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# Individualised education programmes

## A proposal for more effective teaching and learning

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### Introduction

Rather than assigning (streaming) pupils to a specific class or category, and then, providing them with a pre-determined teaching package or programme which has been worked out for a particular age or group, the preferred approach in special education classrooms is to design a programme specifically for the individual pupil which is known as the Individualised Education Programme (IEP). In this programme, the pupil's school experiences are tailored to fit his/her needs rather than as is the case with some settings, to force the pupil to fit a particular programme.

### Concept and Functions of the IEP

The Individualised Education Programme (IEP) provides:

- a) instructional direction where goals are established for the pupil,
- b) a basis for evaluation where the extent to which the pupil's objectives and goals have been achieved, can be assessed and so the effectiveness of the programme determined,
- c) the potential for communication among all parties involved with the pupil – teachers, parents and other professionals.

The IEP can serve a variety of functions; three of these in particular offer the greatest benefit to teachers and students. *First*, by

encouraging a focus on specific goals set for the child, the IEP can provide instructional direction. In this way the assignment of random exercises which do not have merit for the student's overall progress can be avoided, and programmes can be seen within the context of long-term needs and thus provide appropriate instructional sequences.

*Second*, through the setting up of short-term objectives, IEPs provide a means of evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the teacher. In this sense, they introduce the concept of accountability into teaching.

*Third*, the IEP may increase communication among teacher, pupil, and family. No clear distinction should exist between home and school, because parental involvement should be an integral part of the IEP process.

To integrate the IEP into the prescriptive instructional process commonly used in the special education classroom, the following steps should be taken. Following the initial identification of students (pupil find), assessment data are collected. Next, the IEP is written specifying both the placement of the pupil (to be in the least restrictive and most appropriate setting) and the instructional goals and objectives. Following this, annual evaluation of placement and goals should occur with revision made frequently as needed.

### **Components of the IEP**

IEPs are an essential part of the diagnostic teaching process and follow the same sequence of identification, assessment, etc. In addition, the initial IEP will include placement and instructional programme recommendation. The plan must state present levels of functioning, long and short term goals, services to be provided, and plans for initiating and evaluating services (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988). The components of IEP will include:

- Present level of performance
- Annual long term instructional goals
- Short term objectives

- Prescription of type of services/programmes to be provided
- Classroom placement
- Schedule for the programme and its evaluation

Of those components listed, three – level of performance, annual goals, and short-term objectives – are essential for a functional IEP. The following guidelines serve as a basis for the writing of the components.

### **Performance Levels**

The basis for goal setting should be a summary of the pupil's current level of functioning. The summary statements can take the form of formal test scores, descriptions of behaviours, or identification of specific abilities in relation to a sequence of skills in a specific area. What the pupil can do in terms of communication, self-help skills, physical/manipulative tasks, for example, should be recorded rather than what he/she cannot do. The level of performance statements should clearly identify the pupil's present functioning level so that future goals can be established. Performance levels serve as a basis for both annual goals and short-term objectives, so they should be stated for all areas for which special instructional services will be provided.

### **Annual or Long Term Goals**

The second part of the IEP which is of special importance is the section listing the annual/long term goals. These goals, based on the previously stated performance levels, serve as long-term predictors of successes the pupil is anticipated to experience throughout the year. Annual/long term goals are basically an "educated guess" on the part of the teacher as to what the pupil will accomplish and the degree to which he or she will be successful. These goals can be based on the pupil's chronological age, past learning profiles, and/or recent learning history. According to Blackhurst and Berdine (1993), the most important part of the IEP from the teacher's perspective is the "list of goals and objectives because they provide the direction for what is taught".

The following example illustrates the relationship between performance levels and annual goals. If the current level of performance statement was *identifies only three initial consonant sounds* (t, c, b), then a possible annual goal could be *identifies all initial consonant sounds and/or identifies short vowel sounds within cvc trigrams* (e.g., top, cat, bag).

When writing annual goals, three considerations should be made. First, these goals should be positive – providing an applicable guide for sequential instruction. It is important to restrict the use of negative comments so that beneficial communication will result among special educators, regular classroom teachers, pupils, and parents.

Next, annual/long term goals should be *measurable*. To achieve this, they should incorporate precise, behavioural terms that indicate action, avoid difficulties in evaluation, and promote agreement among observers. The goals should be stated so it can be clearly determined that the goal has/has not been reached.

Third, annual goals should be *pupil oriented*. The rationale for this attribute is that the only measure of success is what the pupil has learned, not what he or she allegedly has been taught. An example of an acceptable goal here could be: "The pupil will correctly differentiate between the letters /b/ and /d/". an unacceptable goal might be: "The child will be taught the difference between the letters /b/ and /d/".

## **Short-Term Objectives**

The final major step involved in the construction of the IEP is the development of the *short-term objectives*. These are the steps that need to be taken to reach the annual/long term goals. They provide the stages of teaching that should be followed in sequence to reach that goal and so should be consistent with it. Often, the objective is a skill which can be task analysed. Like annual/long term goals, short term objectives should be measurable, student oriented, and positive; they also should reflect close attention to stated criteria for task success.

Because they are so closely related, it is important to restate the significance of the need for consistency between short-term objectives and annual/long term goals. Since the short term objectives represent steps in the annual goal process, they should reflect major instructional accomplishments between the current levels of performance and the final goals. To accomplish this, three to eight objectives are usually identified and listed, each representing a skill that might be achievable in a time frame of perhaps one or two weeks to several months. The development of objectives from annual goals is a form of task analysis. By extending this process, the teacher can then develop a unified set of objectives upon which weekly and daily instruction can be based.

## **Conclusion**

Effective teachers always plan their lessons. Lesson planning involves deciding what teaching strategies, methods and materials will be most effective for instructing the pupil or modifying his/her behaviour. Lesson planning must fit the pupil's needs and not be an arbitrary intervention based on a restrictive curriculum which prescribes what should be done in the classroom. Well written IEPs can go a long way to help a teacher implement successful lessons which specifically meet the needs and abilities of pupils under their charge.

## **Reference**

- Blackhurst, A. E. & Berdine, W. H. (1993). *An introduction to special education*. 3rd Edition. N. Y: Harper Collins College Publishers.
- Hallahan, D. P. & Kauffman, J. M. (1988). *Exceptional Children*, 4th Edition. N. J: Prentice-Hall.