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# THE ROLE OF READING SPECIALIST IN DEVELOPING IEP's (INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS)

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Everywhere, supervisors, teachers and education specialists are busily engaged in inservice meetings and workshops in an effort to become familiar with writing, implementing and revising Individual Education Programs (IEP's) for children eligible or enrolled in a Special Education Program. The provision in The Education For All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142, requiring an IEP for each handicapped child has caused a great deal of activity and development in the field of Special Education.

In contrast, hardly a ripple is heard concerning IEP's in reading education forums despite the fact that reading difficulties are often a significant problem among handicapped children, particularly those diagnosed as learning disabled (LD). Informal discussion with many reading teacher/specialists reveals that while they have been informally consulted in reviewing and making suggestions for revising already developed IEP's in the area of reading, the reading teacher/specialist is not usually called upon to participate on the evaluation team which develops the IEP.

Recent changes in Health Education and Welfare Department regulations related to the diagnosis of learning disability specify the possible inclusion of remedial reading teachers on the diagnostic team. This change points to a different role for the reading teacher/specialist in the development of IEP's. Hence, reading teachers will need to become familiar with the purpose and scope of the Individualized Education Program and their role in the total effort to improve reading instruction for the handicapped.

This article will provide background information about the Individualized Education Program (IEP) requirement of Public Law 94-142 and discuss the changing role and responsibilities of reading teacher/specialists in helping to plan and implement IEP's.

## *IEP What Is It?*

The Individualized Education Program, IEP, is a written statement developed for each handicapped student which details an individualized plan of education and the specific special and/or regular education services to be provided the handicapped student. (Education Of Handicapped

Children, August, 1977). As of October, 1977, and in the beginning of each school year, each public agency must have an individualized education program in effect for every handicapped child who is a recipient of its special education services.

Public Law 94-142 regulations specify the content of each IEP. Each must be in writing and contain statements with the following information:

- a. A statement of the child's present levels of educational performances;
- b. A statement of annual goals, including short term instructional objectives;
- c. A statement of the specific special education and related services to be provided to the child, and the extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular educational programs;
- d. The projected dates for initiation of services and the anticipated duration of the services; and
- e. Appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining on at least an annual basis whether the short term instructional objectives are being achieved. (Education Of Handicapped Children, August, 1977).

Appropriate evaluation procedures are detailed in the regulations. The evaluation is to be performed by a multi-disciplinary evaluation team, a group of professionals, including at least one teacher or other specialist, with knowledge in the area of suspected disability.

Following the evaluation process, the individualized education program is developed in a meeting by a representative of the local education agency who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of instruction designed to meet the special needs of the handicapped child. Included in this meeting are the child's teacher, the parents or guardian, and, where appropriate, the child.

It is evident that the procedures and content of the individualized education program differ from previous placement practices in special education or remedial programs. While the evaluation procedures and development of long term goals and short term objectives are a familiar procedure, the involvement with a multi-disciplinary team, and meetings with parents, teachers, and child to develop a written individualized educational program are practices infrequently seen in the past. Currently, special education is changing its operational procedures to comply with the law.

#### *Changes In The HEW Regulations*

Of particular concern to reading personnel are the Health, Education, and Welfare regulations published in December, 1977. These regulations specify the additional team members who can be involved in evaluating a child with a suspected specific learning disability. To be included on the multi-disciplinary team there shall be:

At least one person qualified to conduct individualized

diagnostic examinations of children such as a school psychologist, speech-language pathologist or remedial reading teacher. (Assistance to The States For Education Of Handicapped Children, December, 1977.)

Since many learning disability children have associated reading problems, it can be assumed that reading teacher/specialists will now be called upon to add their competencies in the development of the reading instruction component of IEP's. It seems evident that the role of the reading teacher/specialist will change from the predominant remedial reading teacher model in practice today.

### *The Changing Role Of The Reading Specialist/Teacher*

The role of the reading teacher/specialist will be that of an evaluation team member where it is felt that his/her expertise will add to the competencies of the various specialists. The reading teacher/specialist will initially meet with the other team members (L.D., psychologist, principal, etc.) to help plan the diagnostic process or review the results of diagnostic testing and other pertinent information. The reading teacher will contribute knowledge in integrating reading test results with the total evaluation data. She/he will assist in developing realistic goals and in planning long range and short term objectives in reading and language arts for the child to accomplish.

The reading teacher's interpretation and plans will need to be flexible to incorporate the child's special learning problems, unique learning style and behavioral pattern that were discovered by other team members during diagnosis. It is vital for the reading teacher and all team members to understand the diagnostic findings of each team member and not to view the results within his/her own field's interpretation. This is necessary because the child may have a learning difficulty which has resulted in a reading problem. The reading problem may be remediated by adjusting instruction to accommodate the learning difficulty. Teaching techniques may need to be planned which are unusual or clinical in nature in order to help the child overcome the problem.

In summary, reading teachers will act as either diagnostician or consultant to an interdisciplinary team offering insights into the interpretation of the reading skills abilities of the student and in planning the IEP. Also, the reading teacher will be a receptive team member accepting suggestions from other team members who offer specific teaching and learning techniques.

### *Writing An IEP In Reading and Language Arts*

The reading teacher/specialist's first step in helping to write the IEP in reading will be to discuss with the evaluation team the child's level of performance on his estimated instructional level. In addition, the child's specific reading skills strengths and weaknesses at the instructional level will be reviewed. This information will be a guide to planning the long and

short term reading objectives or what the child should be expected to learn in a specified period of time, possibly a semester. When developing long and short term objectives, the reading teacher and other members of the evaluation team will need to keep in mind the child's previous rate of learning or his basic learning capacity. In developing a specific long term objective such as "The child will learn 50 Dolch Basic Sight Words" this semester, the reading teacher would suggest that learning 3-5 Dolch words each week would be an appropriate short term objective. The same process would be applied for each major reading skill area, perceptual skills, word attack and reading comprehension, and in language arts areas, listening comprehension, spelling, alphabet and writing.

In addition, the reading teacher would include long and short term objectives on motivation or attitude towards reading and physical behavior during reading instruction. An example of a motivation and attitude objectives would be: "To increase his desire to improve his attitude." The short term objective would be "To have the student mark a chart showing his daily progress and the skills he learned as well as those he needs to improve." This shows the child what he is accomplishing and enhances his self-concept. An example of a long term physical behavior objective would be: "To hold his writing paper stationary with his free hand when writing on it." A short term objective would be "To hold the writing paper with the free hand when writing one out of three times with only one reminder."

Below is an example of an IEP for a diagnosed LD child with a reading disability. Included are long term (semester) objectives and an example of short term (weekly) objectives for each long term. Daily lesson plans with activities to use to accomplish each short term objective can be drawn up at a weekly planning session by the reading teacher.

#### *Individualized Education Program (IEP)*

Long Term Objectives for a semester (skills to improve are underlined):

1. To increase reading level in comprehension, vocabulary and speed by 6 months as measured by alternate forms of the initial screening tests.
2. To increase flash recognition of the Dolch Basic Sight Words by 50.
3. To improve oral reading at the student's independent reading level by pausing and using correct voice intonation at punctuation and increasing his eye-voice span to 3 words when checked.
4. To identify when heard and apply knowledge when analyzing an unknown word all single consonant sounds, phonograms as measured by the Botel Phonics Inventory and in teacher prepared tests.
5. To be able to write all lower case letters in cursive in sequential order.
6. To improve eye-hand coordination and L-R orientation by copying correctly (note words, punctuation, beginning capitals, etc.) a short passage from a textbook on grade level daily within a specified period of time.
7. To increase motivation and attitude towards reading and language arts by having the student mark his daily progress in each area on charts; by having him set skill and other performance goals on the charts.

8. To hold his writing paper/booklet stationary with his free hand when writing.
9. To hold the book 12 inches from his eyes when reading.

Short term (Weekly) Objectives based on the above long term objectives.

#### *Comprehension and Speed*

1. To complete all comprehension exercises with a grade no lower than with 70% accuracy within the allotted time.

#### *Vocabulary*

2. To recognize and pronounce the new vocabulary in his reading exercises.
3. To learn 3-5 Dolch Basic Sight Words.
4. To note all periods by pausing at them when reading orally.
5. To complete all phonic exercises in the *bl* and *ch* blends at an 80% mastery level.
6. To learn to write in cursive 3 new small letters *d*, *e*, and *f* by memory and to practice writing by memory *a-f* correctly and with ease.
7. To copy 10 words in 3 minutes from his textbook. All writing must be from the left to the right side of the paper.
8. To mark progress on charts after each skills exercise is completed.
9. To remember to hold reading material approximately 12 inches from his face with no more than 3 reminders daily.

Evaluation of the above long and short term objectives is built in. If the reading teacher notes that the short term objectives are too easy/difficult, she/he can adjust the objective's requirements; hence, the long term objectives would be adjusted according to the short.

The reading teacher may be involved as a team member in the planning and implementation of IEP's for diagnosed LD children. The team will be writing detailed long and short ranged objectives for each child in order to alleviate baby-sitting and basketweaving teaching situations. The specialized educational needs of these children calls for every second of time at school to be spent in structured and specific individualized programs. For this type of program, the reading teacher's expertise in the team's efforts in writing and implementing IEP's is necessary. Training for reading teacher/specialists concerning IEP's is just as essential as it has been for LD specialists.

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