

Individualized Instruction

Overview

As defined by the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), youth within correctional facilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Appropriate educational services have long been considered a critical element of successful reintegration into society,¹ assuming that exposure to the general education curriculum will help prepare students for future success. However, the definition of the word *appropriate* has been highly debated. A growing consensus among experts is that an appropriate education includes greater individualization for all students to provide them with access to the curriculum. Youth with disabilities in correctional facilities also may have a myriad of educational, social-behavioral, and mental health or health-related issues. Intensifying instruction for these youth is particularly important because their unique needs may require greater individualization to foster better outcomes.

Key Principles of Practice

The following principles were identified in a review of *Providing Individually Tailored Academic and Behavioral Support Services for Youth in Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems*.²

Have a System to Collect Data and Use It to Make Educational Decisions With the increasing emphasis on making data-based decisions in education and implementing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), correctional facilities should be reviewing performance data, nonacademic data, and other relevant information for each youth to make informed programming decisions.³ These data allow facilities to tailor practices and programming that meet youths' needs. Often, it can take weeks to receive student records, including individualized education programs (IEPs), when a youth is placed in a new educational setting.⁴ Delays in records transfer can make it difficult for correctional facilities to determine the appropriate educational placement; any specially designed instruction, accommodations, and modifications; and any related services needed to support youth with disabilities. It is critical to coordinate with families to expedite records transfer, especially for youth with disabilities. In the absence of records and IEPs, facilities should rely on academic and behavioral screening assessments to determine gaps in foundational skills or possible disabilities. Without this screening, it is impossible for youth to be placed in appropriate courses or receive the supports and services they require. When records are available for youth with disabilities, additional sources of data to support educational decisions include progress toward IEP goals, recent psychoeducational reports, and functional behavioral assessments (FBAs).

Monitor Youth Progress to Evaluate Effectiveness Placing youth in courses based on data is not enough; their growth must be systematically monitored to ensure adequate progress.⁵ To monitor progress, facilities can use pre-post assessments, which are designed to measure academic progress between the start and end of instruction.⁶ These assessments may include specific content-based assessments or standard assessments that are more generalizable.⁷ In some cases, and especially for youth with disabilities who are not making adequate progress toward their IEP goals, more formalized progress monitoring should occur.

Progress monitoring is used to assess a student's performance, to quantify his or her rate of improvement or responsiveness to intervention, to adjust the student's instructional program to make it more effective and suited to the student's needs, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.⁸

By monitoring progress, correctional facility staff can more readily determine when to adapt or differentiate instruction to better meet the individualized needs of each youth. Having a systematic process for collecting and analyzing progress monitoring results can help correctional facility staff determine if additional diagnostic assessments are needed to identify how to further intensify and individualize instruction.

Scaffold Instruction Explicit instruction is a systematic approach that can be used in any educational setting to tailor instruction to meet youths' needs. This may be particularly important for youth within juvenile correctional facilities because many of them perform academically below grade level and have histories of poor school attendance, academic failure, and grade retention.⁹ This may result in insufficient background knowledge to support new learning. Explicit instruction is the process of overtly teaching the steps required to understand a concept or construct, how to apply a strategy, and/or how to complete a task.¹⁰ According to Anita Archer and Charles Hughes,¹¹ explicit instruction has 16 characteristics:

- Focus instruction on critical content.
- Sequence skills logically.
- Teach in small segments.
- Design well-organized and focused lessons.
- Be explicit about the lesson objectives and expectations.
- Determine students' prior knowledge and skills.
- Provide step-by-step directions and demonstrations.
- Use clear language.
- Provide examples and nonexamples.
- Provide guided practice.
- Provide various opportunities for student-teacher interactions.
- Check frequently for student understanding.
- Provide immediate feedback to students.
- Maintain a brisk instructional pace.
- Help students organize their knowledge.
- Provide students with multiple opportunities to practice skills across time.

Research has found that taking a few minutes to provide direct, explicit instruction can have great benefits to students.¹²

Implement Intensive Intervention When intervening with students, it is critical that educators consider the interconnectedness between academics and behavior because students who are struggling academically may react with higher levels of behavioral problems, risk taking, and disengagement from school.¹³ These feelings may be heightened in correctional facilities, where youth may have poor relationships with facility staff, encounter reactive and punitive approaches from staff, lack positive behavioral supports, and receive poor treatment for mental health disorders.¹⁴ These youth may require more intensive, individualized support.¹⁵ Intensive intervention can be delivered through the data-based individualization (DBI) process, which allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data to determine when and how to adapt instruction.¹⁶ Intensifying and individualizing instruction often involves substantively different content and pedagogy and includes more frequent progress monitoring.¹⁷ Instruction can be intensified along four dimensions: (1) change dosage of instructional time, (2) change the learning environment, (3) combine cognitive processing strategies alongside academic learning in alignment with learner needs, and (4) modify the delivery of instruction.¹⁸ The DBI process is ongoing and iterative, meaning that one round of intensifying instruction may not be sufficient; multiple rounds of intensification may be warranted if progress is not demonstrated on progress monitoring assessments. Further diagnostic assessment data (including FBAs) can support teams by identifying what strategies to layer on to existing instructional approaches to further intensify and individualize instruction. In traditional school settings, 3% to 5% of students will require intensive intervention; however, this percentage may differ in correctional facilities because youth with disabilities are disproportionately represented in such facilities.¹⁹ Therefore, if significantly more students appear to need intensive intervention, correctional facilities should consider making parallel changes to core and tier 2 instruction.²⁰

This document was retrieved from a Web-based resource on the topic of juvenile corrections. For more information and additional resources, please visit <http://osepideasthatwork.org/jj>.

Endnotes

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