

The Teacher's Role in Successful Programming

Good programming for students with special needs means matching the learning style of that student to the learning expectations we have for them. Good teaching always involves differentiation.

What is Differentiation?

- The adjustment of the teaching process according to the learning needs of the students.
- A good teacher uses differentiation to focus on the strengths and needs of different individuals in a class.
- Tasks and activities suitable for the more advanced students, the average, and the less able in the classes
- For a student with specific individual special educational needs, we need to devise an individual plan that will address these needs

What is an IEP?

According to the Ministry of Education, an Individual Education Plan must be developed for each student who has been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC), It is a legal document that lays out an educational program for an individual.

Do we need an IEP?

Successful teaching cannot take place without devising a plan and programming for an individual student with special needs. If a student has specific identified needs, then a plan of action must be put into place. Even if we don't use an official, formal I.E.P , we must have a plan. We might choose to call it a Personal Education Plan (P.E.P.)

Any plan that is devised for a student must be based on and constantly reviewed by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation. It must contain specific objectives, teaching strategies and an outline of educational services that will be required over the year to meet the needs of the exceptional student. Plans should be revised as required to build on skills and knowledge attained.

We need to follow Ministry guidelines as to the components that are included in a plan, particularly those pertaining to the development of a program to match the needs and learning style of a student. This is good teaching practice, and helps towards justification and accountability of our actions to the Ministry. IEPs and all other Program plans for a student are working documents.

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IEPs and Student Accommodations

Components of any plan should include:

- Assessment Data
- Student's Strengths (learning styles, previously acquired learning skills)
- Student's Needs (reason why the student requires a special education plan – skill deficits)
- List of subjects, courses, or alternative programs to which the plan applies.
- Accommodations
- Provincial Assessments (Accommodations & Exceptions)
- Human Resources (teaching/non-teaching)
- Evaluation & Reporting Format (Provincial Report Card or Alternative Report)
- Transition Plan (if required)
- Special Education Program
- Log of Parent/ Student Consultation & Staff Review/Updating
- Principal's signature
- Parent's signature

Strengths and needs are important components. They must be based on assessments, evaluation and observation and should be developed based on educational, psychological and on the basis of observation of the student. It is the needs of the student that will determine the expectations we have in the plan, and the strengths will help us to determine the most successful strategies to use for the student to achieve success. A psychological educational report is written by a qualified educational psychological consultant who may have been employed by a school board, or may be from a private practice and employed by the parents. The report provides information about a student's strengths and needs and their learning style, which will in turn help to determine what teaching strategies and interventions may be appropriate for them to achieve success. It is important to note that the recommendations given in these reports should be seen as guidelines only. They are not written in stone and some recommendations may not be practical to apply in a particular school setting.

Strengths and needs may include such things as:

- Cooperation with others
- Creativity
- Fine Motor Skills
- Gross Motor Skills
- Initiative
- Social Skills
- Conflict Resolution
- Attention
- Expressive Language
- Receptive Language
- Self Advocacy skills
- Organizational Skills

How to start writing a Personal Education Plan

- Review all assessments (Psychological and Educational)
- Identify strengths, weaknesses and learning style
- Identify appropriate teaching strategies to match student's needs
- Plan and accommodate/modify programming and assessment to meet the individual needs of the student.

Needs can be of an academic nature, e.g. Reading, Spelling, Written Output, Reasoning, Math etc. But also, they may include non-academic areas, e.g. Anxiety issues, Attention/Hyperactivity, Self Advocacy, Behaviour etc. Needs have an impact on the way a student is able to learn and meet program expectations. A Personal Education Plan can be designed specifically for that student and address those needs. The plan will include Accommodations and/or Modifications, along with teaching strategies and interventions that are required to address these needs and help the student to be successful in meeting program expectations.

Accommodations vs Modifications

Accommodations:

'Accommodated only' is the term used on an IEP to identify subjects or courses from the Ontario curriculum in which the student requires accommodations alone in order to work towards achieving the regular grade expectations.

Accommodations refer to the special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment needed to enable a student to learn and demonstrate learning. They do not alter the Provincial Curriculum expectations for the grade or course.

Accommodations are good practice in teaching. They will help a student with specific learning needs to meet the expectations of the course. They reflect teaching strategies that are different from what is usually provided for a class and reflect the specific needs of a student based on information taken from psychological reports and other assessments.

There are three types of Accommodations: Instructional, Environmental and Assessment.

Instructional may include:

- Access to a calculator
- Access to a computer
- Access to a Word Processor or Writing Output software
- Extra time for copying/taking notes
- Supplying photocopies of important notes

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- Scribing / Reading
- Chunking of information
- Graphic organisers

Environmental may include:

- Individual desk or work area
- Minimize distractions
- Preferential seating

Assessment accommodations should be readily available to a student. For example, if there are problems with written output, then accommodations may include a verbal assessment exercise / scribing / building or hands-on activity in place of written work.

Categories of Assessment:

- Knowledge and Understanding
- Thinking, Inquiry and Problem Solving (TIPS)
- Communication
- Application

Teachers have some leeway in working towards the final mark in how each of these categories are weighted ie Within reason may weight more towards a student's strengths and less towards weaknesses.

Appropriate Accommodations for teaching or assessment are changes to the HOW we expect a student to achieve course expectations, but are NOT changes to the WHAT that they are expected to know from the course. All these accommodations do not compromise the expectations of a given course, but instead, facilitate the student to be successful in imparting his knowledge and understanding of a particular subject. We cannot compromise the integrity of the course expectations content.

Modifications:

'Modified' is the term used on an IEP to identify subjects or courses from the Ontario Curriculum in which the student needs modified expectations. These expectations would differ in some way from the regular grade expectations. Often in secondary school courses, modifications would involve changing the number and/or complexity of the regular grade level expectations. Modifications can be made more easily to program in elementary schools than with High School credits.

Modifications are changes made in the age-appropriate grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student's learning needs. They may involve developing expectations that reflect knowledge and skills required in the Curriculum for a different grade level and / or decreasing the number or complexity of the regular grade level curriculum expectations.

For each subject or course in which a student requires modified expectations, the following must be included in a plan:

- Current level of achievement
- Annual program goal(s) – statement describing what a student can reasonably be expected to accomplish by the end of the school year. (They are not rigid requirements and may be revised as necessary)
- Learning Expectations - The Ministry recommends that for each learning expectation listed in a modified program, the IEP should indicate a corresponding teaching strategy (only if individualized and particular to that expectation) and also, a corresponding assessment method.

In High Schools, how can we give modifications without compromising the integrity of the course and working to the expectations of the Ministry? Credit courses are based on Ministry expectations. If we can't justify that modifications DON'T compromise credit expectations, then the credit can be revoked by the Ministry. It is the role of the school to use the information given in the psychological education report, any other assessments available, and knowledge of the student to help guide and channel the student to the appropriate level of credit course in High School where they will be able to achieve success to the best of their potential and ability.

Alternative Programs:

A student's special needs may be of a less academic nature. The question is where on an individual plan can we make provision and plan specific intervention for these needs. On an IEP, we can develop 'Alternative' expectations which help students acquire knowledge and skills that are not represented in the Ontario Curriculum. As Alternative expectations are not part of a subject or course from the provincial curriculum documents, they are considered to constitute alternative programs or courses.

Often students in private school settings have special needs such as learning disabilities, ADHD, or other exceptional needs. They might also be socially immature or suffer from anxiety. The school may need to implement an alternative program to address these needs

Examples:

Speech remediation	Self Esteem
Social Skills	Self-Regulation Skills
Personal care/ Life Skills	Organisational Skills
Behaviour	Self Advocacy Skills

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Alternative programs to address skills may be listed separately but the teaching strategies and interventions for these programs may be applied over several credit courses. Eg. Organisational skills, or Self Advocacy Skills.

It is therefore, imperative that ALL teachers of the student are familiar with his/her individual plan.

Alternative courses may be found at a secondary school level and would be non-credit courses. Expectations for these courses are individualized and generally focus on preparing the student for daily living. School Boards must use “K” course codes and titles to identify alternative courses (These can be found in the ministry’s Common Code listings at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/list/commoncc/ccc.html)

An example of such a course would be Money Management and Personal Banking (KBB)

In conclusion, When we are faced with programming for a student with Special Needs we should:

- Review all reports, assessments etc
- Collaborate with all professionals (teaching and non-teaching) who may have pertinent information about the student’s learning style, strengths and needs.
- Develop Personal Educational Plan to match identified needs with appropriate expectations, teaching strategies and interventions
- Follow Ministry guidelines and include required components in plan.
- Provide accommodations that enable a student to complete credit expectations
- Adapt teaching styles to best match student’s learning style
- If modifications are required in High School, review the student’s credit selection and guide towards credit options that more suitable match with ability level
- Ensure High School credits are not compromised with the application of a personal plan (ie Only change the HOW and NOT the WHAT)
- Constant review and evaluation of plan (working document)

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