

A RATIONALE FOR EARLY INTERVENTION

by
Nur Azizah ⁶⁾

Abstract

Young children with special needs are not automatically possess one or more those skills and as consequence, teachers in early intervention purposely have to teach those skills directly. It is essential for young children with special needs to commence in early intervention, because at this age, which is believed as a golden age, is a strategic time to shape young children with special needs by age-appropriate skills. The implementation of early intervention builds from at least four components which are: Firstly, theoretical base about learning and development. Secondly, empirical research where many studies show that early intervention give advantages for young children with disabilities and their parents and communities. Thirdly, expert opinions which draw from theoretical and empirical research and lastly changing in society concerning values and attitude towards people with disabilities. There are five theoretical model of curriculum in early intervention, namely: Developmental Curriculum Model, Developmental-Cognitive Curriculum Model, Academic (or pre-academic) Skills Model, Behavioral Curriculum Model, and Functional Curriculum Model.

Keywords: early intervention, young children with special needs

Introduction

Parents always hope that their children would grow and develop in the best way that society expected. However, some of the parents can not fulfill their dreams. Parents of children with special needs are often concern about their children' developmental stage cannot meet society standard and as a result their children will excluded from the society and live in an uncertainty.

'Will my child be able to have a happy life?' is a question that often hovers on parents' mind due to disabilities had by their children. For these parents, early intervention is the best preference in helping their young children as the most important goal of early intervention is to ensure that young children with special needs can fully develop their potential in their early years and to help them gain functional skills in areas of behavior, social, emotional and cognitive.

6) Dosen Jurusan Pendidikan Luar Biasa FIP UNY

Young children with special needs are not automatically possess one or more those skills and as consequence, teachers in early intervention purposely have to teach those skills directly. It is essential for young children with special needs to commence in early intervention, because at this age, which is believed as a golden age, is a strategic time to shape young children with special needs by age-appropriate skills.

A number of programs in early intervention are set to support these young children attain specific skills, whether it is behavior, social, emotional or cognitive skills. However, it is believed that these skills are link to each others. Therefore, it is important for teachers in early intervention to take account on all aspects stated above in arranging and delivering curriculum for young children with special needs.

Early Intervention

Early intervention refers to a service provided for young children with special needs and it has become a part of educational system in the late 60s (Odom, 1988). Bowe (2004, p. 40) maintains that early intervention is 'service provided for infants and toddlers and their families to address the special needs of very young children who have disabilities, have developmental delays or are at risk of developmental delays'. According to Peterson (1987), early intervention for preschoolers with special needs is not only beneficial but it is essential. Commencing young children with special needs would make a significant difference in developing areas of functional skills that needed for future learning skill. In addition to this, it would also reduce opportunities of having additional/secondary difficulties as a result of delayed intervention.

The fact that prevalence of preschoolers who portray disabilities growing significantly in time to time give another reason to implement services such as early intervention. Snyder (2001), Tremblay, Mass, Pagani and Vitaro (1996) as cited in Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) insist that 'without early intervention, emotional, social and behavior problems in young children may lead to academic problems, grade retention, school drop out and antisocial behaviors'. In additions, a study conducted by Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004) conclude that 'preventing, reducing and halting aggressive behavior at schools entry are important to reduce later delinquency and academic failure'.

Although Bowe (2004) and North and Carruthers (2005) indicate specific age covered by early intervention that is from birth up to three years, Foreman (2005, p. 23) seen early intervention as 'part of an ongoing educational program begin in infancy and continue throughout life'.

Rational for early intervention

The philosophical issue underpinnings early intervention is not much different as early childhood education (Bowe, 2004; Correa & Jones, 2003). The implementation of early intervention builds from at least four components (Peterson, 1987). First, it derives from theoretical base about learning and development. Second, the rational for early intervention develops from empirical research where many studies show that early intervention give advantages for young children with disabilities and their parents and communities. Third, expert opinions which draw from theoretical and empirical research are considered to be very significant contributions to implement and finance early intervention. Four, changing in society concerning values and attitude towards people with disabilities gives assistance in applying the importance of early intervention for these people. This values and attitudes include human rights issue where people with disabilities are equal to those without disabilities and should be given opportunities to optimal their potential through various programs that benefit for them.

Specifically, Sandall (2000) as cited in Correa and Jones (2003, p. 352) asserts that there are three philosophical values and attitudes underpinnings early intervention. The three values are '(1) all young children are valued and full participants in their families, communities and schools; (2) High quality early intervention can help ensure that all young children reach their full developmental potential and attain functional skills in areas of communication, mobility, social competence, cognition, and self-care; and (3) families benefit from consistent and supportive partnerships and collaborations with service providers'.

According to Peterson (1987, p. 5-6), there are eight reasons why intervention for preschoolers with disabilities should be given as early as possible.

1. During the early years the initial pattern of learning and behavior that set the pace for and influence the nature of subsequent development are establish.
2. Research suggest the presence of certain critical periods, particularly during the early years, when a child is most susceptible and responsive to learning experience.
3. Intelligence and other human capacities are not fixed at birth but, rather, are shaped to some extent by environmental influences and through learning.
4. Handicapping conditions and other factors that render a child at-risk for developmental disabilities can interfere with developmental and learning so that the original disabilities become more severe and secondary handicaps will appear.
5. A child's environment and early experiences, particularly the degree to which these are nurturing or depriving, have a major effect upon developmental and learning; both greatly influence the degree to which a child reaches his or her potential.
6. Early intervention programs can make a significant difference in the developmental status of young children and can do so more rapidly than later remedial efforts after a child has entered elementary school.
7. Parents need special assistance in stabling constructive pattern in parenting with a young handicap or at-risk child and in providing adequate care, stimulation and training for their children during the critical early years when the basic developmental skills should be acquired.
8. Early intervention implies some economic-social benefit in that prevention or early treatment of developmental problem in young children may reduce more serious, burdensome problems for society to cope with later, including their accompanying cost.

In the same manner, North and Carruthers (2005) explain that the importance of early intervention is not only for preschoolers with disabilities by preparing them into mainstream environment but also for families who have young children with disabilities by providing support for all family members to cope with their children. Furthermore, they also suggest that early learning is crucial for later development in which

children characteristics and needs. Besides that, it is believed that human skills and capabilities are connected to each other.

Conclusion

Early intervention plays an important role in developing areas of functional skills that needed for future learning skill. It would also reduce opportunities of having additional/secondary difficulties as a result of delayed intervention. There are different types of curriculum that can be put into action in providing an effective early intervention for young children with special needs. However, capabilities in human are link to each other therefore teachers in early intervention should be careful in adopting different models of curriculum.

References

- Bowe, F. G. (2004). *Early childhood special education: Birth to eight (3rd edn)*. Canada: Thomson Delmar Learning
- Correa, V. I & Jones, H., (2003). Early childhood special education in F. E. Obiakor, C. A. Utley and A. F. Rotatori (eds). *Effective education for learners with exceptionalities. Advances in special education*. Vol 15. The UK; Elsevier science ltd
- Foreman, P. (2005). Disability and inclusion: concept and principles. In P Foreman (ed.), *Inclusion in action* (pp. 1-34). Australia: Thomson
- North, J., & Carruthers, A. (2005). Inclusion in early childhood. In P Foreman (ed.), *Inclusion in action* (pp. 66- 99). Australia: Thomson
- Odom, S. L. (1988). Research in early childhood special education: methodologies and paradigm. In S. L Odom and M. B. Karnes. *Early intervention for infants & children with handicaps: an empirical base*. The USA: Paul H Brookes
- Peterson, N. L. (1987). *Early intervention for handicapped and at-risk children: an introduction to early childhood-special education*. Denver: Love publishing company
- Webster-Stratton, C., & Reid, M. J. (2004). Strengthening social and emotional competence in young children-the foundation for early school readiness and success: incredible years classroom social skills and problem solving curriculum. *Infants and Young Children*, 17.2 (April-June 2004): 96 (18). Retrieved April 19, 2007, from Expanded Academic ASAP. Thomson Gale