

THE EXTENSION OF THE INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM CONCEPT IN VOCATIONAL TEACHER EDUCATION

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Vocational education is vital to handicapped students if they want to become productive members of society and to maximize their self-sufficiency. Without vocational education, many of the millions of handicapped youth leaving school will be unemployed, on welfare, totally dependent on society, or otherwise idle much of the time. With vocational education, however, educators estimate that 75 percent of the physically disabled and 90 percent of the mentally retarded can work, either in the competitive job market or in a sheltered workshop.

Congress has recognized the importance of providing vocational education to all handicapped students, including special education and related services; therefore, several major pieces of legislation have been passed. Among these are three major pieces of legislation which have significant impact on vocational education:

- P. L. 93-112 Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments of 1973
- P. L. 94-142 Education of All Handicapped Children Act
- P. L. 94-482 Education Amendments of 1976, Title II, Vocational Education

Each of these Acts requires an individualized program for handicapped students. Since vocational education is coordinated with both special education and vocational rehabilitation, and since improved linkage on behalf of the handicapped served by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) program is needed, it becomes necessary for vocational teachers to interpret, develop, and utilize team-developed individualized education programs (IEP) as they relate to provisions of vocational education for handicapped persons.

Needs

An individualized education program (IEP) is a written statement for each handicapped student developed in a meeting with a representative of the local educational agency, the teacher, the parents or guardians, and when appropriate, the student. An IEP shall include (a) the present levels of education performance of the student, (b) annual goals, including short-term objectives, (c) the specific education services to be provided to the student and the extent to which the student shall be able to participate in regular education programs, (d) the project date

for initiation and anticipated duration of such services, and appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether instructional objectives are being achieved (P. L. 94-142).

Vocational educators have long given recognition to individualized training programs, especially to providing individualized training programs for special needs students. In several studies which were conducted to identify the needed competencies of vocational teachers of special needs students, competencies which are related to individualized instruction tended to be rated as very important. Shown in Table 1 are mean ratings of importance of several tasks which are related to providing individualized instruction for special needs students.

For instance, the task of identifying the occupational interests and aptitudes of special needs students has a mean rating of importance of 4.09 in the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff's (UAPB) study (1978), and 4.11 in the National Teacher Education Workshop's study (1976) both based on a five-point Likert-type scale. Also, this task was viewed by 98 percent of the participants of the National Evaluation Systems' study (1978) as a very important or an important task.

Identifying learning difficulties of students had been rated even higher than identifying student's occupational interests and aptitudes. In a study conducted at the Kent State University (1975), this task had a mean score of 4.66 based on a five-point Likert-type scale, while in UAPB's study, this task had a mean rating of 4.34. In the National Evaluation Systems' study, 100 percent of the respondents indicated that this task was either very important or important.

Determining types of materials, methods, and learning situations which are most appropriate for special needs students is another important task of vocational teachers of special needs students. This task had mean ratings of importance of 4.24, 4.44, and 4.34 respectively in UAPB's study, the National Teacher Education Workshop's study, and the Kent State's study.

Vocational teachers recognize not only the need for providing individualized instruction for special needs students but also the need to work with other teachers and educational specialists. A task which deals with vocational teachers' competency in a collaborating process had a mean rating of importance of 4.05 in UAPB's study and of 4.02 in the National Teacher Education Workshop's study. Also, 92 percent of the respondents of the National Evaluation Systems' study indicated this task as either very important or important. In addition, two tasks, one regarding the competency of cooperating with other supportive personnel to provide needed remedial services, and the other dealing with the competency of referring students to guidance counselors or other specialist, had very high ratings too. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1

VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS RELATED TO PROVIDING INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION
FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

<u>Tasks</u>	<u>University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Study</u>	<u>National Teacher Education Work- shop's Study</u>	<u>Kent State's Study</u>	<u>National Evaluation Systems' Study</u>
	(Mean*)	(Mean*)	(Mean*)	(%**)
1. Administer diagnostic assessment instruments and techniques for classification and placement of special needs students.	3.98	4.00	4.04	
2. Analyze special needs students' occupational interests and aptitudes.	4.09	4.11		98
3. Identify the specific nature of students' learning difficulty.	4.24		4.66	100
4. Determine types of materials, methods, and learning situations which are most appropriate for special needs students.	4.34	4.44	4.34	
5. Implement individualized instruction for special needs students.	4.10			
6. Evaluate special needs students' performance and achievements to determine whether course objectives have been met.	4.02	4.13	4.43	99

*Based on a one to five Likert-type scale.

**Percentage of respondents indicating task is very important or important.

Table 2

VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS RELATED TO THE NEED FOR COOPERATING WITH OTHER EDUCATORS
AND SPECIALISTS IN PROVIDING INSTRUCTION AND SERVICES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

<u>Tasks</u>	<u>University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff Study</u>	<u>National Teacher Education Work- shop's Study</u>	<u>Kent State's Study</u>	<u>National Evaluation Systems' Study</u>
	(Mean*)	(Mean*)	(Mean*)	(%**)
1. Collaborate with other educators, specialists, parents, and special needs students in planning process.	4.05	4.02		92
2. Cooperate with other supportive personnel to provide needed remedial services.	4.12			
3. Refer students to the guidance counselor and/or other specialist (e.g. speech pathologist, audio-logist, reading specialist, etc.)	4.27			99

*Based on a one to five Likert-type scale.

**Percentage of respondents indicating task is very important or important.

Even though vocational teachers have recognized the need for providing individualized instruction for special needs students and the need to work with other educators and specialists, they do not fully accept the responsibility to prepare individualized education programs for handicapped students. In the study conducted at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, both superintendents and vocational teachers were asked to rate the importance of developing IEPs for handicapped students. Based on a five-point Likert-type scale, the mean rating obtained from the superintendents' group was 4.26, and from the teachers' group, only 3.95. When superintendents and teachers were asked how competent their teachers or they themselves were in developing IEPs, the mean ratings of confidence were 3.22 and 3.12, respectively, for superintendents' and teachers' groups. It seems that both school administrators and vocational teachers agreed that they were not competent in developing IEPs.

Given the extent of demand in providing individualized education programs for handicapped students, and without having sufficient knowledge of the procedures and effective ways to develop and implement IEPs, there is a need to offer programs to equip vocational teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Efforts Responsive to These Needs

Concentrated programs are needed to develop vocational teachers' competencies in developing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs. Also, they should be trained to fully accept handicapped students in their classes. This process may be time consuming; however, it will aid and facilitate vocational education programs and personnel in effectively serving handicapped students. Programs to respond to these needs may take a variety of forms. The following suggestions might provide direction as to further program development.

Development of Teacher's Handbook

Based on the findings of research studies, inputs from experts, and the review of literature in related areas, a teacher's handbook would be advantageous. Such a handbook should contain at least the following parts:

- a. the components of IEPs in vocational education
- b. the resources needed for developing IEPs in vocational education
- c. the procedures for developing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs in vocational education
- d. the formats and forms used for developing and implementing IEPs in vocational education
- e. roles and responsibilities of IEP team members in vocational education

After the teacher's handbook has been developed, a field testing should be conducted to examine the usability of the handbook. The field testing sites should include the secondary, postsecondary, and adult levels of vocational programs in urban, suburban, and rural settings with different types of handicapped students. The results of the field testing can then be used to revise the teacher's handbook.

Preservice Teacher Preparation Programs

The quality and quantity of vocational teachers are the key factors of successful vocational programs. In preservice teacher preparation programs, selected courses should be restructured to include developing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs in vocational education. If this cannot be done, then appropriate individualized learning opportunities should be provided for prospective vocational teachers to obtain the needed competencies. In both cases, the teacher's handbook can be used as the major text, and some hands-on experience should be required.

Inservice Teacher Training Programs

For vocational teachers in the field who do not have the competencies in developing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs, inservice training programs should be offered. If the number of vocational teachers who need this type of training is large enough to justify providing a workshop, then a group process can be used. However, if the number is very small, then an individualized learning environment would be more appropriate. Again, the teacher's handbook can be used as the main instructional vehicle, and some hands-on experience should be provided. Also, at the end of the program, an evaluation process should be followed to determine if the needed competencies were mastered.

Cooperation With Special Educators and Rehabilitation Personnel

Vocational teachers are not the only group in the field of education required to serve handicapped students. Special education teachers and vocational rehabilitation personnel have a longer history and more experience in serving handicapped students. Also, they have been involved in the development and implementation of IEPs for a longer period of time, and are more competent in doing this. For these reasons, vocational teachers should establish a very close relationship with special educators and vocational rehabilitation personnel. The state department of education may take the leadership to facilitate this type of cooperation. All three groups working together will develop better IEPs for handicapped students, and handicapped students will be served more effectively.

Conclusions

It is important to remember two historical perspectives in reflecting on the individualized education program for handicapped

students in agricultural education. First of all, one might say individualized instruction had its beginning in the minds of early philosophers. For example, the Greeks had some idea of the consideration which should be given to an individual in the education process. Plato envisioned society as a place where people would learn well that which they were fitted for by nature.

On the other hand, one must surely be conscious of the fact that many school administrators and others have regarded the agricultural education program as a "dumping ground" for handicapped students--students with problems who could not adjust to other courses of study in high school. Therefore, agricultural teachers had to learn a long time ago how to help handicapped students overcome various disadvantaged conditions.

However, agricultural teachers have the problem of adjusting instructional programs so that they will be meaningful to handicapped students with widely divergent backgrounds and with desires and aptitudes for different levels of achievements and competence. This is no less true for handicapped students in agricultural education than it is for students in other parts of the school system. Individualized education programs are designed in such a way that specific goals and objectives may be established for each handicapped student and supportive services are provided to increase the chances of success in a training program. As students work through the program, they can evaluate their progress in terms of their own goals and objectives. They are not in competition with others in the class or the school system for grades. Their program can be made meaningful to them regardless of their background and previous experience.

Unfortunately, most agricultural teachers have not been involved in the development and implementation of IEPs as specific as those outlined in P. L. 94-142. They have very little knowledge of the time, effort, and additional competencies required for developing, implementing, and evaluating IEP. Therefore, programs responsive to these needs should be conducted to equip agricultural teachers with the needed competencies. Through the use of IEPs, agricultural teachers will be able to successfully prepare handicapped students for occupational competencies, and the educational needs of handicapped students can be met more effectively.

References

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