

Case Study: Achieving Goals In An Individualized Education Program For Students With Special Needs

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Abstract

The present article presents and analyzes the goals written in the individualized education program (hereinafter IEP) for children with special needs in a regular school. The first part deals with legislation in the field of IEP, how to prepare IEP, type of goals, the importance of planning annual goals and the purpose of IEP evaluation. The second part presents three students with special needs and their goals from the IEPs, as well as methods of achieving the written goals. The students have difficulties in the following fields: the technique of reading aloud, lack of organization and planning skills and long division method. The purpose of the presented goals and methods is to present an example of good practice and its findings.

Keywords: children with special needs, individualized education program, achieving goals, additional professional support, case study

1. Introduction

“School has always been a commitment for me, but too often, I had the feeling that I was not doing it for myself but someone else. At school, I missed one subject, or rather that real knowledge about life... Deep down, I had the feeling that I was not getting what I really needed in life - to realize how important it is to be persistent, confident, to trust, to think optimistically and above all, to believe in myself and in the things I want to achieve, even when everyone around me doubts me. We learn a lot of content in schools, but there is not enough useful knowledge. When you finish school and start working, you have the feeling that you know nothing practical. So what is then the point of storing huge amounts of data with little use value?”

(M. Irenej in Česa šole ne povedo)

2. Individualized program

The White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (2011) defines the IEP as a plan for the individualization of the educational and developmental-rehabilitation work of an individual student. It is the basic guideline for teachers and parents in meeting a child's special needs and is adapted to the individual student's needs, which is just as crucial for the child as the school curriculum.

2.1. Legal grounds

The Orientation of Children with Special Needs Act (2011, Article 36) clearly defines the guidelines for IEP. These serve as basic directives for the progress of children with special needs in the process of upbringing and education, and direct as follows: "(1) The educational institution or social welfare institution must draw up an IEP for a child with special needs no later than 30 days after the decision is final. (2) The IEP shall determine the organization and implementation of additional professional assistance in the program with adapted implementation and additional professional assistance for: overcoming deficits, providing consulting services and providing learning assistance. (3) The IEP shall determine the following:

- goals and forms of work in individual educational fields,
- strategies for integrating a child with special needs into a group,
- the necessary adjustments in the examination and assessment of the knowledge, the achievement of standards and progress,
- use of adapted and assistive educational technology,
- providing physical assistance,
- interpretation in Slovene sign language,
- transition between programs and necessary adjustments in the organization,
- class schedule,
- skills for maximum independence in life (adaptation skills) and a plan for inclusion in employment."

2.2. Objectives in IEPs

In recent years, formative monitoring of student progress has also been encouraged with additional professional assistance. Various studies (Fuchs and Fuchs in Rogič Ožek and Dobravc, 2019) have shown that formative monitoring is beneficial, especially for children with lower results. The teacher supports the student by constantly finding out how they are progressing and adapting the lesson to the feedback received from the student. The personalization of lessons, which is enabled by formative monitoring, is precisely what has a positive effect on their learning (Yeh, *ibid.*).

Types of goals

If we want the student to achieve the set goals in a particular area of functioning, they must be precisely defined, achievable and measurable. Thus, we can check whether the goals are achieved and get a clear picture of the child's progress in each area of functioning. Galeša (1995) emphasizes that the process of formulating measurable goals happens from general to more precise, specific goals, taking into account the student's weak and strong areas. We predict and plan the student's desired progress in certain areas of functioning for a certain period, and based on this, prepare the path along which these goals will be achieved. The

latter means that we derive general functional goals from the global ones, indicating which skills the student will train and implement in the broader areas of functioning.

Planning global goals

They are usually planned for a period of one year based on an initial assessment of the individual's functioning and represent the direction of the individual's development. We consider the individual's past achievements, the current level of their achievements, the practicality of the chosen goal, the priority of the child's needs and the amount of time required to achieve the desired goal (ibid.).

General goal planning

General goals represent an intermediate step between global and operational (working) objectives. A general goal defines the result of the work done by the individual. They can be derived from global goals or replace them and are set as broader general goals. If general goals are planned in combination with global ones, the following rules and guidelines should be followed: each global goal contains several general ones, general goals can be arranged according to different criteria (developmental, from simple to complex, from least to most important, they do not cover descriptions of individual behavior, do not contain criteria for determining performance, can be written in three to four words, do not define the desire for progress or increased time or understanding, are not timed, and we do not define all the general goals covered by the global goal for the period of one year).

The general goals must be set precisely enough so that they can be broken down into work goals or that they can be operationalized (ibid.).

Operational goal planning

Operational goals are the essential component of an IEP for the individual and those who teach the individual. They are designed to help us understand the individual's action, achievement, and activity that the student will be able to show when learning the material.

Measurable goals are:

- those that record the activity of the individual; they can be measured and with their help, it is possible to determine whether the goal has been achieved;
- those written in such a way that they are interpreted in the same way - several evaluators give the same assessment of whether an individual goal has been achieved;
- those which allow the calculation of the individual's progress.

Galeša (1995) emphasizes the importance of the action verb. In other words, the verb must define the student's external behavior as accurately as possible. For example, the verb *knows* (*meaning of the expression*); we do not know whether the student really knows its meaning until the student proves it. Therefore, verbs such as *writes* (*definition of expression*), *writes* (*meaningful sentence with expression*) and *explains* (*meaning of expression*) are used when forming operational goals. In addition to listing verbs that accurately determine the student's performance or explain the student's activity, an element of the performance criterion must be

included in the operational objectives or rather the criterion based on which we judge whether the planned goal and thus a specific skill was achieved. Performance criteria or the criteria may be different, and they depend on the individual activity. Therefore, the measure of an individual's success can be a percentage (e.g., of correct answers, calculations), time or time frame (e.g., needed to perform an activity, record, calculation), quality (e.g., of a record), quantity (e.g., sitting upright for five minutes). The operational goal can also include the circumstances or the conditions in which the student should achieve the goal and any aids that might be used (e.g., to correctly solve an arithmetic problem of multiplying two-digit numbers, etc., by a calculator / in writing / from memory). For each area, we need to plan which forms, methods of work, strategies and tools the student will need for the implementation to be able to achieve the set goals.

If a goal does not contain measurability criteria or is not measurable, it cannot be measured - its implementation cannot be checked and assessed. If a goal is set too generally, its content is too broad, and we, therefore, cannot check whether it was achieved or not. Anyone can interpret general goals in their own way, which is why evaluating such goals is very subjective.

The elements that can represent the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of IEP are summarized according to the legal bases and the statements of various authors about the necessary and vital elements of IEP. They can be divided according to the phases of IEP implementation (Stergar, 2016):

- the evaluation of a child's environment and functioning (stating the student's involvement in educational institutions so far; balance of the assessment that takes into account the motor, cognitive and affective aspects of the child's functioning; description of the child's environment, family; stating the perceptual channel through which the student receives information; stating the skills area in which the student is successful);
- planning (definition of global goals for an individual's area; an indication of operationalized goals for each considered field; measurability of operationalized goals - description of behavior or activities, circumstances or conditions in which the student should achieve the goal, performance criteria; goals should be set in logical sequence in terms of developmental aspect and difficulty; planning the frequency and manner of cooperation with the student's parents; planning conditions and adjustments for the implementation of the proposed program; indicating strategies and forms of work in the individual's area; planning the manner and frequency of evaluations);
- implementation (indication of the scope and manner of additional professional assistance; a record of the schedule of activities; an indication of the activities of the provider and the student; an indication of the participating members in the group; appointment of the provider of additional professional assistance; definition of the frequency of participation of the expert group members; appointing a member of the

expert group to inform the parents of the progress and the treatment effectiveness, to record the assessment of ongoing evaluations during implementation);

- evaluation (descriptive evaluation of the student's progress; evaluation of the achievement of planned goals by individual areas; an indication of areas where the student still needs additional help; an indication of adjustments and strategies that have proven effective; an indication of proposals, planning of work for the next school year).

At this point, it is sensible to emphasize the importance of evaluation, which represents the final phase of IEP and is at the same time the starting point for the design of a new work program. It represents an integral part as it gives us feedback on the effectiveness of program planning, the adequacy of implementation, and student progress. In this phase, based on the criteria defined in the operational goals planning, we can evaluate the implementation, achievement of planned goals, the success of implementation, the effectiveness of used methods and forms of work, tools and strategies of working with students (Galeša, 1995).

3. Case study: goals in an IEP

The goals from the IEP of three different students with deficits in individual areas of learning and the methods for achieving the set goals are presented in more detail below.

3.1. Example of goals for a student who has difficulty with her reading technique

READING AND READING COMPREHENSION						
ASSESSMENT PERIOD	1.	2.	1.	2.	1.	2.
ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS	achieves		partially achieves		does not achieve	
Syllabifies the words.						
Reads the words in a connected manner.						
Improves the technique of reading aloud.						
Is persistent in reading (10 minutes).						
Consistently uses a reading card.						
Understands the text read.						

Girl A attends the 3rd grade. She loses focus during work, trying to lead the class through conversation, especially when the lesson of extra professional support is intended for exercises in improving reading efficiency and the reading aloud technique. Her reading technique was inferior to that of her peers: she read stuttering, more slowly, adding and omitting letters, reading only a part of the word aloud (e.g., she would read the first two letters of the word *spring* quietly and the rest aloud). The girl refused to spell and connect the words but either spelled them aloud or quietly. Such reading was utterly incomprehensible to the listener. With encouragement (but not always), she would read the spelled word aloud. When reading, she must be carefully monitored and consistently reminded of the observance

of previously agreed rules. She does not want to help herself by using her finger/reading card; she wants to work independently. Too much help irritates and disturbs her. The success in reading depends on the student's mood and her good/bad days. Comprehension of the read text is good.

We have improved the reading technique:

- *With a unified approach to reading:* the word can be spelled quietly but then has to be said out loud. The student, the student's class teacher and her parents agreed with the approach. She also reads aloud at home for at least ten minutes a day. Either her mother or some other adult listens to her. I recommended the behavioral-cognitive method of reading.
- *With proper motivation for reading:* monitoring reading during lessons of additional professional help. I explained to her that in my experience, slower readers read less than 60 words per minute, average between 60 and 80, and faster more than 80 words. We made a tool for monitoring the number of words read, which I will present at the presentation.
- *By agreeing on the course of the lesson and step-by-step work:* each lesson consists of three to five different activities and tasks. On the board, we wrote what we were going to do and in what order. Example of the course of the lesson: 1. Exercises to improve reading efficiency, 2. Reading a text (in pairs), 3. Answering questions, 4. A game of the student's choice.

3.2. Example of goals for a student who has difficulty organizing and planning learning

LEARNING TO LEARN						
ASSESSMENT PERIOD	1.	2.	1.	2.	1.	2.
ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS	achieves		partially achieves		does not achieve	
Finds a suitable way of learning.						
With help, she plans the knowledge assessment.						
Knows different learning strategies.						
Finds information in a notebook / textbook.						
Knows and values her achievements.						
Strives to improve performance to the best of her abilities.						

Girl N attends the 9th grade. She finds it difficult to follow in class; she is often absent, especially before knowledge assessment. She is not independent in her work; she needs the help of a teacher in solving math tasks (step-by-step work), making statements and also in the field of organization and learning planning. She is less motivated for school work. She feels that she devotes a lot of time to school work, but according to her, work and effort do not pay off, as she does not achieve the success she wants. She does not know how to learn and what to change to be successful in learning.

Methods of work that have helped to improve the organization and planning of learning:

- *Analysis of the current situation:* learning strategies, learning time (when to learn and how long before the knowledge assessment), planning and organization of work.
- *Introducing the student to reading learning strategies:* the Cornell Strategy, KWL (what I know, what I want to learn, what I have learnt), SQ3R (survey, question, read, recall, review). I will present one of the strategies in more detail during the presentation.
- *Self-evaluation:* a reflection of work (what she has succeeded in doing, what she has not and why not). Based on the findings, we formed performance criteria and defined other additional activities.

Example of a checklist for learning the organization of learning (Rogič Ožek and Dobravec, 2019)

I will be successful when I...	I will do this by...		I succeeded / I failed because...
	With help	WITHOUT help	
☞ obtain information on when I have written knowledge assessments;	I will ask the provider of additional professional support for help.		✓
☞ obtain information on when I have oral knowledge assessments;		In class, I will ask the teacher myself.	✓
☞ formulate a learning plan;	I will ask the provider of additional professional support for help.		✓
☞ use a learning plan when I do not know what to do		I will have the learning plan in the pencil case next to the timetable.	I failed because I lost the plan.
☞ know what I need to learn in a particular subject		When other students have oral assessments, I write down the questions the teacher asks.	I succeeded to a lesser extent as I sometimes forgot.
☞ have my notes in order.		If I do not manage to copy from the board, I borrow a notebook from my classmates and copy the material.	I succeeded to a lesser extent as my classmates were not always willing to lend me their notebooks.

3.3. Example of a student who has difficulties with the long division method

MATHEMATICAL CONCEPTS AND PROCESSES						
ASSESSMENT PERIOD	1.	2.	1.	2.	1.	2.
ACHIEVEMENT OF GOALS	achieves		partially achieves		does not achieve	
Knows and understands mathematical concepts.						
Counts, reads and writes numbers up to 1,000,000.						
Adds and subtracts in writing in the set of natural numbers up to 1,000,000.						
Multiplies and divides in writing in the set of natural numbers up to 10,000.						

Student L attends the 5th grade. The boy was diagnosed with scotopic syndrome and is now using corrective glasses with an added color spectrum. Problems with attention and concentration are noted in the classroom as well as in individual help classes. He has difficulties sitting still and listening intently. Work performance fluctuates and depends on the day (sometimes he is more focused and able to perform the set tasks, at other times, he is less focused, more mistakes occur). The boy is less organized (untidy school desk). He has no problems with numerical representations, but occasionally there are problems with computational procedures. He recently needed help with the explanation of the process of calculating written division with a two-digit number.

Work strategies that helped to solve the problems:

- *Checking the understanding of mathematical concepts:* multiplication, division, dividend, divisor, quotient.
- *Making a card with the process of written division:* step-by-step calculation, using colored pens.
- *He tells the calculation process out loud.*

4. Conclusion

The IEPs, which I, as a special pedagogue, prepare every year, contain all the legally prescribed components. This article is focused on the most important part of the IEP - the set goals. I focused mainly on the presentation of goals from three different areas: reading, learning to learn and mathematical processes for the purpose of exchanging opinions. I am also open to suggestions for improvements. I believe that the presented goals are written thoroughly and comprehensibly, are realistic and measurable, and above all, are individualized and adapted to the needs of each student. With the proposed approaches and activities that follow the presented goals, I tried to show how we can effectively achieve the set goals and whether these work methods are effective.

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