaching the level of secondary education despite their language problems. However, the demands of secondary education usually increase due to its tasks and curriculum. Therefore some children who have communication problems cannot cope with the curriculum in the complex language environment of the school. On the other hand, it may not be easy to find screening tools which can quickly and easily identify the problems of children with language difficulties in

the secondary school level (Beveridge and Ramsden, 1987). Since teachers are likely to play important roles in the assessment of the child they may need an understanding of the process of language development in order to help (Meers, 1976).

In the assessment of the child, observation can be helpful, but it should be done in different situations in order to have detailed information about the child. For instance, in a special unit there may be more adult-child interaction, while in an ordinary class, the child can show some positive interaction with his peers (Clark, 1983). The assessment shows the strengths and weaknesses of the child with communication problems, and this can shed light on such questions as to what the child's demands from the curriculum are, and how the child can have acess to the curriculum with her/his special needs. The assessment can also clarify what kind of extra help or support is needed for the child.

As mentioned before, the children with communication problems have wide-ranging differences, although they can show some common problems and similar characteristics. The problems of children with communication difficulties are focused on language skills. For, to some extent, learning experience includes language. Language allows one to communicate with other people. It seems to be the most powerful social tool a human being can have. It tells thoughts, feelings and demands (Beveridge and Ramsden, 1987). Its deficiency, even in the form of minor speech problems, can cause anxiety and loss of confidence particularly in school aged children. In general, the problems of children with communication difficulties can be summarized as follows: general immaturity, social unawareness, inattention, poor concentration, slow reactions, faulty associations between concepts and between symbols, poor sequencing skills and limited expression about events (Hutt, 1986). The children with severe language difficulties can also show general clumsiness, poor motor coordination and poor rhythmical sense (Webster and McConell, 1987). Therefore, a programme for physical activities and movement will probably help these children to organise their motor activities. Since they usually have poor memory, some activities, such as music, may help to improve their memory, auditory skills of perception and discrimination. Hutt (1986) points out that children with severe language difficulties usually have less difficulty in the visual modality than in the auditory one. It seems to be clear from this point that the curriculum should be planned in the context of visual modality.

Curriculum and Some Teaching Methods

Barnes (1976) puts forward that the children's participation in lectures can be not only be a matter of their individual characteristics but also a matter of the teacher's good understanding of the children. As

mentioned above, the children with speech and language difficulties have less confidence particularly in oral discussions. Therefore, the teachers may encourage them by using textbook and printed worksheets, blackboard presentations and other presentation materials such as pie charts, graphs and bar diagrams. The demands of each topic are different in terms of information, concepts, materials and skills, however, these children are likely to need more experimental and practical lessons and less of the abstruse range of concepts.

Mathematics and science appear as vital areas of the curriculum for children with communication problems. But the children are not able to learn them very easily. Since these children are rigid and concrete thinkers, they can have difficulty in constructing relationship, generalization and using principles. Besides, slowness in perception and poor auditory memory can affect their learning experience (Hutt, 1986). In the early stages of mathematics, concepts may need to be related to concrete and daily experience (Webster and McConell, 1987). The language of science requires more technical vocabulary. The children may need some skills such as categorising information, setting up hypotheses, etc. They all demand the language of enquiry (Beveridge and Ramsden, 1987; Webster and McConell, 1987). No matter which particular area of the curriculum, the basic issue seems to be that "they need to learn how to learn" (Donald, 1978-from Webster and McConell, 1987).

Beveridge and Ramsden (1987) state that "curriculum planning must include darama, music, art and crafts as essential ingredients of language teaching". Such activities can encourage children to use their communication skills. Drama can help the children to understand what "feeling" is, since their understanding of the literature seems to be limited. With these activities, the children can achieve confidence and relaxation (Hutt, 1986; Webster and McConell, 1987; Beveridge and Ramsden, 1987).

When the children are involved in learning as active discoverers and collaborate with the teacher to understand the meaning of what they learn, then they can show better progress. Meaning-oriented strategies can be useful for the development of literacy skills, particularly for the learning context of these children. It is important to seize all the opportunities presented in the class. When the children are involved in talking, listening, questioning, reading and writing across the subject needs, then the integration programme can reach its aims (Webster and McConell, 1987). In brief, "integration is a process and not a goal" (ibid).

Beveridge and Ramsden (1987) point to three principles which can be integrated for specific techniques of language teaching. These principles define language as: "(a) part of a wider symbolic system, (b) subject to a hierarchy of learning process,

(c) related to traditional modes of expression found in the school curriculum".

The SCORE approach defined by Beveridge and Ramsden (1987) can be taken as relevant to successful teaching and it can help plan a curriculum for children with communication problems. The SCORE model describes five basic principles in language teaching:

1. The Situation in which language is taught. This principle defends a natural teaching situation and natural communication. The natural conversation can be useful for children's everyday activities and lives outside the school. Through natural conversation the less able children become able to get help, while the more able children can be challenged. In nursery settings, some activities, such as free play sessions, seem to be more effective than other activities in promoting conversation at different levels. Clark (1983) also draws attention to similar advantages in the pre-school unit. Group interaction in play can support the language acquisition for both children with and without communication problems.

2. Contrast: Language can be taught as a system of contrast. Using contrast in the language teaching may help see the relationships between different aspects of language, between sounds or utterances. If the information is presented through contrasting, it could give chance to children to see the relationships between new and old information, helping the children also focus on a particular aspect of language.

3. Order: There are two ordering principles.
(a) Functional Approach. This can be appropriate for children with limited ability. These children are not able to learn the language system fully. However, they can learn concepts and structures such as food, dress, toilet, which are linked to their social environment.
(b) The Developmental Approach. This suggests that teaching language can have the same order which is applied to a normal child. It can help compare the children. Thus, the teacher can be familiar with the existing language system of the children with language problems.

4. Regularity: The environment of language includes teachers, parents and may others who are responsible for the children. They should all develop their own ways of approaching the children.

5. Encouragement: It is important to accept and listen to children with communication deficiencies in order to encourage them to achievement.

On the basis of these principles, a child-oriented programme may be developed. However, there is another programme which is structured and called "the John Horniman programme". This programme does not seem to include SCORE principles. According to this programme, the curriculum can be defined as "a system of systems". In this approach, normal teaching and a normal classroom environment cannot fill the gaps, rather it can become harmful for children with language

disorders. Hence, it can be argued that this programme omits the integration programme. In an integration situation, children get more and more insecure and unable to concentrate on any single issue. However, to accept this is to ignore the very question as to how the children can be involved in out-of-school activities after separated education. Besides, this programme does not seem to be concerned with the individual differentiation of children in terms of special needs.

Webster and McConell (1987) point out that "the arguement is not all children should have an access to all aspects of the curriculum". But there is need to have a broader curriculum. Which can give a rich choice of learning opportunities for each child's needs. The teachers can have similar aims for every child such as; achieving independence, developing as a person, self-discipline, ability to think clearly, practical skills, literacy and numeracy, enjoyment and understanding others, preparation for adulthood. However, there is also a need to have certain individual goals according to the particularities of each child. Brenan (1987) supports this as follows:

each area of the curriculum needs to have well-defined guidelines. For the individual child, there must be well-defined short term goals within a general plan. It is important to have continuity of approach, cooperation and agreed goals. There should also be close work with the supporting services.

Roles of the Teachers and Specialists

In mainstream settings, the class teacher should accept exceptional children with the task of integrating them into regular classrooms. It does not seem very easy to do this. The teacher needs help to understand the children with communication problems. The school speech, language and hearing clinicians can provide some help for the class teacher. There are mutual expectations between the teachers and the speech therapist. One of the expectations of the speech therapists from the teachers is to help identify the children in the classroom settings. They can also expect the teachers to provide a classroom environment that will encourage communication and not exclude the child with problems (Neidecker, 1980). In this respect, the teacher is required to attend in-service training.

The speech-language specialists are likely to play a vital role in the speech and language programme of the school. Their responsibilities are to organize and plan a language programme in consultation with the teacher and even with the parents by taking into consideration the natural and spontaneous language learning context (Van Hattum, 1985).

Webster and McConell (1987) argue that if the speech and language specialists view the role as one of taking over specific areas of the curriculum, there would be danger of the ordinary class teachers viewing their contributions as peripheral, not really important in the child's learning experience, rather than as providing an opportunity for social contact with normal peers. If the speech-language specialists view the role as one of handing on strategies to the teachers in the mainstream, there would be "time" organization.

From this arguement, it appears that there is need to find "time" to share ideas. Co-operation between teachers and specialists seems to be a very fundamental necessity in the planning of the curriculum for children with communication problems. This also requires a suitable timetable for both teachers and specialists.

In special education, not only the children but also the teachers have special needs. In this respect, teaching methods, strategies and situations can become very important aspects of the implementation of the curriculum for the teachers. Failure in learning may not always be the children's problem. The teachers also need to find out the appropriate ways by which children can learn more effectively. Therefore a successful teacher should develop relevant strategies for both children and themselves to follow. (Webster and McConell, 1987).

As Brennan (1987) states, teachers need to be involved in the development of curricula and can be a very important curriculum resource as the result of their contribution to the planned and hidden curricula of the school.

Families, too, can be important resources for the curriculum, particularly in the assesment of children. It could be easier to see the children's demands outside the school if the daily-recorded information is used in co-operation between home and school. This record would be another effective contribution to curriculum planning.

Support from the language unit can be available for the children with communication difficulties who failow the normal school curriculum. A language or support unit is usually under the control of the school's board of directors. If there is coordination between the language unit curricula and the ordinary curricula, it should be possible to have balanced training and experience. Different experiences from various aspects of teaching activity can provide more details about the children.

Evaluation

Evaluation appears to be one of the important points for curriculum planning. Discussions and reviews of children's characteristics from different angles can help make further evaluation of both the curriculum and the children. At this juncture, Brennan (1987) argues that; "Evaluation is part of the curriculum process. It is not a result of the curriculum". Evaluation can also become a framework for the "new curriculum". Each area of the curriculum needs to be looked at in turn. Emphasizing the importance of daily preparation for classroom settings, Webster and McConell (1987) put forward that before the children join the mainstream class session,

evaluation of the lesson is vital. To associate the lesson with the other areas of the curriculum is also important *(ibid)*. Gaps can appear not only in any single area but also in the whole curriculum. The curriculum may be modified or reorganised in order to fill the gaps recognized.

Conclusion

A well-planned curriculum seems to be the most important aspect of the successful integration programme. There are some basic factors which should be considered in designing such a curriculum. These factors can be formulated as questions in the following ways:

- One basic question is how each child can be individually identified in different situations.

- Connected to the above, one other set of questions is which areas of the curriculum can fit the children; what kinds of modifications are necessary in the areas which do not seem to fit the needs of children; and whether the children can have an access to the whole curriculum.

- Whether the curriculum includes some areas such as music, drama, art and craft all of which can encourage the children's participation in the classroom settings.

- Whether the curriculum is flexible enough to use suitable teaching techniques and situations for these children's needs.

- Whether each area has enough practical and experimental opportunities for the children.

- Whether the curriculum gives opportunity to the children with limited communication skills to be active learners rather than passive participants.

- Whether the curriculum prepares the children for life after school.

- Whether the home-school record books are used as resources which provide more information about children.

- Whether the specialist and class teacher have any scheduled discussions of goals for the child in the curriculum.

- Whether the parents, the class teacher and other staff are involved in the curriculum planning.

- Whether there are any evaluation records for both "former" curriculum and children's achievements.

To sum up, it does not seem to be possible or necessary, to make a radical change in the content of curricula and in teaching styles for these children. It is certain that only carefully made assessments and detailed observations will help the illumination of each child's particular problems and provide the framework for curriculum planning.

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