SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION ENRICHMENT PROGRAM: AN INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM FOR INCLUSION INTO MAINSTREAM SOCIETY

[a]Dominic T. Paguio

[a]Assumption College San Lorenzo, Philippines

[a]dtpaguio@assumption.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

The discussion on Inclusive Education should not stop in the inclusion of children with special needs into school settings but should extend to including them in society. Inclusive education should also have the end in mind. With that, the Special Education Transition Enrichment Program (SETEP) of TW Community Enablers was birthed to address the concerns of parents and other stakeholders involved in the holistic education of the individual with special needs of what happens to the child after formal schooling. This case study aims to present the development of the mentioned program, the process of admission of the child to his/her exit from the program, the challenges that the program continually faces, and some suggestions to improve its implementation. The program has five tracks, namely: Independent living, Post-secondary education, Community participation, Employment, and Leisure and Recreation. The program boasts an interdisciplinary approach that supports the individual's total development as he/she is prepared for independent living. Although the program faced challenges, it shows its strength in its comprehensiveness and individualized approach to transition education. The program sees that more advocacy work should be done for transition programs like SETEP to flourish in the Philippines.

Keywords: Transition planning, programs, inclusion

1.   Introduction

Transition planning is a set of coordinated, results-oriented activities that prepare individuals with a disability for independent living. It focuses on the person's movement from school to activities done after their total schooling is done. Planning involves looking into the person's dreams and aspirations matched with their skill level. Bates, Brokema, Ames, and Hess (1992) mentioned that transition planning involves three processes. First, identification of the student's goal and how they see themselves in the future. Next is determining the services needed by the students to attain their goals. Lastly, connecting with other institutions and agencies. These pieces of information are used to design a series of activities geared towards developing skills for a successful adult living (Loh & Yahya, 2013).

The researcher has observed that in the Philippines, most institutions catering to the needs of individuals with disabilities focus on schooling but not on post-school preparation. An unpublished paper by Quijano (2007) that presented a Philippine framework of transition education mentioned that the parents and professionals still lack the know-how on transition

planning and education. This finding was supported by Martin and Boon (2007). They said that the need for orientation of teachers and parents to the importance and process of transition is vital in developing any transition program. Parents are usually confronted with the dilemma of what will happen to their children with disabilities once they are gone. In this light, the Special Education Transition Enrichment program (SETEP) of the TW Community Enablers (TWCE), a private rehabilitation center for adolescents and adults with disabilities, was born. The program aims to educate its students and prepare them for independent living.

2.   Methodology

This is a case study that looked into the development of the program, the structure of the program, and an evaluation of the program. Interviews, observations, and documentary reviews were done to identify the processes undergone by the institution in the development of the program. This study aims to identify the program development and implementation process of this transition education program.

3.   Results and Discussion

3.1   The Program

The Special Education Transition Enrichment Program (SETEP) is an individualized, interdisciplinary special education program that focuses on meeting the transition needs of a person with a disability. It is the special education arm of TW Community Enablers, an adult adolescent rehabilitation clinic which aims to help people with disability create meaningful lives. The program admits adolescents and adults 13 years old and above and has five modules, namely: Independent Living, Employment, Post-secondary education, Community Participation, and Leisure and Recreation with Communication and Functional academics integrated into each module. There are two settings that the program can be done: center-based and home-based.

It was created to accommodate the changing developmental needs of the children served in the pediatric clinic Therapy Works. It heeds the call for a more functional program that most schools do not provide. The program also targets the educational needs of individuals who find it challenging to flourish in a larger group setting.

In developing the program, the program's director needed to benchmark existing transition programs. Most of these programs were in the National Capital Region (NCR) and were run by therapists who saw their students on a per session basis and were not complete school-based programs. Challenges to these programs were the inability to do intensive training of the students, thus, difficulty attaining the transition goals. Government-run programs such as the one proposed by Quijano (2007), though comprehensive, faced challenges like a lack of networks with companies that could hire and absorb the students from their programs. Also, the program catered and was designed for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Hence, Quijano (2007) programs were preparing students but encountered difficulties placing students after their training in the centers. These programs' challenges were on top of changing the parents' attitude towards transition education. More advocacy needs to be done to change their perspective about their child just being in school and not looking beyond it.

After benchmarking and reviewing existing programs, the program developers needed to create a comprehensive framework to cater to their students' different abilities. They ensured an exit from the program by linking with companies who are willing and ready to employ the graduates.

The program's framework is shown in Figure 1. The students who qualify for the program fell between the cracks in their previous schools with many students. They are the ones whose parents notice are not benefitting anymore in large class settings. Also, the students who enroll are those students who parents and teachers feel would benefit more in an individualized setup. Once the child is enrolled, assessment and evaluation will be done to ascertain the child's skills and needs. This information will help in the development of the Individualized Transition Plan where parental engagement is strongly encouraged. Parents and the child help set the goals and targets for the plan. The parents and the child, depending on their goals, will be introduced to the five modules of the program. The program might involve assisting the individual's placement in the workplace, post-secondary institution, or assisted setting.

Figure 1:The SETEP Framework

3.2   Modules

The SETEP features five modules from which the identified goals of the parents and students are classified into. Once identified, the program director categorizes the goal into the modules and individually designs the activities suited for the student based on the evaluation of the student's skills done at the start of the process.

3.2.1 Independent Living

This module aims to target the development of skills that are involved in successful adult living. The activities include grooming, nome maintenance, and self-management skills. Activities include eating, dressing, toileting, grooming and hygiene, food preparation, housekeeping, health and safety, care for pets and plants, financial management, and self-determination skills.

3.2.2 Leisure and Recreation

These involve activities that are non-obligatory and engaged in for relaxation, enjoyment, and personal growth. These are activities that are not work-related or activities necessary for existing. These may include but are not limited to painting, arts & crafts, baking, cooking, board games, football, and other sports, and yoga.

3.2.3 Post-secondary School Participation

These activities are done to assist the adolescent or adult develop the skills needed to succeed in post-secondary school endeavors. These activities include involvement in school-related activities with varying levels of modifications, applying for identified institutions, accomplishing academic requirements, demonstrating expected behaviors according to institution rules & regulations, following a routine of college classes, organization skills, following school rules, working with a group, and participating in extracurricular activities
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3.2.4 Employment

This module involves job seeking and keeping skills, participation in volunteer or vocational activities, and achieving meaningful employment. Activities may include job skills, interests and aptitudes, job seeking and acquisition, job performance, salary and compensation, and an internship program.

3.2.5 Community Participation

This module comprises skills that enable the student to engage in community activities such as identifying community services, appropriate behaviors in public spaces, eating out skills, shopping, banking, accessing community transportation, and self-advocacy skills.

3.2.6 Achievements

The center made several achievements. First, it created more awareness among the students, their families, and the community regarding the importance of transition education. Through the art exhibits that were held, commissioned works of art created income for students and ignited hope among their parents for a bright future. Secondly, the interdisciplinary approach was a vital component in the program as different professionals worked together in the transition planning and implementation of the student's plan. This approach ensured that all areas of skill development are covered, and a comprehensive approach to teaching is attained. Also, the individualized approach made sure that the program was tailor-fit and specifically designed based on the students' dreams, aspirations, goals, needs, and abilities. Lastly, a few students were eventually placed in employment with the help of other institutions.

3.2.7 Challenges

The center continues to fight for its advocacy of increasing awareness of the importance of transition education and countering the notion that persons with disabilities are perpetual children and need to remain in conventional schooling. It is also a challenge to find teachers who are interested and trained in implementing transition activities. Finally, a big challenge is creating opportunities for the student once they exit from the program. Companies and institutions that will hire students with disabilities are still scarce in the Philippines.

4.   Conclusion

The journey of the center that revolves around helping adults and adolescents have a brighter future ahead of them is still narrow and challenging. Still, the center sees glimmers of hope as more people become aware of the importance of transition planning and education. The center still feels passionate about bridging the gap between schooling and independent adult living for persons with disabilities.

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