Dressing Your IEPs for the General Education Climate

Analysis of IEP Goals and Objectives for Students with Multiple Disabilities

MICHAEL F. GIANGRECO, RUTH E. DENNIS, SUSAN W. EDELMAN,

AND CHIGEE J. CLONINGER

ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE DESCRIBES CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPs) OF 46 STUDENTS FROM NINE DIFFERENT STATES IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 12 WHO HAVE MULTIPLE DISABILITIES AND RECEIVE ALL OR PART OF THEIR EDUCATION IN GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSES. THROUGH CATEGORICAL CODING OF THE STUDENTS' IEP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES, SEVERAL THEMES WERE IDENTIFIED THAT HIGHLIGHT PROBLEMATIC CHARACTERISTICS OF IEPs. ALTERNATIVES ARE SUGGESTED THAT THE AUTHORS BELIEVE MAY MORE ADEQUATELY COMMUNICATE THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS TO THEIR TEACHERS IN GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSES AND IMPROVE THE USEFULNESS OF IEPs.

AT A RECENT MEETING INSIDE AN AIR-conditioned room, participants wore long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and sweaters in order to stay warm. Outside, the 95-degree mid-day temperature was coupled with high humidity. At noon, the people at the meeting left the comfort of the air-conditioned room and headed down the street to a nearby restaurant for lunch. As they strolled a few blocks down the street, most of the people they passed were wearing shorts and lightweight, short-sleeved shirts. As the people from the air-conditioned room continued on their way, they wilted in the heat with every passing step. Their clothes didn't match the weather conditions. They were very uncomfortable.

When we spend time in artificial environments, we often develop ways of coping with the characteristics of the place we have created. We often find that what worked in the artificial setting does not work in the realities of the natural climate. Traditionally we have created artificial environments of students with multiple disabilities in the form of separate schools and classes. One of the ways we adapted to these artificial environments was to develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that seemed to fit those settings. As students with severe disabilities are increasingly included in general education schools and classes, the old IEPs may not fit; the educational climate is different. A recent study by Hunt and Farron-Davis (1992) analyzed IEPs for students with severe disabilities when they were placed in special education classrooms and again after these same students were transitioned to full-time general education classes. Although the IEPs from the general education classes had higher quality ratings (e.g., functional, age-appropriate), the researchers reported that the curriculum content of IEPs for general education placements did not differ significantly from the previous IEPs implemented in special education settings.

The purpose of the present analysis is to discuss the characteristics of IEPs for 46 students who have transitioned from separate to inclusive educational environments in order to identify themes that affect the fit of IEPs in a new general education climate and to offer potential alternatives.

Like many qualitative undertakings, the specific focus of this investigation emerged from data we were collecting for a different purpose. We received the IEPs of a group of students whose educational teams had volunteered to participate in a federally funded research project to study innovations for educating students with deaf–blindness in general education settings. We had requested IEPs as a way of learning about the students who were to be part of our project. At first, our intention was to read the IEPs that had been developed for students. In a later phase we planned to compare the IEPs developed before and after the use of specific innovative planning approaches. We thought the original IEPs would be a way for us to become familiar with the unique needs of the students as reflected in their individualized goals and objectives.

Although teachers have access to additional types of information about students (e.g., assessment reports, conversations with previous teachers, progress reports), the IEP is considered a key document in describing a student's individualized learning outcomes and services based on documented levels of educational performance. The IEP is one of the only required documents accompanying all students with disabilities. We approached the task of reviewing the IEPs as an extended team member might who was learning about this new student; the IEP was part of the paperwork what would precede the student and give us an initial picture of the youngster.

As the IEPs began to arrive, it became increasingly apparent that these documents were not informing us about the students, as we had hoped. After reading the IEPs, we had little sense of what the students' educational needs were, why their stated goals and objectives were important, or for that matter, what they really meant. It caused us to think about teachers who receive new students each year, preceded by written documents, specifically IEPs. Do these IEPs help the receiving teacher and other team members understand the strengths and needs of the new student? Do these IEPs offer real direction, in terms of curriculum and instructional planning in general education settings? A review of the literature on IEPs from 1975 through 1989 by Smith (1990) ". . . reveals a history of IEP inadequacies and passive compliance" (p. 6). The present study describes common themes from the IEPs we reviewed, discusses the rationale underlying what we believe contributes to inadequacies for their use in general education settings, and offers some potential alternatives that may communicate students' needs more effectively.

METHOD

Participants

The IEPs analyzed were written for 46 students with deaf–blindness who attended general education classes either full time (n = 31, 67.4%) or part time (n = 15, 32.6%) in nine different states (AZ, CO, DE, IA, KS, MA, RI, TX, VT). These 46 students were served by 44 different teams. Students ranged in age from 4 through 21. Twenty-six were males; 20 were females. With the exception of 2 children, all of the students had additional disabilities reported, most frequently severe mental retardation and severe orthopedic disabilities, most commonly cerebral palsy. Other disabilities reported, but to a lesser extent, included behavioral challenges, seizure disorders, microcephaly, health impairments, Down syndrome, Marshall-Smith syndrome, Nolfe's syndrome, and Pierre-Robin syndrome.

. . . the IEP is considered a key document in describing a student's individualized learning outcomes and services based on documented levels accompanying all students with disabilities.

Students were educated at every general class grade level, kindergarten through Grade 12. Eight of the 46 students were served in multigraded classrooms, primarily in elementary schools. Each student was served by a group ranging in size from 4 to 21 (M = 10.24, SD = 3.93) that typically included special educators, parents, related service providers, and general class teachers. With the exception of 1 child, all the students received related services. Speech/language was the most common service (n = 36), followed in descending order by physical therapy (n = 33), occupational therapy (n = 23), vision support services (including orientation and mobility) (n = 21), hearing support services (n = 14), and nursing services (n = 10).

Design and Data Collection

The design of this descriptive investigation was document analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). During the 1992–93 school year, IEPs were mailed to the research team from schools across the country as part of the intake documentation for voluntary participation in a federally funded research project exploring specific innovations for educating children with deaf–blindness and multiple disabilities in general education settings. Parental permission was obtained to release information and educational documents (e.g., IEP, progress reports, assessment profiles) to the research team. At the time of this writing, 20 of the 46

students had been observed in their general education classroom placement by at least one member of the research team.

Data Analysis

Upon receipt of the IEPs, each was read by the first author. To facilitate data analysis, the annual goals and short-term objectives from each IEP were dictated to audiotape along with researcher comments, questions, and observations. The audiotapes were transcribed and imported into a text-sorting program called HyperQual (Padilla, 1991). Each IEP was analyzed using categorical coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) in an attempt to identify patterns and themes in the data.

The first 38 IEPs were analyzed together as a block of data to establish initial themes. The transcripts corresponding to each IEP were coded by hand in the margins of each transcript. This resulted in the use of 77 initial codes. Each transcript was then recorded within the HyperQual application. The combination, deletion, and addition of initial codes culminated in the use of 51 final codes. HyperQual was used to produce 51 code-specific reports, which were compilations of all entries with a specific code (e.g., handwriting, computer, broad categories). Analysis of the 51 reports led to the development of initial themes. The remaining eight IEPs, which arrived in the mail after this first set had been analyzed, were treated similarly (i.e., read, taped, transcribed, coded, imported to HyperQual, recorded). These subsequent IEPs were used to look for occurrences, nonoccurrences, and contradictions to the identified themes that would assist in clarification and description.

RESULTS

Analysis of the IEPs led to the identification of three major themes that raise questions about the effectiveness of these documents to communicate the unique needs of individual students and to support the provision of appropriate education in general education classes. These themes are as follows: (a) IEPs frequently are broad, inconsistent, and inadequately referenced to the general education context; (b) IEPs often list goals for staff rather than those for students, and (c) IEPs are discipline referenced. Each of the three themes and corollary subthemes are presented in this section.

Vagueness and Inconsistency

Question: When are IEPs like our most dreaded stereotypes of politicians running for public office?

Answers: (1) When they make statements that on the surface sound good, but upon further

review are so broad, sweeping, and devoid of any real direction as to render them virtually meaningless. (2) When they use rhetoric that sounds good but lacks substance. (3) When they make promises that are hard to keep. (4) All of the above. If you chose (4), you are correct!

SWEEPING STATEMENTS. Since individually selected annual goals reflect the educational needs of students based on their present level of performance, they are the heart of the IEP. The IEPs we reviewed shared a striking similarity. A high proportion of the annual goals were written as a statement of a broad curricular category rather than as learning outcomes. Typical annual goal statements included the following: "Peter will improve communication skills." "Molly will improve social skills." "Juan will improve self-care skills." These examples provide little usable information or direction to a receiving team member because no learning outcome is stated that is attainable within a year, only the curriculum area or category. One IEP bypassed individualized annual goals altogether by having a preprinted IEP form that stated, "Annual Goal: The student will demonstrate acceptable levels of mastery in each of the objectives/ essential elements for the area indicated below." These types of goal statements lack individualization because they do not give the reader any notion about which of the myriad of communication, social, self-care, or academic skills, for example, the student needs to learn. This problem was further exacerbated when two or more curricular categories were combined in a single goal statement (e.g., "Thomas will improve reading and math skills").

One might reasonably expect the short-term objectives corresponding to each annual goal to clarify their meaning; in some cases this was true, thus calling into question the purpose of the vaguely stated annual goals. Some of the short-term objectives read like a series of three or four annual goals. For example, a goal statement from our data, "Juan will improve self-care skills" was followed by a series of three objectives, one each addressing dressing, eating, and grooming. There was extensive variability in short-term objectives ranging from their complete absence, to vaguely stated learning outcomes without performance criteria, to highly specific objectives that included an observable behavior, crucial conditions under which the behavior would occur, and explicit criteria.

FUNCTIONAL RHETORIC WITHOUT SUBSTANCE. The need for functional and age-appropriate goals and objectives has been documented extensively in the educational literature of severe disabilities since the 1970s (Brown et al., 1979; Orelove & Sobsey, 1991; Snell, 1987). Reflecting current trends in the literature, the majority of IEPs we reviewed used functional and age-appropriate language to phrase the goals and objectives. There were only rare references to nonfunctional objectives such as using peg boards and stringing beads. Most goals included contemporary

words and phrases such as "community," "vocational," "domestic," "choice making,"and "social initiation."

We now seem to have more functionally stated IEP goals than in years past, but do we really have more functional IEPs? There are reasons to question whether this trend, although certainly a positive step, may have stalled in a stage of functional rhetoric without substance, resulting in IEPs that sound better but that inadequately communicate the unique needs of individual students. One type of functional rhetoric may be exposed by internal inconsistencies between goals and objectives. For example, one IEP ended each annual goal with the phrase "and transfer them to everyday living." Although this phrasing apparently demonstrated the writer's knowledge of the importance of generalization as an important contemporary issue, further review revealed short-term objectives that reflected acquisition of skills exclusively, with no references at all to generalization issues. Another example of functional rhetoric was demonstrated in an IEP that offered an interesting format whereby annual goal statements were preceded by a "life outcome" (e.g., obtaining a job, developing friendships) and a rationale for that outcome. The first life outcome listed the rationale as "to improve quality of life." The next life outcome's rationale read, "to improve quality of life." Each subsequent outcome's rationale read, "to improve quality of life." While referencing of annual goals to quality of life outcomes is a positive attribute and the notion of improving life quality appealing, it did not take long to realize that the phrase "to improve quality of life" was a cliché.

MAKING PROMISES THAT ARE HARD TO KEEP. Even more disturbing were possible external inconsistencies with classroom practice. A study conducted by the Kansas State Board of Education (1992) concluded, in part, that IEPs from six school sites, rural and urban, did not reflect what was actually happening in the classroom. Our observations in 20 of the students' classes led us to similar conclusions regarding the external inconsistencies between the IEPs and classroom practice. Two common variations illustrating these external inconsistencies were instructional activities for the student with disabilities that were either not related to IEP content or were separate from activities engaged in by classmates without disabilities. In essence, we found the IEPs, functionally stated or not, were not incorporated into daily instruction in general education settings. Rather than the IEP providing a useful road map for curriculum and instruction within the general education class, the IEP was filed away; general class teachers frequently were not familiar with the content of the child's IEP. At times, students seemed to be welcomed and included in class activities, but it is unknown whether or not the individual needs of the students were necessarily being addressed in general education activities.

One of the reasons we suspect that IEPs are not used by teachers is that they are too long. Many of the IEPs included dozens of goals and objectives. The longest IEP in

this data set was 49 pages long; 20- to 30-page IEPs were not uncommon. Some were handwritten and thus difficult to read; several were computer generated from predetermined lists of goals and objectives. This computer-based approach to IEP writing may have inadvertently encouraged the development of plans that, while legible, attempt to document every conceivable learning outcome the student may encounter. In keeping with the fashion trends of comedian Billy Crystal's "Fernando" character, who thinks "it is better to look good than to feel good," many of the computer-generated IEPs "loook maaaavelous," but there remains a question about whether they feel good to students, parents, and teachers. Many IEPs are unnecessarily and unrealistically long and cumbersome and therefore may be less likely to be useful to teachers. The Kansas State Board of Education's (1992) study noted, "It became evident that the IEP was often viewed as a static document, not a changeable, useful tool" (p. 2). The length of IEPs may be a factor in their usefulness; implementation of a 30-page IEP may be a promise that is hard to keep.

IEP Goals

Another frequent characteristic of IEP goals and objectives was that they were written to reflect behavior change on the part of others (e.g., teachers, therapists), rather than behavior change on the part of the student. The following is a list of examples from the data:

> Rosa will be repositioned every half hour.
>
> Jordy will receive chest PT [physical therapy].
>
> Medication will be administered to Carey during the school day.
>
> Jaime will continue to wear AFOs [Ankle-Foot Orthoses] and a body jacket with physical therapist monitoring.
>
> Hector will attend sixth-grade classes with nondisabled peers.

Each of these examples, which may be important features of the educational program, are things that will be done to or for the student. They do not require the student to learn something or exhibit a behavior change. Conversely, they do require the teacher, assistant, therapist, or others to learn and exhibit behavior change. In the examples listed above, it is the staff who need to (a) remember how to reposition Rosa regularly and do it skillfully; (b) provide chest PT to Jordy; (c) give Carey her medicine; (d) properly use and monitor Jaime's AFOs and body jacket; and (e) ensure that Hector is scheduled for, and included in, sixth-grade classes. These examples are not, in our opinion, annual goals or short-term objectives. Rather, they are accommodations, management needs/supports, and in some cases may be related services required for the student to access his or her educational

program and/or participate in it. In an analysis of IEPs for students with deaf–blindness, Downing (1988) observed that the IEPs of students with severe physical disabilities were more likely to list such passive statements as IEP goals or objectives.

Discipline-Referenced IEPs

The third major theme identified was that IEPs were "discipline referenced," that is, the selection of goals and objectives seems to have been based on the values and professional framework of specific disciplines (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech/language pathology, vision specialists). In the common use of discipline-referenced approaches, various group members bring their own professional agendas for the child to the IEP process, based on their separate evaluation of the student and the notion of authority for decision making by their discipline about services potentially provided by their discipline (Giangreco, in press; Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1993; Giangreco, Edelman, & Dennis, 1991). This practice was transferred to general education settings from locations where students with multiple and severe disabilities were typically served, namely, segregated or isolated educational or clinical settings. For example, it is commonly known that one of the areas in which occupational therapists are socialized and trained to value is daily living skills. Given this context, it was not surprising to find the following annual goal written by an OT: "Keisha will improve occupational therapy skills." This was followed by short-term objectives listing a series of daily living skills (e.g., pull off socks, take off shoes, put on coat, wash hands). Not only do many of the goals suggest a discipline-referenced approach to planning, but also, in some cases, the stated goals assume an isolated approach to intervention, being prefaced by phrases such as "during therapeutic intervention."

The IEP itself is often organized in separate sections for the various disciplines, which are at times written in different handwriting, each containing discipline-referenced goals and objectives. These conceptually distinct sections are stapled together and present the illusion of a unified IEP document. On the contrary, the document is too often merely a compilation of disjointed parts that not only lacks coordination among the disciplines, but also has the potential for the different sections to be working at cross purposes. A few IEPs were actually two completely separate IEPs, written for the same student, for the same school year, by two different agencies (e.g., the local public school and the school or agency under contract to provide a related service such as vision support).

In our analysis we have purposely avoided the use of the popular term "team" to refer to the work done to develop discipline-referenced IEPs. A foundational characteristic of teamwork is having common or shared goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). The discipline-referenced IEPs we reviewed led us to suspect that group members may have pursued separate goals based on the values of their own particular discipline or on existing school or agency practices or policies.

One of the most readily identifiable features of discipline-referenced IEP goals and objectives is the use of jargon. The following examples from the data provide a sampling written by occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech/language pathologists:

The student will:

... improve postural stability and increase antigravity of head, trunk, and extremities.

... increase bilabial lip posturing, lip movement, and lateralization

... demonstrate increased toleration of co-active b.u.e/hand motions in various tactile media.

... improve visual cognitive attention to a task following brief engagements of vestibular stimulation.

... initiate correction to mid-line when displaced laterally while prone or sitting astride horse or bolster.

... engage in sensory stimulation activities daily to improve overall sensory awareness skills for auditory proprioceptive, tactile and vestibular systems, kinesthectics and olfactory.

Discipline-referenced approaches to writing goals and objectives were common in the IEPs we reviewed. This calls into question the cohesiveness and coordination of educational planning by professionals and ultimately the utility of the IEP in general education settings.

DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged from this document analysis should be viewed with the understanding that the IEPs reviewed were for 46 students identified with deaf–blindness and multiple disabilities. Further, we did not have access to the process used for developing the IEPs, only the final document. Therefore, the presumption of reasons behind the development and the subsequent implementation of the IEPs we reviewed (e.g., discipline-referenced approaches) remain to be verified. Also, the IEPs were reviewed apart from other educational documents that may have rendered them more useful to school staff. Although not a primary source of data for the present study, initial interviews and classroom observations from another study in progress at these same research sites raises the question of whether general education teachers find IEPs particularly communicative or useful (Giangreco, Edelman, Dennis, & Cloninger, 1993).

The IEP characteristics identified through this document analysis are cause for concern to anyone interested in the education of children with special education needs. Our analysis suggests in a variety of ways that IEPs (a) frequently are broad, inconsistent, and inadequately referenced to the general education context; (b) list goals for staff rather than those for students; and (c) are discipline referenced. The remainder of this article will present potential alternatives and unresolved questions related to appropriately preparing our IEPs for the general education climate (see Table 1).

Individualized Learning Outcomes

We suggest that annual goals include two major components rather than listing curriculum areas. First, goals should include a learning outcome for the student that is (a) an observable behavior and (b) attainable within a year. The size of the goals will vary substantially based on the characteristics, needs, and learning patterns/rate of the individual student. What is attainable in a month for one student may take a year for another; therefore, what may be an annual goal statement for one student may be similar to a short-term objective for another student. Second, the annual goal should specify the context in which the desired learning outcome should occur. This means giving a brief statement describing the settings and/or circumstances in which the behavior should be displayed. For example, if a learning outcome for a student is "make purchases," the context might be "in neighborhood stores where his family shops." If the learning outcome is "sustaining social interactions," the context might be "in typical school social or play situations

(e.g., recess, playground, lunch, bus stop) with peers who do not have disabilities." By offering an observable learning outcome and a context, we can pursue the development of annual goals that are individually appropriate for a student and simultaneously offer a contextual focus for instructional planning.

Family-Centered Priorities Based on Valued Life Outcomes

Functional language in the construction of goals and objectives can be misleading if it has not been individually determined. For example, all of the discipline-referenced learning outcomes the occupational therapist listed (e.g., pull off socks, take off shoes, put on coat, wash hands) may or may not be functional for a specific student, depending on the student's needs and priorities. To ensure that functionality is more than empty rhetoric, we can develop annual goals from a family-centered perspective (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1993). The family is in the best position to determine what is truly functional for their child. Annual goals should be referenced to valued life outcomes shared by the family, such as personal health, having friends, having creative outlets, being able to have choice and control that matches one's age, and having access to personally meaningful places and activities (Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis, & Edelman, 1993). Individually selected curricular content for a student should specify a relevant context and be designed to enhance the status of the student's valued life outcomes. The ultimate aim is for the student's life to be better as a result of participating in the educational experiences articulated in the IEP.

TABLE 1. Illustration of IEP Characteristics with Alternative Practices

Problematic characteristics	Potential alternatives
1. Sweeping statements: "Jose will improve communication skills."	1. Individualized learning outcomes: "Jose will initiate the use of 15 new signs during first-grade activities."
2. Functional rhetoric without substance: "Gina will enlarge her circle of friends."	2. Family-centered priorities based on valued life outcomes: "Gina will initiate and maintain social interactions with classmates during cocurricular activities."
3. Making promises that are hard to keep: IEPs filed away, lengthy, and not incorporated into general education activities.	3. Useful IEPs: Use of a one-page Program-at-a-Glance (Table 2) to summarize a student's individual education program within general class activities.
4. Goals for staff rather than for students: "Mary Ann will have hearing aids checked daily by the audiologist" written as an IEP goal is actually a goal for the staff, not Mary Ann.	4. Goals for students are distinguished from supports provided by staff: "A teacher assistant, taught by an audiologist, will check Mary Ann's hearing aids daily" is written in the IEP as a support rather than a goal.
5. Discipline-referenced: "Darren will improve articulation of bilabial sounds in speech therapy."	5. Discipline-free shared goals: "Darren will increase intelligibility of speech in one-to-one conversation with parents, siblings, classmates, and teachers."

Emphasis on Usefulness

It is not surprising that many IEPs languish in file folders, rarely seeing the light of day. In our opinion, if IEPs were more relevant—shorter, more focused, and individually meaningful—they would be more useful. In addition, reorganizing the document could help IEPs communicate more effectively. For example, in the educational planning process called COACH (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1993), learning outcomes are divided into two categories. The first set of learning outcomes identifies the family's highest priorities. Recognizing that a small set of priorities may be too limiting for the student, COACH also includes a team process to identify additional learning outcomes. These additional learning outcomes come from a combination of the general education curriculum at various grade levels and other sources that extend beyond what is typically included in the general education curriculum. These two clearly labeled sets of learning outcomes (i.e., family priorities and other learning outcomes) are distinguished from a list of supports provided to or for the student. Priorities, other learning outcomes, and supports are summarized in a one- to two-page document called "Program-at-a-Glance" (see Table 2). This easy-to-understand document succinctly summarizes the student's individualized program/curriculum for use by classroom teachers, instructional assistants, related-service providers, and special area teachers (e.g., art, music, physical education). The brevity of the Program-at-a-Glance and its categorization of content (e.g., priorities, other learning outcomes, and general supports) offers a sharp contrast to a 25-page IEP. IEPs no longer must serve as the entire curriculum for students who are now accessing general education classrooms and curricula to a varying and individualized extent. IEPs must keep pace with current educational innovations by articulating priority learning outcomes beyond the scope of or at different levels from the existing general education curricula.

Computer-generated IEPs have made it easier for school personnel to include an increasingly long list of goals and objectives on the IEP. This increases the likelihood that IEPs imply promises increasingly difficult to keep, which may lead to a sense of frustration for the parents, students, and other team members. An alternative is to identify with the family a small set of the highest learning outcome priorities they have that they believe to be attainable in a year. The team, including the family, also reaches a consensus about which other learning outcomes, and how many, are reasonable in a given year. One advantage to this type of distinction between the two types of learning outcomes is that the team knows which are the priorities. If the IEP has to be adjusted, the most important learning outcomes are not abandoned. If the team was initially too conservative by selecting too few learning outcomes or too ambitious by selecting too many, they can adjust the student's program during the school year, thus avoiding limitations on student progress. Efforts to reach consensus about the educational program can help

TABLE 2. Program-at-a-Glance for Tommy Smith

Family-centered priorities for IEP goals

Communication	1. Indicates "more."
	2. Makes choices when presented with options.
	3. Summons others.
Socialization	4. Sustains interactions with peers without disabilities.
School	5. Works at task independently.

Breadth of curriculum learning outcomes

Physical education	6. Demonstrates reach and pull.
	7. Uses gym scooter.[a]
	8. Demonstrates tension/relaxation exercises.
Health	9. Acknowledges feeling.[a]
	10. Locates key places in the classroom and school.
	11. Identifies own wellness and illness.
Computer	12. Uses ENTER and CLEAR keys on the computer.
	13. Locates letters and numbers on the computer keyboard.
Communication	14. Makes requests.
	15. Follows instructions.
Socialization	16. Accepts transitions between routine activities.
Recreation/leisure	17. Engages in active leisure with peers.
Academics	18. Reads symbols/photographs.
	19. Writes self-identification information (rubber stamp).
School	20. Participates in small groups.
	21. Uses school facilities.
Vocational	22. Does school job with peers without disabilities.

General supports

Personal needs	23. Feed snacks and lunch.
	24. Dress as needed (e.g., gym, recess).
	25. Change diapers.
Physical needs	26. Reposition out of wheelchair at least once per hour.
	27. Move from place to place.
	28. Provide passive range of motion within daily activities.
Sensory needs	29. Position close to activities/people so he can see them.
Teaching others	30. Teach staff and peers what his facial expressions mean.
Providing access	31. Take him to the activities available to classmates.

[a]To be addressed later in the school year.
Note. From *Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children: A Guide to Planning Inclusive Education* (p. 64) by M. F. Giangreco, C. J. Cloninger, and V. S. Iverson, 1993, Baltimore: Brookes. Copyright 1993 by Michael F. Giangreco. Reprinted by permission.

establish group accountability and increase the likelihood of making promises that can be kept.

Distinguishing Staff From Student Goals

The importance of distinguishing between goals for the staff and those for the student is twofold. First, if many IEP goals are written as goals for the staff rather than the student, the potential exists for the student's educational experience to be extremely passive, with the emphasis on others doing things to the student (e.g., range of motion, repositioning, personal care) rather than an emphasis on making active attempts to teach the student. This restricts the student by interfering with his or her opportunity to learn and develop.

Second, IEP goals and objectives written for staff can create confusion about what staff are expected to do versus what the student is expected to do. This may create unnecessary conflict among staff members or between school staff and the family. For example, problems can arise if one person sees her role as feeding a student while another sees it as teaching eating skills. By listing things we do to or for students under a separate heading on the IEP (e.g., accommodations, management needs, supports), we more clearly communicate our intentions and provide a structure for team members to discuss their potentially different understandings about such issues.

Discipline-Free, Shared Goals

This analysis suggests that discipline-referenced approaches to goal selection are common. The problems discussed earlier pertaining to discipline-referenced approaches (e.g., disjointed goals, goals working at cross purposes, goals that reflect what is valued by a professional discipline in the language used by that discipline) can be overcome by pursuing a "discipline-free" set of shared goals. Discipline-free means that the selection of priority learning outcomes is determined from a perspective that is free of the orientation of any specific professional discipline. Thus, the selection of IEP content should be made through family-centered approaches that reference priority learning outcomes to valued life outcomes.

The use of professional jargon may not only interfere with communication among staff members representing various disciplines, but may also be intimidating to families and other team members. In the vast majority of cases, jargon is simply unnecessary. The alternative is for professionals to replace terms like *upper extremities* with *arms, prone* with *on stomach*, or *improve postural stability and increase anti-gravity movement of the head* with *holds head up and moves it to participate in functional activities (e.g., toy play, eating, making choices)*. Some teams have used a "jargon-buster" as a role within their collaborative teams to remind people of the importance of using language that can be understood by everyone (Thousand & Villa, 1993). It is the jargon-buster's job to constructively point out the unnecessary use of jargon

and assist the team in using language that is more easily understood. Using a jargon-buster during the development of written documents such as IEPs may make them more useful for team members.

CONCLUSION

IEPs in their current form have been with us over 15 years with only minor changes. Several studies have suggested that IEPs are often not useful documents (see Smith, 1990). The growing support for inclusive education indicates that the time may be ripe to consider some major changes in how we document educational plans for students with disabilities to match these new educational climates. Although descriptive information in the IEP (e.g., alternative testing techniques, native language, health information) may continue to look similar, the goals and objectives of IEPs used in general education settings may need to look significantly different. Many IEPs do *look* different, but may not necessarily *be* different beyond the superficial exterior. Potential form changes in the IEP should be driven by an improved conceptualization of what IEPs are meant to do and how we can revamp them so they fulfill their intended purpose for all educational team members. This implies that team members share a common understanding about the purpose of IEPs—but this assumption may be premature and deserves further study.

Although federal law lists a series of minimum requirements for the IEP (e.g., a written statement of educational performance levels, annual goals and short-term objectives, initiation and termination dates of services), no maximums have been established. It seems that the latitude available under the current legislation has not been fully explored. Most importantly, IEPs need to move away from disjointedness toward a model of congruence among all the various components and to move away from "being" curricula to "supporting" curricula.

It seems clear that several substantive issues regarding IEPs remain unresolved. For the most part, the IEPs reviewed did not adequately communicate the individual needs of students, nor did they seem to serve as a useful resource to guide their general education experiences. The issues outlined in this document analysis highlight some potential reasons for these problems and offer some suggestions to develop better prepared educational plans.

We suggest that efforts be focused on improving the quality and usefulness of IEPs by, at least in part, reconceptualizing the minimum requirements and extending beyond those minimums. IEP goals, objectives, and supports should be internally and externally congruent and be designed to improve valued life outcomes. That is, components of the IEP should not contradict each other, content of the IEP should be reflected in what is taught within general education class activities, and student outcomes should be truly meaningful.

This article has suggested potential alternatives to better prepare IEPs for the general education environment. Other issues related to improving IEP development for use in general education settings warrant investigation. For example, further studies might explore the congruence among other aspects of IEP development, such as assessment, present levels of performance, related-services planning and implementation, and evaluation of impact on valued life outcomes. We must continually be asking ourselves, "How is this student's life better because he or she attended our school?" Our answer to this question is both the beginning and ending of the cycle of education for students with disabilities and all their classmates without disability labels. Whether our IEPs assist or hinder our efforts on this front is a question worth posing within our own teams. ∎

MICHAEL F. GIANGRECO is a research assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Vermont. He is the principal investigator and co-director of an OSERS-sponsored research grant (Project LIFE—Lifelong Impact From Education) designed to study innovations for educating students with deaf–blindness in general education settings. **RUTH E. DENNIS** is a lecturer in the College of Education at the University of Vermont. She serves on the Project LIFE staff and as the occupational therapy consultant on the State of Vermont I-Team, providing intensive special education support to Vermont students with disabilities. **SUSAN W. EDELMAN** is a lecturer in the College of Education at the University of Vermont. She also serves on the Project LIFE staff, and as the physical therapy consultant on the State of Vermont I-Team, providing intensive special education support to Vermont students with disabilities. **CHIGEE J. CLONINGER** is a research associate professor in the College of Education at the University of Vermont. She serves as the co-director of Project LIFE and as the coordinator of the State of Vermont I-Team, providing intensive special education support to Vermont students with disabilities. Address: Michael F. Giangreco, The University Affiliated Program of Vermont, 499C Waterman Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405-0160.

REFERENCES

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods (2nd ed.)*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Brown, L., Branston, M. B., Hamre-Nietupski, S., Pumpian, I., Certo, N., & Gruenewald, L. (1979). A strategy for developing chronological, age-appropriate and functional curricular content for severely handicapped adolescents and young adults. *The Journal of Special Education, 13*, 81–90.

Downing, J. (1988). Active versus passive programming: A critique of IEP objectives for students with the most severe disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 13*, 197–210.

Giangreco, M. (in press). Effects of a consensus-building process on team decision-making: Preliminary data. *Physical Disabilities: Education and Related Services*.

Giangreco, M., Cloninger, C., & Iverson, V. (1993). *Choosing options and accommodations for children: A guide to planning inclusive education*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Giangreco, M., Cloninger, C., Dennis, R., & Edelman, S. (1993). National expert validation of COACH: Congruence with exemplary practice and suggestions for improvement. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 18*, 109–120.

Giangreco, M., Edelman, S., & Dennis, R. (1991). Common professional practices that interfere with the integrated delivery of related services. *Remedial and Special Education, 12*(2), 16–24.

Giangreco, M., Edelman, S., Dennis, R., & Cloninger, C. (1993). [Project LIFE research sites]. Unpublished raw data. Burlington: University of Vermont, Center for Developmental Disabilities.

Hunt, P., & Farron-Davis, F. (1992). A preliminary investigation of IEP quality and content associated with placement in general education versus special education classes. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 17*, 247–253.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, F. P. (1987). *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (3rd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kansas State Board of Education. (1992). *Measures to evaluate implementation of integration and best practices with students who have severe disabilities including dual-sensory impairments*. Topeka: Author.

Orelove, F., & Sobsey, D. (1991). *Educating children with multiple disabilities: A transdisciplinary approach*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Padilla, R. (1991). *Qualitative analysis with HyperQual* (version 4.2). (Available from R. Padilla, 3327 N. Dakota, Chandler, AZ 85225)

Smith, S. (1990). Individualized education programs (IEPs) in special education—From intent to acquiescence. *Exceptional Children, 57*, 6–14.

Snell, M. E. (1987). *Systematic instruction of persons with severe handicaps* (3rd ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Thousand, J., & Villa, R. (1993). Collaborative teams: A powerful tool in school restructuring. In R. Villa, J. Thousand, W. Stainback, & S. Stainback (Eds.), *Restructuring for caring and effective education: An administrative guide for creating heterogeneous schools* (pp. 73–108). Baltimore: Brookes.