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**ABSTRACT**

Curriculum is an essential element in Individualized Education Program (IEP) development, which has often been left to special education teachers unequipped for the task. A lack of district-wide curriculum foundations leads to haphazard decision-making. Teachers have often relied on their own content biases, speculations, and standardized tests for evaluation. Curriculum projects and models do exist and need to be implemented districtwide to form a common curriculum base. The 6-S paradigm differentiates the instructional process so that constituent elements may be examined independently before their interaction is studied. In this model, someone teaches something to somebody, somehow, somewhere, sometime. Such models are necessary because teachers need to use curriculum as an objective means for evaluating and adapting instruction based on ongoing assessment of student progress. They also need to provide instruction that is integrated across subject areas, allowing students to build a knowledge base for future learning. Special education programs need to provide continuity through a developmental and relevant progression of content. A 17-item bibliography is included. (LMM)

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Curriculum: The Keystone to Instructional Planning  
in Special Education

by

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## Curriculum: The Keystone to Instructional Planning in Special Education

### Introduction

Curriculum - the content of instruction - is interpolated from goals of education that are set forth by state and local education agencies. While the goals of education - literacy, and social and economic survival - are the same for all students, the degree to which each individual achieves these goals differs. It is perhaps for this reason that Kaufman and English (1976) observed that the imprecise nature of statements of the goals of education has contributed to the diffuseness seen in today's regular education curriculum. This diffuseness extends to concern with special education curriculum as well, since much of what is taught in special education classes is drawn from the regular education curriculum.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the role of curriculum in special education within the contexts of the individualized education program (IEP) and the "6-S" paradigm of instruction.

### Early IEP Development

Early implementation of PL 94-142, The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, saw emphasis placed on procedural compliance with mandates. Concern centered on meeting timelines specified in the law, protecting the due process rights of consumers of special education services, and generating reports attesting to compliance.

As with other parts of PL 94-142, the IEP posed a dilemma for many special educators: whether to attend to procedural compliance - the timelines and logistics of creating the document - OR to attend to the substance of the IEP, the content of instruction and its relevance for the student. More often than not, special education administrators were forced to choose procedural compliance as an alternative to costly and time consuming due process challenges from parents (Gross, 1979).

The tasks of IEP development and implementation were often delegated to special education teachers. With little direction, the teachers turned to objectives banks (generated either in-district or by commercial publishers), curriculum guides and scope and sequence charts, or "their own intuitive sense of what comes next" as a basis for developing IEPs (Tymitz-Wolf, 1982). Not surprisingly, special education teachers have become increasingly frustrated and discouraged since they have been delegated tasks that they are ill-prepared to assume. Most special education teachers lack the training and experience that would equip them to generate valid long- and short-range objectives for students. Equally important, the teachers have not been trained in consultation skills typically required in IEP meetings, and are not prepared to rationalize their professional decisions to colleagues and parents.

The absence of districtwide curriculum foundations that provide direction for educational programming in special education creates a void that leads to haphazard instructional

decision making. Where teachers have no curriculum roadmap on which to plot "where the student has been, where he's at, and where he's going" they have no objective basis for making curriculum decisions. Consequently, teachers have relied on their own content biases and speculations about what the student's priority areas for instruction are. Since biases and speculations can vary greatly from teacher to teacher, this leads to a randomness in the selection of the content of instruction provided to handicapped students. Related to this is the problem that, in the absence of curriculum foundations, special education teachers are forced to rely on standardized tests to determine students' current levels of educational functioning and their rate of progress as well. The use of these tests for instructional purposes is of questionable value since they do not typically test what has been taught in the classroom, nor do they provide much useful information to guide teachers' subsequent curriculum decisions.

The lack of instructional consistency within special education classrooms is exacerbated when one looks at the differences in curriculum and approach used from one level of the program to the next. Thus, the absence of a consistent curriculum base from which the special education teachers in the district draw their content creates a lack of continuity in the special education program. A consequence of this discontinuity is that as students move from level to level, e.g., primary to intermediate, they are exposed to a random assortment of instructional expe-

riences, a crazy quilt of learnings. Implicitly, the students are expected to integrate the instructional experiences into a coherent whole for themselves, and to transfer what they have learned into socially adaptive ways to cope in the adult world. Such an expectation is contrary to research on the learning characteristics of handicapped learners (Ellis, 1963). From an extensive review of studies of the mentally retarded, we find that these individuals have great difficulty generalizing information learned in one situation to other similar situations unless they are taught to do so. This information is too important for special education decision makers and curriculum implementors to ignore.

#### The IEP and Curriculum Planning

In recent years, a shift in the emphasis of implementation of PL 94-142 has been noted that suggests movement from procedural to substantive compliance with the law (Deno & Mirkin, 1980; H. Goldstein, 1980; Weiner, 1978). While it is likely that this shift is due, in part, to special educators' recognition that attention to substantive program issues represents good professional practice, parent advocates have also played a role in focusing attention on what happens after students are classified. Too frequently, the questions being asked by parent advocates are "now that you have classified out children, what sort of an education will you provide? What will the childrens' curriculum consist of? And, too often, the questions are met with silence or ambiguous references to the regular education curriculum.

Through the IEP it is possible that the intent of the law -- appropriate education for handicapped students -- will be realized. Such a possibility exists since the IEP represents the most direct link to classroom instruction, and has the greatest potential to affect the instructional process. If the IEP is to become a powerful instructional tool, however, it is important that curriculum foundations are available to guide IEP development.

To accommodate the range of handicapped students entitled to a free, appropriate public education, it is likely that an array of curriculum options is needed. For some learners, parallel strands of curriculum keyed to the regular education curriculum need to be devised; strands that represent the systematic expansion or contraction of the regular education curriculum. For other learners, alternative curriculum strands need to be developed that incorporate relevant instruction for students whose needs are not served through adaptation of the regular education curriculum, and that allow these students to achieve the goals of education by way of a different route.

Such an array of curriculum options would allow IEP developers to select annual goals and short-term objectives within the context of a curriculum base. And, through the use of a consistent curriculum base, the probability is increased that a more focused, coordinated and relevant instructional program would be provided for handicapped students.

To focus on the importance of curriculum for special education does not suggest that appropriate curriculum materials

do not exist. Major curriculum innovations in special education supported by the federal government during the 1960s and 1970s include: The Social Learning Curriculum (H. Goldstein, 1974; 1975), Project MATH (Cawley and others, 1975), I CAN (Field Services Unit, 1974), Project MORE (Bieberly, Lent and Keilitz, 1974), and Me Now (BSCS, 1974), Me and My Environment (BSCS, 1977), and Me in the Future (BSCS, 1979). Add to these the multitude of curriculum projects devised at state and local levels and the results suggest that what is needed in special education is not further curriculum development as such. Instead, the time has come to select from among the materials that are available those that are responsive to and compatible with a district's needs, and to weave them into an integrated set of goals, objectives and activities. What follows after is the implementation of this curriculum in the district's program.

From a common curriculum base, curriculum mapping for individual students can be managed in a systematic way, and a substantive IEP can be developed and implemented. By planning experiences that are developmental, activities at each level in the student's schooling serve as a foundation for learning increasingly complex knowledge, skills, and behaviors. In this way, greater use would be made of handicapped students' school years since they would be learning information that is both immediately useful and that, at the same time, serves as a foundation for meeting long-range instructional goals.

Were this curriculum-based approach to IEP development used,



it would respond to a caveat recently expressed by Herbert Goldstein (1981) concerning the use of the IEP as an alternative to having handicapped students take state-mandated competency tests. He cautioned that LEAs may need to lay a handicapped student's IEPs end-to-end to demonstrate a coherent progression of content that the student has mastered and that allows the student to meet the goals of education. Looking to a future that promises ever-increasing emphasis on accountability, the time may not be far off that Goldstein's speculation becomes reality.

#### The "6-S Paradigm and Curriculum Planning

Unlike some views which equate curriculum with the entire instructional process (Ornstein, 1982), the "6-S" paradigm seeks to differentiate the elements that comprise the instructional process. This is done in order that each of the constituent elements can be examined independently of the others, as a prior step to studying their interaction. For this reason, the content and process of instruction are separated, and both are differentiated from the environmental factors that influence the instructional process and from the actors in that process.

According to the "6-S" paradigm, "SOMEONE (the manager of learning) teaches SOMETHING (the content of instruction: curriculum) to SOMEBODY (the learner) SOMEHOW (the process of instruction: strategies and tactics) SOMEWHERE (the learning environment) SOMETIME (according to a set schedule, at a particular pace)" (Alter & M. Goldstein, in press). Implicit in the paradigm is a

view that teaching incorporates all of the significant instructional behaviors in which the manager of learning engages. Most importantly, these include this individual's evaluation of ongoing instructional progress of students, and his/her selection, evaluation and adaptation of instructional content to meet students' needs. Adaptation, an essential skill, requires that the manager of learning be able to systematically reteach and/or reinforce learning.

From this perspective, we find yet another rationale for providing developmentally organized, sequential curriculum for use in special education. If teachers are to evaluate student progress, and adapt instruction to more effectively guide learning, they must have available the tools by which to accomplish these tasks: the curriculum roadmap that allows the teacher to know what has been taught (content) and how it was taught (process)--- as the bases for making subsequent instructional decisions.

This "test - teach - test" approach is not new. However, by adding an "adapt" action to the approach, it is possible to accommodate the learning characteristics of ALL students within the paradigm, rather than as an afterthought. Equally important, the availability of curriculum roadmaps allows adaptation of instruction to be managed as systematically as the other aspects of the instructional process (M. Goldstein, in preparation).

### Summary

The relationships between the "6-S" paradigm and IEP

development were discussed in an earlier paper by Alter and M. Goldstein (in press). The purpose of this paper has been to focus on the importance of curriculum as an essential element in IEP development, using the "6-S" paradigm and current IEP development practices as the bases for discussion.

Three related issues were identified that point up the need for curriculum roadmaps for special education: the teacher's need to use curriculum as an objective means to evaluate and adapt instruction, based on ongoing assessment of student progress; (2) the teacher's need to provide instruction that is integrated across subject matter areas, and that allows the student to build a knowledge base as a foundation for future learning; and (3) the special education program's need to provide continuity in instructional programming among the special education settings in the district so that the program provided for students represents a developmental and relevant progression of content that assists them to meet the goals of education to the extent that their abilities permit.

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