Appropriate and Motivating Curriculum

Definition

An appropriate and motivating curriculum challenges students while enabling them to achieve success. It is a curriculum that is neither too difficult nor too easy for the functioning level of the student.
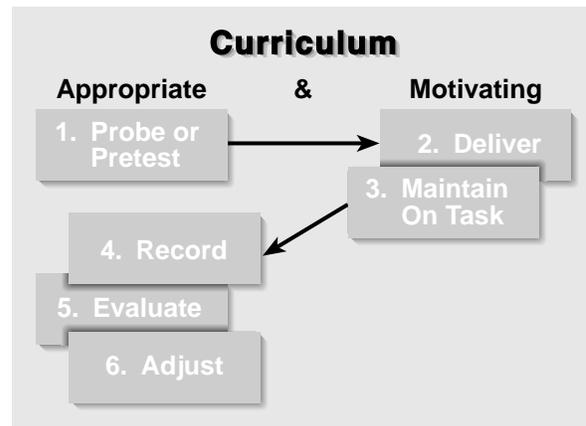
Things to Do

✓ Probe or pretest.

✓ Deliver instruction.

✓ Maintain on-task behavior.

✓ Record progress.

✓ Evaluate progress.

✓ Adjust curriculum/ instruction.

✅ Probe or pretest.

☞ The teacher selects a sample of academic "probes" from the student's proposed curriculum. The probes represent critical skills or steps necessary to master the curriculum. The student is administered increasingly difficult probes until he/she fails a series of presented items. This is the point in the curriculum at which instruction for the student will begin.

☞ Pretests are commonly used to assess student's skills at the secondary level.

Curriculum

Appropriate   &   Motivating

1. Probe or Pretest → 2. Deliver

3. Maintain On Task

4. Record

5. Evaluate

6. Adjust

✅ Deliver instruction.

Research overwhelmingly supports the use of direct instruction (DI) strategies to teach basic skills to hard-to-teach students. DI maximizes academic learning time and minimizes opportunities for misbehavior. It emphasizes group instruction by teachers or paraeducators using carefully sequenced lessons. Many DI programs have the following characteristics:

2. Deliver

- Brisk pace
- Oral response
- Effective grouping
- Lots of praise

☞ Presentations are fast paced.

☞ Oral responses are used to monitor the ongoing learning of all students.

☞ Small groups are utilized to maximize student response opportunities and teacher monitoring.

☞ Student motivation is maintained with praise and encouragement and other reinforcement.

☞ Skills are taught to mastery.

☞ Individual mastery tests are administered periodically to confirm mastery.

☞ When students make errors, correction is immediate using specific correction procedures recommended by the program.

✅ Maintain on-task behavior.

If a student is not performing with an on-task rate of at least 85%, the teacher will need to select and use interventions that will increase the on-task behavior to an acceptable level. For students with severe disabilities, an appropriate intervention may be a specific "attending" program. Other examples of ways to increase on-task behavior may include the use of a "beeper tape" system, differential reinforcement, or a combination of a token economy system paired with the use of response cost.

☑ Record progress.

Record grades/scores regularly, preferably daily. It is insufficient (and unethical) for teachers to record unsatisfactory scores or grades week after week, make no program changes, and then conclude at the end of the year that the student was unsuccessful.

☑ Evaluate progress.

If a student hasn't achieved a mastery level on material just taught, additional instruction must be provided before moving on to subsequent instruction. (Check the teacher's curriculum guide for other suggestions.)

☑ Adjust curriculum/instruction.

A student should be achieving at an 80-90% success rate on instructional tasks. If a student is not experiencing success on a skill after 3 data points, the teacher will want to consider adjusting the curriculum or instruction.

For example, if the last 3 days' data indicate Mary has achieved 46%, 57%, and 44% on math facts, sums to 5, and a mastery level of 90% is required before moving ahead, an adjustment should be considered.

Necessary Prerequisite Skills

Probes backward in the curriculum will confirm whether in fact the student has the **necessary prerequisite skills** to accomplish the current skills.

More Practice Time

If prerequisite skills are in place, the teacher may decide the student needs **more practice time** to accomplish the task.

Positive Reinforcement

If the student is not sufficiently motivated, effective **positive reinforcement** will need to be provided for working hard to master skills.

Probe Ahead

If a student is continually achieving success within a current level, the teacher will occasionally want to probe ahead to test new skills not yet taught to make certain that the student has not inadvertently learned them. If the student is found to have the skills, the teacher should adjust instruction upward in the curriculum.

Examples

DI curricula that have proved effective for many hard-to-teach students include the following:

- Connecting Math Concepts
- Distar Arithmetic I and II
- Corrective Reading
- Reading Mastery I-VI
- Corrective Spelling Through Morphographs
- Cursive Writing Program
- Corrective Mathematics
- Mathematics Modules
- Distar Language I-III

- Reading Mastery (fast cycle)
- Spelling Mastery
- Basic Writing Skills
- Expressive Writing I and II
- Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction—ECRI reading curriculum
- Teaching Research Publications—Teaching Research Curriculum (for young learners with severe disabilities)

Potential Problems and Solutions

Inappropriate Behavior

A student's continuing inappropriate behavior signals a need for the teacher to check whether the curriculum is too hard or too easy, whether the pace of instruction is appropriate, and whether positive reinforcement must be adjusted.

Lack of Progress

Lack of adequate progress may result in the student developing similar problems to those mentioned above. In addition, the teacher will want to double-check that the skill will be useful to the student (that he/she has a need to use it). It is also important for adequate instructional time to be allotted for the student to work on the skill to be mastered during the instructional day.

Getting Ready

- Select a curriculum that teaches the student valid skills—those that the student needs and will use. In other words, do not waste valuable instructional time teaching the student useless skills (e.g., teaching letter sounds to a student with severe disabilities who has not acquired any functional self-help or self-sufficiency skills).

- Ensure that there is effective reinforcement of desired student behavior at a **high rate**.

References

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