

Running Head: INSTRUCTION FOR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

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Instruction for Individual Needs

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The third standard of the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) *Content Standards for Beginning Special Education Teachers* (2007) discusses how not just exceptional conditions but cultures, backgrounds, beliefs, and traditions can all affect how a child learns and how a special educator instructs that child. This idea, that all children are different, learn different, and enter into education from a different context is at the heart of what I believe about meeting the individual needs of students. I believe that all students, whether "exceptional," culturally in the minority, or what some might refer to as "normal," all deserve and require individualized instruction. To accomplish this, I believe that I, as an educator, must get to know the student as an individual, I must plan accordingly to meet the needs of each of my students, and I must use all available resources to meet those needs.

First, to effectively meet the individual needs of my students I believe that I must get to know my students as individuals. It is undeniable that everyone is unique and each student brings that uniqueness with them into the classroom. Smith (2005) explains that just knowing your students' names isn't enough, that listening to the hearts of your students is just as important as challenging their minds. I have learned first hand that even the most seemingly exciting lesson may not necessarily peak the same interests in all of my students. Some may have a real, personal interest in what I am presenting, others may have no context for the lesson, and still others may have a personal or cultural reason to perhaps fear or even despise what I am trying to teach them. But if I can discover exactly who each child is and what perspective they are bringing my classroom, I can better prepare myself to find ways of teaching the material to them. For instance, I can use questionnaires, interest inventories, classroom discussions, ice-breaking sessions,

interviews, and even one-on-one honest inquisitiveness to find who my students are, their cultures and backgrounds, their belief systems and values, their strengths and weaknesses, and their learning differences. And only then can I truly reach each of them on their level.

Next, to meet the individual needs of my students, I believe that I must plan accordingly for each student. This does not mean, however, that I should create a separate lesson plan for each individual student, but it does mean that, as I get to know exactly who my students are, I should have each student's learning style and perspective in mind while I create lessons. I should also be flexible and reflective so that I can adjust lessons and my teaching styles as I get to know more about my students. Continuing, even though only special education students are required to have individualized plans for their education (usually IEPs), I believe that it can only be beneficial to have at least an informal set of goals and objectives that are unique and specific to each student. Every student learns differently and each has a different capacity for comprehending and utilizing new information, so even if they do not have an official plan to assist with their education, I must implement strategic plans to reach my students on their own individual level.

Lastly, to fully meet the individual needs of my students, I believe that I must utilize all available resources. Polloway, et al. (2008) discusses in the book *Strategies for Teaching Learners with Special Needs* that educators must be driven to utilize their surrounding knowledge base to effectively serve their diverse learners. Since students are so unique and always have such diverse backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and life situations, there are a myriad of resources aside from what is directly available in the

curriculum and the resources within the classroom that must be utilized to fully and effectively reach each student. This can be everyone from the students' families, IEP teams, advocates, the school's administration team, any cultural centers, literature, etc. that is relevant and beneficial to the individual student. As a teacher, I must be willing and active about interacting with all of the people and organizations that are part of my students' lives and about using those resources to better understand and educate my students. I should also be up to date with the current literature and research that pertains to my student and their area of need.

I work directly with students with language-based learning disabilities everyday and everyday I am constantly reminded that no lesson and no content can be presented the same way in the same context to any given class or any given student. I can never assume and never expect my lessons to occur a certain way. I must be open, flexible, reflective, resourceful, and, most importantly, honestly interested in my students to truly reach them not just as students, but as unique, diverse human beings.

References

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