Individualization is only a point on a continuum between totally teacher-directed instruction and totally student-determined learning. The variables and the extent of individualization are manipulated to fit student outcomes.

new perspectives in individualized instruction

by L. James Walter and H. James Funk

Project evaluation and individualized instruction are two major areas of interest for Larry J. Walter, assistant professor of education at Indiana University at South Bend. He has also taught at the University of Nebraska and served as assistant research professor for the Oregon State System of Higher Education. Author of numerous articles and papers, he also writes on cost analysis, performance objectives, computer-based instruction and test development, and information processing.

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How can the schools effectively educate the children of a democratic society? This question has pervaded American educational thought since the origin of free, public education. Public education for the masses of the population has been advocated to support the contention that a democratic form of government requires an educated populace. Because of this philosophic orientation, schools have endeavored to provide programs to meet the needs of all students. While critics of American education argue that schools are not effectively meeting the needs of all students, there is continuing support to identify new approaches that will effectively educate children of the democracy.

Recent approaches in education have combined with advancements in the media and communications areas to form a new technology of education. Flexible, modular-scheduling, differentiated staffing, open education, various patterns of individualization, and numerous other innovations represent efforts toward achieving the goal of educating all students.

Individualized instruction, while not a panacea, provides a means for making the educational system more responsive to the particular needs of individual students. In individualization students are given more control over the instruction they receive: What they learn; how they learn it; and how they are evaluated. Students have increased responsibility for managing the accompanying instructional variables such as time, materials, and the learning environment.

Schools adopting individualization as a pattern of instruction realize the following benefits:

1. Alternatives for learning are developed for individual students giving formal recognition to the concept that it is not necessary for two individuals to share the same abilities, interests, or learning styles.

2. Students become more actively involved in decisions affecting their learning. Students have increased opportunities to learn and practice responsibility as a formal part of their education.

3. Learning becomes more relevant to students. They have the opportunity to pursue resources that fit their diverse interests.

4. Teachers' roles change from the patterning of content toward roles in which teachers are supporting the learning outcomes of individuals.

5. Instruction becomes more efficient. Students only pursue and learn the knowledge and skills they have yet to master.

6. Students are able to develop a more positive self-concept. Students have sufficient time and access to instructional alternatives to master the skills needed to develop a positive identity.

While there is little doubt that most teachers feel that individualization of instruction is educationally desirable, there are some serious obstacles preventing immediate implementation. As a task, individualization requires a great deal of time, training, and energy. In light of the enormity of the task, many programs have adopted the jargon of individualization without making any real changes in the learning that students experience. Because no one teacher can completely individualize instruction immediately, a more prudent approach would be to gradually and systematically individualize parts of the curriculum. In the initial stages of individualization, teachers and learners alike are learning new behaviors. Teachers are developing skills in organizing, managing and supporting an individualized instructional environment; students are learning the skills that enable them to function within that environment. If students are to take a more active role in selecting and managing their learning, they must have opportunity to learn and practice those behaviors. As teachers gain the necessary experience in managing instruction and the students adjust to new routines, further progress toward individualization can be pursued.

How can the variables in an individualized instructional setting be examined? Individualization has two major groups of variables, instruction and roles. Because individualization is an extension of a systems model of instruction, the first group of variables can be classified using the four major components of a systems model of instruction—objectives, diagnosis, instruction and evaluation.

Objectives→Diagnosis→Instruction→Evaluation→

Objectives—The determination of learning expectations

Diagnosis—The determination of the learner's instructional needs

Instruction—The prescription of instructional activities

Evaluation—The determination that the objectives are mastered

The second major group of variables can be examined by identifying the roles the teacher and learner play with respect to each component of the model. Each component (objective through evaluation) has the potential of being totally teacher-determined, jointly-determined by teacher and student, or totally student-determined.

Teacher ←——————————————→ Student
Determined   Determined

By arranging the two groups of variables, instruction and roles, into cross-partition, a model for examining the continuum of individualization can be formed.

CONTINUUM OF INDIVIDUALIZATION

Teacher-Determined (TD) .... Student-Determined (SD)

COMPONENTS OF INSTRUCTION		Teacher-Determined (TD)				Student-Determined (SD)
	Objectives	All objectives (if specified) are Teacher-Determined (TD). All students achieve the same objectives.	All objectives are TD. All students achieve the same objectives.	All objectives are TD. Some objectives are optional.	Objectives are TD and SD.	Objectives are SD with teacher input.
	Diagnosis	No formal diagnosis is conducted. All students are assumed to have same repertoire of entry behaviors.	Pretest is administered over objectives to adjust the instruction.	Pretest is administered over required TD objectives. Diagnosis may be SD over optional objectives.	Diagnosis is TD and SD.	SD with teacher assistance.
	Instruction	All students receive the same instruction at the same time. Choices of instruction and materials are made by the teacher.	Activities are TD. Students have options of activities and the time spent on activities.	Activities for required objectives are TD. Students have options of activities and time. Students may use TD activities or design their own.	Some activities are TD; some activities are SD. Students control time, materials, and methods.	Activities are SD with teacher assistance.
	Evaluation	All students are tested over the same objectives at the same time by the same method.	All students are tested over the same objectives. Time and method of testing may be varied.	Evaluation is TD for required objectives. Students have option of method and time. Evaluation may be TD and/or SD for optional objectives.	Evaluation is TD and SD.	Evaluation is SD with teacher.

Individualization can be viewed as a point on a continuum between a totally teacher-determined and directed instructional setting and a totally student-determined and directed instructional setting. In the totally teacher-determined setting, the teachers manage (as best they can) all the major components of the instructional program and the accompanying variables. The choices of objectives, materials, and amount of time allotted to instructional activities are controlled by teachers. In a totally student-determined setting, students manage the major components of instruction and accompanying variables. They decide what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.

How is it possible to implement an individualized program? Individualization is an extension of a systems approach to planning. A prerequisite for an individualized program is the determination of student outcomes in the form of goals and specific objectives. Once this is accomplished, it is possible to design alternative instructional patterns and assess their effectiveness. By identifying student outcomes an essential first step is taken toward the goal of individualization. In the earlier stages of individualization, the teacher determines and controls the variables of instruction. The teacher determines the objectives. Diagnosis, if conducted, is only used to adjust instruction to the level of the class. All students receive the same instruction and evaluation. In the intermediate stages of individualization, as more objectives are formulated and instructional alternatives developed, diagnosis is used to group students on the basis of common deficiencies. Optional objectives and enrichment activities are provided for students who have mastered the required objectives. In the final stages of individualization, students assume responsibility for determining objectives, learning experiences and evaluation. The teacher's role is to provide assistance in selecting appropriate objectives; locating and selecting appropriate learning experiences; and evaluating student learning.

In summary, to develop an individualized program teachers would: (1) decide where they are; (2) decide the extent to which they wish to individualize aspects of the curriculum; and (3) design a plan to systematically develop the requisites for the individualized system they wish to implement.

the bay of funding

Luckily for those who give money to the various claimants (an act known as funding: with foundation offices in the buildings that tower over the harbor, New York is the Bay of Funding), there is a certain comity in the social sciences. Suppose, however, that the money ran short and the various centers and institutes saw their existence endangered?

Some might make a better case than others, but suppose they all said they wanted to set up ongoing ad hoc mechanisms for option assessment and constructive and creative response? Suppose they all wanted to draft programmatic proposals that could later be implemented on the basis of a meaningful ethos able to supply definitive answers to fundamental value questions and identify dangerous fallout? Suppose—the ultimate horror—they all claimed not only the same set of concerns but the same constituency within which an informed dialogue would resonate? What price cross-fertilization at the interface then?

Strictly Speaking. Edwin Newman.
Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1974. pp. 147-148.