

Curriculum-Relevant Therapy

Definition: Curriculum-relevant therapy is a kind of intervention that engages students in meaningful, relevant, results-oriented work, leading to academic success.

Practice Principles:

- that intervention provided by the SLP should be therapeutic, or clinical, in nature and
- that intervention should relate directly to what students have to learn in school (Ehren, 2000).

The Therapeutic Component

Maintaining a therapeutic focus means applying clinical procedures in the educational setting, similar to the clinical procedures applied in any other setting. "Clinical" does not imply a location of intervention, but rather a type of treatment approach.

- Intervention includes the critical dimensions that form the base for any successful intervention. It is:
 - Responsive (Responsive intervention is a way of making decisions in which a student's reaction to intervention directly shapes how future intervention is provided. SLPs who adhere to this principle continuously assess student learning, make specific accommodations to meet student needs, and provide elaborated feedback.)
 - Systematic (Systematic intervention is a way of organizing learning experiences so that both the SLP and the student follow and continuously review a dynamic plan for learning new skills and strategies, relating them to past and future learning. Systematic intervention regularly has the following four characteristics: it is structured, connected, scaffolded and informative.)
 - Intensive (Intensive intervention is a way of working with students in which sufficient time is spent in guided, interactive learning activities. It is characterized by a high degree of goal-directed student engagement with student mastery and generalization as the outcome).
- "Therapy" includes more than these features. In general, the therapeutic process can be characterized as more intensive and prescriptive, requiring greater expertise in the area of language. "Therapy" includes the following features:
 - Deals with remediating or compensating for deficient skills that have not fully developed or that have been lost;

- Necessitates in-depth knowledge of language, language development and language disorders;
- Depends on the student's on-going, active participation in a self-help process;
- Requires that the sequence of activities be based on individual needs and degree of progress;
- Requires selection of individual goals which address individual needs; requires a diagnostic/prescriptive (or clinical) approach;
- Requires mastery of prerequisite skills as building blocks; may demand more intense effort to promote mastery by an individual;
- Necessitates that the SLP's actions be contingent upon the actions or reactions of the student (e.g., on the spot error analysis will determine immediate next steps) (Ehren, 2000).

The use of the word "therapy" in this sense should not be confused with the more traditional, discrete-skill approach often labeled as the "medical model."

The Curriculum-Relevant Component

- ◆ IDEA 97 (Public Law 105-17) and subsequent revisions (IDEA 04) require that the IEP addresses students' progress within the general education curriculum.
- ◆ SLPs should address curriculum in a unique way, making use of their special competencies in language and its disorders.
- ◆ SLPs should not become responsible directly for mastery of subjects like chemistry, American history, or algebra
- ◆ SLPs should contribute to the acquisition of content by teaching the language underpinnings, as applied directly to the content.
- ◆ This approach does not require SLPs to be as expert as teachers in curriculum. What is needed is enough knowledge about curriculum to select specific content as the raw material to teach language underpinnings.
- ◆ Working with curriculum does not have to be accomplished from an instructional perspective; that is where the objective is to teach the content to mastery.

Implementing Curriculum Relevant Therapy

- Be generally familiar with the standards required of the curriculum.
- Analyze the curriculum for linguistic, related cognitive, metalinguistic and metacognitive underpinnings; that is the skills and strategies in these areas necessary to access the curriculum content.
- Select specific content as the raw material for teaching language-related skills and strategies as described in the examples above;

- Conduct activities that directly relate to the goals and objectives on students' IEPs, making them relevant to content acquisition and classroom performance.

Balancing Skills and Strategies in Curriculum-Relevant Therapy

A balanced approach to curriculum-relevant therapy includes the appropriate combination of skill and strategy targets, based on the individual needs of students. Some SLPs may be more familiar with skills than they are with strategies. Strategic teaching is an educational approach in which students are taught to use “strategies” independently. A strategy is an individual’s approach to a task. It includes how a person thinks and acts when planning, executing and evaluating performance of a task and its outcomes. It consists of critical guidelines related to selecting the best procedure and how to make decisions about its use (Deshler & Lenz, 1989). A strategy helps individuals determine how to do something effectively and efficiently on their own. A strategic approach to therapy is aimed at providing rules or guidelines to help students with language disorders approach listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks more effectively, efficiently and independently.

Strategies are related to, but are different from, knowledge and skills. Knowledge is information you have; a skill is something you can do; whereas a strategy is a deliberate attempt to use knowledge and skills wisely. For example, a student may decide to use a summarization strategy to assist listening or reading comprehension. She would have to know what the words mean or she will not understand the text well enough to give a synopsis. So vocabulary knowledge is a requirement. She also has to be able to synthesize the content and crystallize the gist of the material. This is in part a semantic skill. In addition she needs syntactic skills to formulate sentences for the summary. Although knowledge and skills form the building blocks for strategies, teaching strategies is different from teaching knowledge and skills.

Examples of Curriculum-Relevant Therapy

1. **Ms. Jackson** works on vocabulary with the 9th grade students on her language caseload by teaching them the words they need to know for world history. They are about to begin a unit on the French Revolution. Targeted vocabulary for that unit includes these words: estate, tithe, bourgeoisie, unicameral legislature, conscription, coup d'etat, dictatorship, nationalism. These are the words that the world history teacher is going to have to teach the class, so Ms. Jackson will not focus on them. Rather she will suggest ways for the teacher to provide sufficient encounters with the words for students to learn them. She may even model vocabulary teaching for the teacher, if he is receptive. Ms. Jackson will teach her caseload students other words, key to understanding this unit, that they do not know; these words include: revolution, unrest, declaration, reform, opposition, and restore. She will also begin teaching her students to use vocabulary acquisition strategies for other words which they may not know in world history and other subject areas.
2. **Mr. Lozano** has students on his language caseload in 10th grade who are taking biology. The biology teacher has students reading the textbook in her class and writing responses to questions on the chapter. His students have been doing poorly on this work. These students are also seen by the learning disabilities teacher who has been trying to teach them a paraphrasing strategy to facilitate their reading comprehension in biology and other classes. Mr. Lozano discovers that his students have great difficulty putting text into their own words. He knows that if they cannot paraphrase text they will not be able to use paraphrasing as a strategy for reading, so he teaches them how to use synonyms and different syntactic structures to express the ideas in the biology textbook in other ways. He begins with the sentence level and works up to the paragraph level; he teaches them to paraphrase orally and in writing. He will include work with other textbooks as well.
3. **Ms. Whitten's** 12th graders on her caseload are preparing for a test on Shakespeare. They have to remember major characters from the plays they have studied. They are struggling to keep all the names straight. Ms. Whitten teaches them to use a mnemonic device to remember the names of the characters. At this point she develops the mnemonics with them, models and practices their use. For example, they came up with the sentence mnemonic, "Oh, poor Hamlet cannot live happily!" for the names Claudius, Hamlet, Polonius, Horatio, Laertes, Ophelia. The first letter of each word in the mnemonic is same as the first letter of one of the play's major characters. Ms. Whitten will not go through this procedure for all the ideas students have to remember in all their classes. She will teach them a strategy for developing mnemonic devices on their own for other content they have to learn, so that the students can employ mnemonic devices independently. She will use research-validated procedures for teaching strategies and she will be sure to work specifically on generalization across subject areas.