

Full Length Research Paper

Development and validation of a customized vocational program for adults with mild intellectual disabilities

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The study focused on the development and validation of a customized vocational program for adults with mild intellectual disabilities to prepare them for independent and gainful living. The program was based on the identified basic vocational skills such as grooming, social skills, cleaning, frying, sorting, selling, money changing and washing dishes, and other related skills in physical, intellectual and socio-emotional present among the participants. It consists of pre-referral/evaluation, orientation, workplace readiness training and job shadows of internship. This was evaluated by SPED and TLE teachers for the assessment of its attainability of objectives, congruence of activities to objectives, adequacy of activities to objectives, appropriateness of resources and appropriateness of success indicators. After the assessment, the customized vocational program was tried out to ten adults with mild intellectual disabilities whose age ranged from eighteen and above. The program was found to be appropriate to adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher recommends: that the customized vocational program be further tried out; that this program be tried out to all public schools with special education classes so the children with special needs, regardless of their economic status, will have the opportunity to be trained and have the chance of being independent and productive; and that the qualified adults with intellectual disabilities be given continuous upgrading to provide opportunities for professional development to build competence and instill confidence among them.

Keywords: Customized Vocational Program, Intellectual Disabilities, and Transition Program.

INTRODUCTION

Special Education is defined as an individually planned, systematically implemented, and carefully evaluated instruction to help exceptional children achieve the greatest possible personal self-sufficiency and success, in present and future environments (Heward, 2003). In the United States, there is a powerful law that was enacted in 1975. Public Law 94-142, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has affected every school in every country and has changed the roles of regular and special education teachers, school administrators, parents and others in the educational system. The IDEA is a comprehensive legislation regarding the education of children with disabilities. The major provision of this law states that all children with disabilities who are between the ages 3 to 21, regardless of the type of severity of their disabilities shall receive free, appropriate public education. Each one of them shall be given an individualized education program or IEP

(Heward, 2003 *in* Inciong et al, 2007). After this age, they are set free to face the world of work. Unfortunately, especially here in the Philippines, students with intellectual disabilities and the like are not yet capable of handling themselves at the age of 21. One of the reasons for this could be failure to enroll due to lack of financial and parental support. This results in a more complicated approach in teaching them since they are already old to learn basic and adaptive skills. They then become adults in the Special Education program, inept of acquiring a job that will make them independent. In this adult stage, they still rely on other people's support, thus failing to achieve the Special Education goal. This is where the study starts. These individuals cannot possibly go to high school or college, thus a vocational program is necessary to prepare them for work.

Education is the best way in helping individuals with intellectual disabilities cope with the demands of the

world. According to the World Health Organization, these individuals grow up and master activities of daily living.

They need to be imparted with education like other children. Going to school is essential for them to learn not only academic skills but also discipline, social/interactional skills, and practical skills for community living. Though they are slow in learning, experience and research has shown that by applying the right kind of educational techniques, it is possible to impart the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic to many children with intellectual disabilities. The current approach is to educate them, as far as possible, in regular schools, rather than setting up special schools (inclusive education). This especially applies to those with milder forms of intellectual disabilities. However, more severely retarded children may benefit better in educational settings meant for them (special schools). Another approach, which is interesting, is to conduct special classes only for them in regular schools itself (opportunity sections). Whatever may be the approach, it is important to realize that even children with intellectual disability need educational experience, to ensure their optimum development and well-being.

Educational experience for these cases is done through Special Education. This kind of education for individuals with disabilities has gone through many changes over the past several years. It is no longer limited to simply teaching academic subjects to persons with disabilities. It has also evolved to focus on intervention to eliminate or at least reduce the obstacles that might keep a child or adult with intellectual disabilities from full and active participation in school and society (Heward, 1996 *in* De Leon, 2011). In view of this goal, Special Education helps lessen these individuals' obstacles with the use of activities that will make them achieve their greatest possible personal self-sufficiency and success in present and future environment (Heward, 2003).

Vocational training program is the last level for developing these special students with special needs. This will serve as a transition program from school to work. But one may doubt if these individuals are able to get possible employment after finishing the said program. Employers may question their abilities and may not want to hire them. Judging from their physical characteristics, these individuals might also become liabilities in the establishment where they are in. According to Reschley (2002), persons with intellectual disabilities are usually associated with unemployment. In the event of economic depression, this group will be among those severely affected. A vocational program is embedded to focus on those establishments where employment for these adults is possible.

As mentioned in the website <https://fp.auburn.edu/rse>, vocational training is an important service component. Typically, the training process includes a set of sequenced phases, such as an introduction to occupations, an orientation to work, followed by

general vocational adjustment training. This training is intended to help the students develop work habits and

skills that are considered important to 'common' work activities. Vocational skills development is vital to a quality lifestyle for people with all forms of intellectual disability. However, existing research on the vocational development of people with moderate to severe intellectual disability focuses on occupational choice rather than vocational development (Rumrill and Roessler, 1999). Occupational choice reflects a person's vocational decision at any point in time, whereas vocational development reflects an ongoing, developmental process that incorporates and integrates personal and environmental information. Vocational development is a dynamic process that requires individuals to engage in the ongoing assessment, analysis, and synthesis of information about the world of work and self (Callahan and Gardner, 1997). In addition, career development activities may lead to increased job satisfaction and promote sustained patterns of employment among people diagnosed with intellectual disability (Wadsworth and Cocco, 2003).

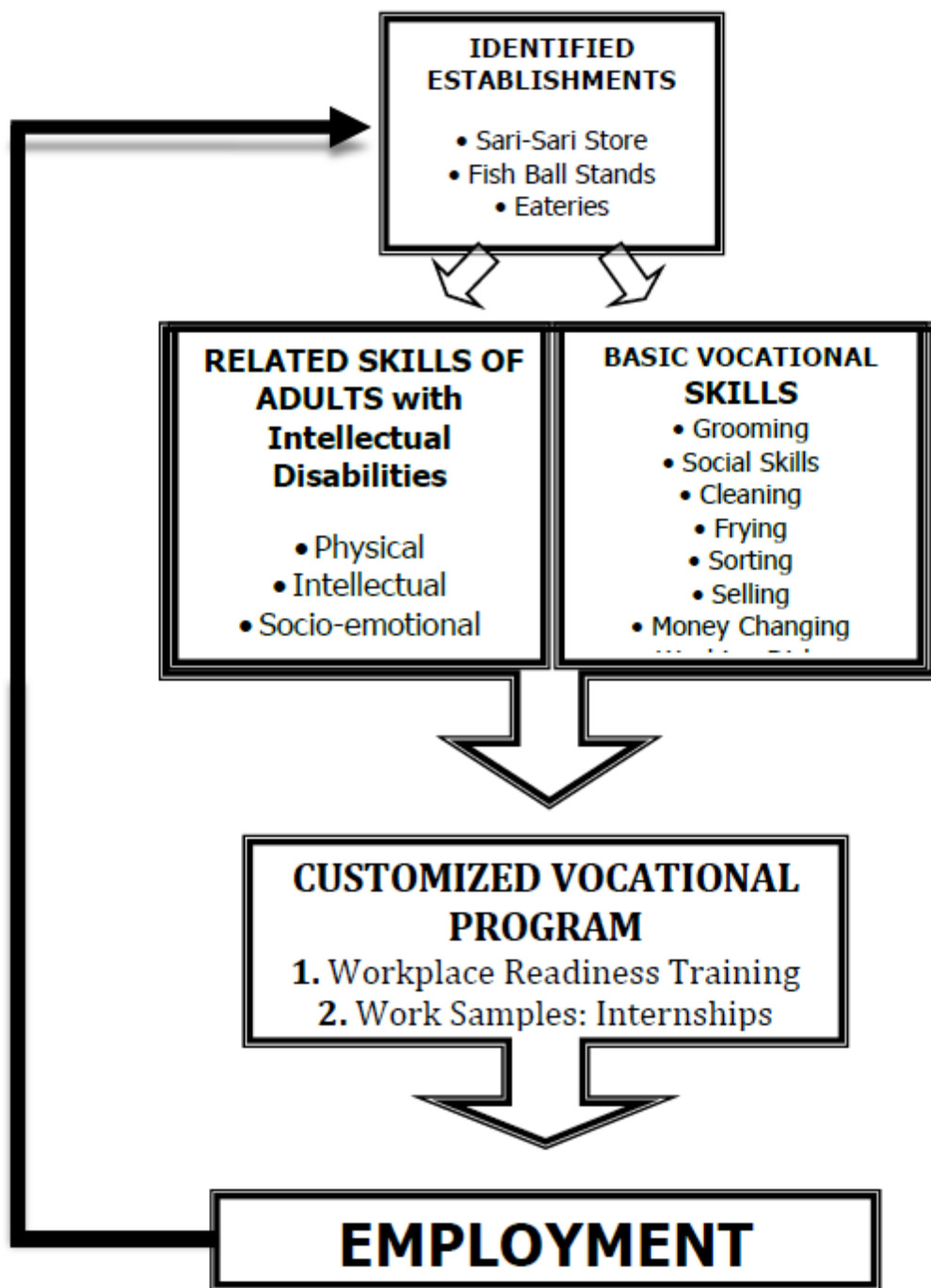
Goldstein (1982) points out that this school-to-work transition is particularly difficult for mildly handicapped individuals for three reasons:

- (1) Recent technological advances have dramatically reduced the number of unskilled and semiskilled jobs that have typically been held in the past by mildly disabled individuals;
- (2) Academic, behavioral, and social handicaps place disabled workers at a particular disadvantage during times of high unemployment; and
- (3) The "invisibility" of mild handicaps often causes employers to develop unrealistic expectations of mildly handicapped workers.

In view of the aforementioned reasons, the researcher undertook this study on developing a customized vocational program suitable for adults with mild intellectual disabilities.

The adults with mild intellectual disabilities related skills and basic vocational skills need to be assessed. These are paralleled to the current employment demands which are situated in the school premises. As evaluated by experts, these are sari-sari stores, fish ball stands and eateries. These are the only establishments recommended by the experts since these indicate a higher possibility of employment for the participants. Skills needed for employment for these establishments as per validation are grooming, social skills, cleaning, frying, sorting, selling, money changing and washing dishes and related skills in physical, socio-emotional and intellectual. These skills will be of help for these adults to have employment in the identified establishments after undergoing the vocational program.

Figure 1. This is the conceptual framework of the study



vocational skills and the identified establishments that can be manned by people with such qualifications. Two additional dimensions were added to the customized vocational program dimension of transition:

(a) The Workplace Readiness Training and

(b) The Work Samples: Internships. The three dimensions are viewed as supporting the goal of employment.

The Customized Vocational Program contains set of activities, which will develop the vocational skills of the

adults with intellectual disabilities appropriate to the demands of the identified establishments. Each activity contains specific objectives, strategies, resources, time frame and success indicators. The second pillar, the

- arranges condiments and table napkins properly
 - sets the table before and after the customer arrives
 - recognizes when to replace commonly used items
- Scholarly J. Sci. Res. and Essay

Workplace Readiness Training, indicates detailed instructions in preparation for work while the last pillar, Work Samples: Internships, is the application of the training in a real job setting. The second and third pillar will provide for a smooth transition from school to work.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive Developmental Study was the research design of this study.

The research design of this study followed four phases of development: Phase I-Preliminary Preparation; Phase II-Writing; Phase III-Evaluation; and Phase IV-Final Preparation. The following figure shows the procedures that the researcher will undergo in making this study possible.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phase I – Planning

This phase involved gathering of basic information about the profile of the participants. Based from the gathered data, there is equal number of boys and girls that served as the participants of this study. These are 5 female and 5 male adults with mild intellectual disabilities who are enrolled in the Transition-Vocational class of Legarda Elementary School Special Education Department. These students were already in the adulthood stage, from 18 years and above.

The initial phase started through the assessment of the participants' present vocational and related skills. From the data gathered, the following are vocational skills of the participants that are needed to be improved:

GROOMING SKILLS

- uses mouthwash and/or dental floss appropriately
- keeps fingernails short and clean
- uses handkerchief or tissue to cover mouth when sneezing

SOCIAL SKILLS

- asks for payments politely
- gives food orders to right customers
- retains orders in mind, so as not to forget it
- asks customer's orders politely

CLEANING SKILLS

- removes trash and taking the filled garbage cans out for collection
- works without being told

FRYING SKILLS

- distinguishes sweet from sour sauce
- observes safety rules and standards
- prepares food on a paper plate, after cooking
- opens jars and bottles safely
- plugs and unplugs equipment before and after use
- recognizes reading skills like symbols, pictures and word labels

SORTING SKILLS

- names different items found in the store
- opens jars and bottles safely

SELLING SKILLS

- returns change correctly, if there's any
- retains orders in mind, so as not to forget it

MONEY CHANGING SKILLS

- returns change correctly, if there's any
- selects appropriate bill and coin values in order as change is given to a customer
- understands basic math operations like subtraction
- understands basic math operations like addition
- uses calculator if needed
- counts coins and bills correctly
- differentiates denominations of money
- separates the coins into piles of common coinage
- differentiates with different coins e.g., P5, P10

WASHING DISHES

- identifies cupboard, sinks and others
- The following are related skills of the participants that are

needed to be improved:

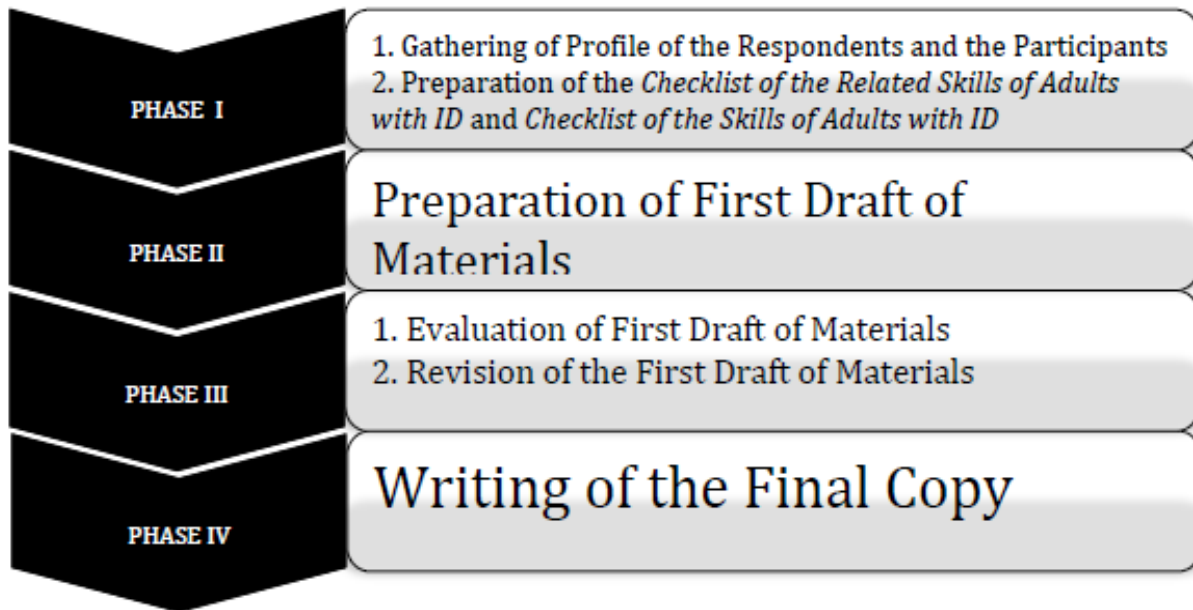
INTELLECTUAL SKILLS

- recites rhymes, short poems
- identifying simple shapes
- adds and subtracts combinations of three

- repeats numbers out of sequence
 - distinguishes left from right
- Custodio 5

- expresses thoughts or ideas carefully
- says “please”, “excuse me” and “you’re welcome”

Figure 2. Procedures that the researcher will undergo in making this study possible



- says “thank you”, “po” and “opo”
- greets visitors and other familiar personalities
- exhibits self-confidence

Phase II – Writing

Based on the identified basic vocational skills and identified establishments where the adults with mild intellectual disabilities can possibly work, a customized vocational program was prepared. The program was divided into three components: Orientation, Workplace Readiness Training and Work Samples. Career Learning, Exploration Activities and Punctuality and Attendance fall under the first component of Orientation. In the Workplace Readiness Training, activities in grooming, social skills, sorting, cleaning, money changing, washing dishes and frying were given emphasis. On the last component of Work Samples, Internship starts. Each activity prepared consists of objectives, pre-requisite skills needed, materials or equipment, suggested activities and evaluation.

Each component has five parts, namely objectives, pre-requisite skills, materials, suggested activities, and evaluation. Objectives are the goals set for the participants to achieve for the day. These goals will be attained by the help of the pre-requisite skills or the already developed skills present among the adults. Materials are the tools, instruments or visual aids needed to do the activity. The suggested activities contain the different developmental activities that will promote the enhancement of the adults’ vocational skills. And lastly,

the evaluation part of the customized vocational program is the assessment to be used after each activity to determine if the vocational skills were developed.

Phase III – Evaluation

The revised customized vocational program was subjected for evaluation by experts. There were five evaluators in each instrument. On the first instrument, the *Checklist of the skills of adults with Intellectual Disabilities*, four evaluators have BSEd and Master of Education units in Special Education, while the other one has Ed.D and MA Special Education units. All of them have experienced more than five years of teaching in Special Education.

On the second instrument, the *Checklist of the Related Skills of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities*, three evaluators finished bachelor’s degree in Education, had CTP units and SPED units. The other evaluator has a Bachelor of Education in Elementary Education degree and MA SPED units. The last evaluator has a Doctorate degree in developmental psychology. All of them have above five years teaching experience in handling students with intellectual disabilities.

The last instrument was the *Customized Vocational Program*. Two out of five evaluators finished Bachelor of Elementary Education and took Master of Arts in Special Education. Both of them have five years of teaching experience in Special Education, handling students with intellectual disabilities. The other evaluator, on the other hand, has a Doctoral degree in Developmental

Table 1. Summary of the evaluation of experts on the customized vocational program N=5

COMPONENT / ACTIVITY	ATTAINABILITY of Objectives	CONGRUENCE of Activities to Objectives	ADEQUACY of Activities	APPROPRIATENESS of Resources	APPROPRIATENESS of Success Indicators	MEAN	Interpretation
Component 1: Orientation							
1. Orientation	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.0	3.96	Very Much
1.1 Career Learning	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.0	3.96	Very much
1.2 Exploration Activities	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
1.3 Punctuality and Attendance	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.92	Very much
Component 2. Workplace Readiness Training							
2.1.1 GROOMING – Brushing Teeth	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.8	4.0	3.96	Very much
2.1.2 Combing Hair	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.1.3 Washing Hands	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.1.4 Trimming Nails	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.1.5 Grooming and Dressing	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.2.1 SOCIAL SKILLS – Character Traits	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.2.2 Dealing with Customers	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.96	Very much
2.2.3 Dealing with Co-workers	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.3.1 SORTING – Naming Items	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.84	Very much
2.3.2 Arranging Items	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.4.1 CLEANING – Sweeping	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.88	Very much
2.4.2 Mopping	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.4.3 Setting Table	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.4.5 Emptying the Garbage	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.5.1 MONEY CHANGING – Using Calculators	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.5.2 Money Skills	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.5.3 Making Change	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.6.1 WASHING DISHES	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.6.2 Drying Utensils	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.7.1 FRYING – Following Safety Precautions	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
2.7.2 Following Instructions	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
Component 3. Work-Samples: Job Shadows							
3.1 Internship	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.00	Very much
MEAN	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.98	Very much

SCALE: 3.26-4.00 = very much; 2.51-3.25 = much; 1.76.-2.50 = very little; 1.00-1.75 = not at all

units in SPed. She experienced handling students with intellectual disabilities for fifteen long years. Finally, the last evaluator had 26 years of teaching experience. She finished her Ph.D in Developmental Psychology and experienced teaching in the SPed and Livelihood Education programs. All fifteen evaluators were chosen

to evaluate the instruments of this study because of their expertise in handling students with intellectual disabilities. Their educational background and work experience made them qualified to evaluate the program.

Table 2. Activities of participants in frying

ACTIVITIES	FEEDBACK from the SPED teacher and the Researcher
Activity 2.1.2 GROOMING: Combing Hair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing them as employees make the participants more serious in dealing with different activities, especially in making them sign for their Daily Time Record • Singing nursery rhymes are uncomfortable to some since they are already in their adolescents and adulthood stage • Emphasis should be on the importance of hygiene
Activity 2.2.1 SOCIAL SKILLS: Character Traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smooth flow of discussion • Attainable and enjoyable activities • Video presentation for real customer-employee transaction should also be given (if possible)
Activity 2.4.3 CLEANING: Setting the Table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants became serious as teachers pretend to be the customer for the day • They take turns in being the employee of the day • Sanitization activities which was introduced to them should be emphasized since this is something new to the participants • Proper handling of materials, especially the sanitation products should also be • Canteen materials should be used in the activity so participants should already be acquainted with the different condiments and utensils used • Participants should be reminded not to get too excited in doing the activity to avoid accidents
Activity 2.5.2 MONEY CHANGING: Money Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer try-out days should be given so more activities in combining bills and coins could be done • More fun activities for the group should be given so those participants who cannot follow will also engage in the said activity
Activity 2.6.1 WASHING DISHES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participants are good in doing this activity, however, they just need to get familiarized with the names of the utensils, equipment, cupboards, sinks and others
Activity 2.7.1 FRYING: Following Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants should keep calm while doing the activity to avoid untoward accidents • Knowing when the food is cooked or not should be given emphasis in teaching this skill. Nonetheless, proper monitoring of the participants should be done so the food will be prepared well.

specifically in orientation.

The table shows the descriptive analysis of experts' assessment of the developed activities according to attainability of objectives, congruence of activities to objectives, adequacy of activities, appropriateness of resources and appropriateness of success indicators. The first component of the customized vocational program is *Orientation*. This garnered mean scores ranging from 3.26 to 4.00 interpreted as *very much* attainable, *very much* congruent to its objectives, *very much* adequate, resources were *very much* appropriate and success indicators were *very much* appropriate. This means that the above mentioned components are parallel to all activities indicated in Activity 1.

The second component is the *Workplace Readiness Training*. This contains seven activities in grooming, social skills, sorting, cleaning, and money changing, washing dishes and frying. All of which have activities, objectives, resources and success indicators that are

appropriate and attainable in relation to the skills of adults with mild mental retardation.

The last component of the customized vocational program is the *Work Samples: Job Shadows of Internship*. Its activities have attainable objectives, which are also congruent and adequate to the objectives. This final division has appropriate resources and success indicators, which was seen on the weighted means ranging from 3.26 to 4.00.

All the more, all vocational activities developed were appropriate to all components. As per evaluators, the researcher did a well-planned customized vocational program which made all these activities retained.

Tryout Results

Upon finishing the customized vocational program, the activities were tried out starting from the orientation. The participants were introduced to the different workplace

along the premise of the school where they are enrolled. These are sari-sari store, eateries and fish ball stands which are identified establishments, possible for them to get work from.

After the orientation, the participants were subjected to implementing one activity per vocational skill. In grooming

vocational skill, activity 2.1.2 was tried out. This was entitled *Combing Hair*. The objectives of the activity were as follows: demonstrate the proper way of combing the hair; recognize the importance of brushing hair; and learn a new song. The initial activity is to record their DTR and to make them sing "This is the Way". Some of them were shy in singing nursery rhymes, so only few of them participated in the said activity. Task analysis of combing hair went well with them since they already know how to comb their hair. In so manner, the SPED teacher focused on the discussion of importance of hygiene. The activity was finished as all of them performed the activity without assistance of others.

The second activity for try-out was activity 2.2.1 *Character Traits*, under the vocational skill, Social Skills. The objectives of the activity were the following: acquire desirable character traits and behaviors necessary in the workplace; distinguish bad from good behavior skills in the workplace; and demonstrate behaviors through role playing work situations. The activities performed were easy since the adults already know the difference between good and bad behavior. Discussion went well and they were cooperative in sharing situations that they know are good and bad when it comes to dealing with people in the workplace or even in the classroom. The role playing activity of customer-employee transaction also went well. Asking customers' orders and payments was done in a polite manner. The participants were already used to saying polite expression like "thank you", "po", "opo", "please", "excuse me" and "you're welcome". Commendations were easily given to them as they finish giving polite transactions to the customers. Performance-based salary was also discussed by the teacher which made them understand that professionalism should always be present all the time.

The third try-out activity under cleaning vocational skills was *setting the Table*. This was the activity chosen by the researcher for try-out because the other cleaning vocational skills which are sweeping, mopping and emptying the garbage bins were already practiced in their classroom every day. Activity 2.4.3 on setting the table has the following objectives: wash and dry work areas (table top, counters); wet the canteen table; and replace commonly misplaced used items on the table (tissue, utensils, condiments). This activity was done in the classroom so tables and counter tops in the room were the ones used. Implementation of this activity became fun for the participants since they enjoyed preparing different table setting styles where their classmates and teacher evaluated their work. The participants memorized the different table setting styles and materials well. Role

playing was also done where customers will dine and leave the area. Cleaning and sanitation of tables and counter tops were also taught to the participants. All of them tried to become the employee of the day and mastered the activity well.

Money changing vocational skill was the fourth activity
Scholarly J. Sci. Res. and Essay 8

done for try-out. This activity number 2.5.2 on *Money Skills* has the following objectives: identify coins and bills and count coins and bills correctly. This activity may be the hardest activity among the vocational skills because out of ten participants, 4 are behind when it comes to number skills. Identifying and counting bills and coins could be an easy task, but once these are combined, the participants find it difficult to do. Most of them were already acquainted with the different bills and coin dominations but adding them could be a hard task for four of them. A lot of different solo and group exercises were given and longer time for this activity was suggested by the SPED teacher.

The fifth activity was *Washing Dishes*. Activity 2.6.1 has the following objectives: follow instructions in washing dishes (order of dishes to wash); scrub utensils with soap and water; and return utensils in proper places. This activity was easy since all of them take turns in doing this activity when they have their cooking or baking activity. They just need to be familiarized with the utensils, equipment, cupboards, sinks and others, however, washing dishes was easy for them to accomplish.

The last activity that was tried out was activity 2.7.1 *Following Instructions* in frying. The objectives were as follows: follow steps in frying; identify appropriate utensils to be used; and name different ingredients correctly. The participants in this activity get too excited to take their turn in frying, so it was suggested for them to keep calm while doing the activity to avoid untoward accidents. All of them already know how to prepare the materials to be used, name different ingredients, plug and unplug the electric equipment, fry hotdogs and squid balls and prepare the cooked food on a paper plate after cooking. All of them experienced to fry the food and did it well.

Phase IV – Writing the Final Copy

With the aim of further improving the customized vocational program, the researcher tried out a representative sample of the activities to students with mild intellectual disabilities at the Legarda Elementary School – Special Education program. Based on the results of the evaluation and the try-out activity, the final copy of the Customized Vocational Program was prepared. At this stage of the program writing, the comments and suggestions offered by the researcher's advisers, experts, as well as the SPED and TLE teachers' feedback served as basis for the refinement of the program.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researcher made the following conclusions: Adults with intellectual disabilities possess the vocational skills in grooming, social skills, cleaning, frying, sorting, selling, money changing and washing Custodio 9

dishes. Aside from these skills, they also have physical, intellectual and socio-emotional skills that helped them in participating in the customized vocational program. All vocational activities are attainable, adequate and congruent to its objectives. Its resources and success indicators are also appropriate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher presents the following recommendations:

The customized vocational program may be further tried out to young adults with special needs.

This program may be tried out to all public schools with special education classes so the children with special needs, regardless of their economic status, will have the opportunity to be trained and become independent and enjoy a productive life.

The qualified adults with intellectual disabilities should be given continuous upgrading to provide opportunities for professional development to build competence and instill confidence among them.

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