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Reform of Special Education Schools in the Context of New Curriculum Reform

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Abstract: *In these years of the new curriculum reform, we summarize the reform trends of special education schools in curriculum objectives, curriculum content, curriculum implementation, and curriculum evaluation, select some representative schools' reform activities for evaluation, and summarize the reform inspiration and experience to promote special education curriculum reform and promote the deep development of special education.*

Keywords: *New curriculum reform; Special education school; Curriculum*

Introduction

From the various policy guidelines of China's new curriculum reform, it can be concluded that there are some imperfections in the previous educational practices of special education schools. The new era has new requirements for education, and it is imperative to carry out new curriculum reform to cultivate special students who are suitable for the changing times and change, to maximize teachers' independent inquiry into teaching materials, curriculum, and teaching, and to get out of traditional misconceptions and innovate educational concepts. The new curriculum reform must meet two needs: first, to meet the requirements of society for children with special needs, and second, to develop the potential of children with special needs and meet the educational needs of children with special needs. Based on this, children with special needs can acquire knowledge, master skills, and improve their emotions, attitudes, and values, with the ultimate goal of improving their overall quality and social adaptability.

The Reform Trend of Special Education Schools in the Context of New Curriculum Reform

Course Objectives: Special Features of Special Education

In 2007, China promulgated the Experimental Program for Curriculum Development of Compulsory Education for the Deaf, in which the training objectives of special education are different from those of general education, in that special education aims to develop the abilities of children with special needs, such as self-care, social adaptation, and employment, which are not covered by general education (Ministry of Education, 2007). In terms of curriculum, the program proposes to make "communication and interaction"

a compulsory subject for deaf students (Ministry of Education, 2007). This initiative will reflect the special nature of the curriculum in special education schools, as deaf students are less able to communicate and interact with each other due to their disabilities and special communication styles. Since deaf students' ability to absorb and comprehend the knowledge and internalize the output is different from that of ordinary students, in the compulsory education textbook for deaf schools, the chemistry textbook prepared according to the curriculum standards reflects the characteristics of the capacity, depth, and difficulty of the textbook in line with the cognitive level, cognitive characteristics and learning development of deaf students (Qiao, 2018). The Special Education Upgrading Plan (2014-2016) puts forward such a measure: encouraging the pilot construction of special education schools for children and adolescents with autism in regions with developed conditions or better development (Ministry of Education, 2017), where children with autism used to be mainly enrolled in mentally retarded schools (classes) or comprehensive special education schools, and now it is necessary to specifically establish special education schools (departments) for children with autism. In the past, children with autism were mainly enrolled in mentally retarded schools (classes) or comprehensive special education schools.

In 2016, China introduced the Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education for Deaf Schools (2016 Edition), and analyzing from its curriculum nature, curriculum concept, and curriculum objectives. The reform contents are combined with the physical and mental development characteristics of deaf students and changed to be more detailed and realistic. It can be seen that this is in addition to having the objectives of the general school curriculum, it also has the characteristics of a special education school, combined with the life, society, and future of students, and fully considers the special characteristics of special students. In the future reform and practice, it will also combine with the times, the specific situation of schools around the world, and the students' characteristics to reflect more and more the special features of special education schools.

Course Content: Developmental, Functional, Compensatory

The requirements of "focusing on the development of deaf students' language skills and communication and interaction skills, and increasing the number of courses that meet the characteristics of deaf education" are mentioned in the Experimental Program for Curriculum Setting in Compulsory Education for Deaf Schools (2007) (Ministry of Education, 2007). The additional communication and interaction classes and comprehensive practical activities classes are based on the psychological characteristics and future development of special students, which fully reflects that special education in China is not only for the present but also for the future development of special children. The experimental program "forms a dichotomous complementarity between general and special subject modules" (Sheng, 2011), which not only compensates for the missing abilities of special education students, but also plays a complementary role in integrating different subject courses and comprehensive courses, and the crossover and integration of course contents promote the comprehensive development of students.

The other two types of special education schools also have a similar process and direction of curriculum content change, with curriculum content reform gradually diversifying and taking into account the special needs and mental health of special children, which is the most direct manifestation of "individualized teaching".

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Curriculum Implementation: Local Adaptation to the Autonomy of the School and the Creativity of Teachers

In the "Experimental Program for Curriculum Development of Compulsory Education for Blind Schools" issued in 2007, districts and schools with good school conditions are encouraged to offer comprehensive courses, integrating several related subjects into courses that span a broader common area, such as history and society, science, art, etc. Districts and schools with relatively weak school conditions are allowed to offer only sub-courses of general subjects, giving local schools the right to decide on their own to offer courses according to actual conditions. It is also mentioned that local educational administrations and schools are allowed to offer sub-courses in general subjects only. It is also mentioned that local educational administrations can make appropriate changes in the light of the school situation in the region, and the arrangement and setting of each local curriculum and how class time is allocated are specified (Ministry of Education, 2007). The experimental program fully takes into account the uneven development between the east and west, the conditions of local educational administrations and schools, and brings into play the autonomy of schools.

In the Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education in Blind Schools (2016 Edition) promulgated in 2016, several courses mentioned "living" "openness" "creative use of teaching materials" "adjust measures to local conditions to expand teaching space and time" "extracurricular resources development and utilization of content such as" (Ministry of Education, 2018), fully reflecting the curriculum reform of teachers' teaching ability and creation ability. In addition to the textbooks and standards, teachers are required to develop their understanding and creativity in special education, and to innovate and create in the teaching practice of special education.

Course Evaluation: Dynamic, Multiple, Process

The Experimental Program for Curriculum Development in Compulsory Education for the Deaf Schools, promulgated in 2007, requires "comprehensive, dynamic, and growth", "diversified and multiple approaches", "observation, communication, tests, practical operations, work demonstration, self-assessment and mutual assessment" (Ministry of Education, 2007), which requires that future assessments focus on substantive follow-up assessments, dilute one-dimensional summative assessments, broaden the scope of student assessments, emphasize multiple-stage assessments, and reduce selective competitive assessments. The "Assessment Recommendations" section of the Language Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education for the Deaf (2016 Edition) provides corresponding specifications: the need to follow the requirements of development, diversity, and pluralism, which require schools to look at students with a developmental perspective when evaluating them; to evaluate students in a variety of ways, not in a single way; the subject of evaluation can be not only the teacher, but also parents, classmates, groups, and themselves (Ministry of Education, 2018). It can be seen that the evaluation of the curriculum of the three types of special education schools is increasingly focused on the learning process of students, dynamic management of evaluation, multi-faceted, multi-angle, and multi-subject evaluation.

Evaluating the Reform Practice of Special Education Schools in the Context of New Curriculum Reform

Student-Centered and Teacher-Led

Teachers in Beijing schools for the blind conduct teaching case study sessions in the new curriculum reform, and teachers exchange teaching information and experiences with each other (Gan, 2008). The main activities are based on the analysis of teaching materials and teaching feedback to explore in practice the integration and development of the new concepts of the new curriculum reform and the current curriculum.

Personalization and Democracy

The Beijing School for the Blind offers elective courses specifically in humanities in addition to several special courses prescribed by the state because of the limitations in the future development of visually impaired students due to their physical impairment (Gan, 2008). The setting of humanities courses takes into full consideration the psychological needs of students, which is not only a reflection of the personalized and democratic nature of the new curriculum reform but also a humanistic concern for students with visual impairment.

The special education school in Shigatse, Tibet Autonomous Region, has carried out personalized reforms in the physical education classroom. And since the school has various types of students, teachers need to tailor the physical education curriculum to the students' physical and mental conditions to develop teaching activities and training content in the classroom and assign homework according to the student's current abilities as a way to enhance students' love for physical education and motivation in the physical education classroom (Ba, 2020).

Living and Socialization

The special education school in Panshui, Jilin Province, has carried out the following curriculum in the new reform: it focuses on the adaptability of the curriculum as well as the practicality and life of the curriculum. Life language, life math, and life adaptation classes all combine and interpenetrate life and teaching, and the two promote and serve each other in the students' learning process. Moreover, the school has expanded the scope of the curriculum so that all activities of students in school (including dressing, eating, toileting, and queuing) are considered as a kind of curriculum, and these lessons are organized and carried out with the pedagogical goal of enhancing students' life adaptation skills, using the current school environment as the pedagogical scene, and throughout every minute of students' time in school (Song, 2018).

In the spring semester, Quzhou Special Education School held an internship training session for parents of prospective seniors, and a special education session for students on "Are You Ready For Your Internship?" After the educational activities, instructors led student representatives to visit enterprises. The school helps and promotes the socialization of students, providing them with opportunities to meet the society, and the joint efforts of home and school, school and enterprises, and other parties to protect students from campus to society.

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Focus on Student Mental Health and Moral Education

Sexuality education is becoming a hot topic of discussion in Chinese schools today and is a curriculum that teachers must pay attention to and implement. The Suzhou School for the Blind and Deaf has invited senior lecturers in sex education to the school to provide a series of lectures on sex education for students and training seminars for teachers on the topic of "Understanding Sex and Sex Education". Sex education helps students to clarify the characteristics of gender roles and to develop good sexual ethics, awareness, and concepts. The school also hired the president of the Suzhou Association for the Physically Disabled as an outside counselor to give motivational lectures to affirm, encourage, and educate students with their own experiences and attitudes toward setbacks.

Moral education is invisible, and the spring breeze makes rain. The school's development of such invisible courses is a new manifestation of the new curriculum that focuses on students' moral emotions and moral will.

School-Based

The special education school in Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang, launched a school-based curriculum on the theme of "Hui Min Snacks", which incorporates the skills of local Hui Min cuisine and empowers students with hands-on skills and life skills. Beijing Dongcheng District Special Education School launched a month-long technology month with activities such as a technology-making kit experience, making a model of the Tiangong II or Shenzhou V, and learning about Chinese astronauts and spacecraft.

The development of school-based lessons is a new manifestation of curriculum diversification and individualization, focusing on the connection between education and life, reflecting the color of pragmatism, and highlighting the characteristics of each school's local adaptation.

Summary and Insights

The New Curriculum Reform Cannot be Separated from the Leadership and Support of the Government

This is the first time that special education has been presented as a separate module, and it is also strong support and higher quality expectation for special education. Under the new curriculum reform, the curriculum standards and teaching materials of the three types of special education schools have been prepared and published in an orderly manner and implemented into teaching practice.

Special Education Schools Should Optimize Resources, Coordinate Management, and Promote Reform

As the front line and practice unit of the reform, special education schools need to conduct regular evaluation activities of each teaching and research group, make good use of the existing and available resources of the