

The Role of Occupational Therapists in the Classroom

The following explanations of related services and intervention models are provided in literature from IDEA '97, AOTA guidelines in special education, and recent information reported in Cuyahoga Special Education Service Center materials:

“Related service is driven by the IEP and intervention is based on incorporating therapeutic strategies and consultation into the educational curriculum in an inclusion setting, or in the least restricted environment.”

“Lesson Based Therapy is a common method of service delivery to meet the above criteria. For example, the occupational therapist services those students on her caseload and fits her treatment into whatever the classroom teacher has planned. Thus if the teacher is requiring students to write in their journals, the therapist would address IEP goals related to handwriting with intervention strategies to include things like desk posture, pencil grip, adapted paper for line orientation, etc., while the student is working on his journal.”

‘Related services should serve a supportive role in helping the student to participate in and benefit from special education. IDEA '97 also decrees that special-needs children be educated in the least-restrictive environment (LRE) and that "... removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." Therefore, the therapist needs to emphasize intervention strategies within the student's natural environment.’

‘In the school system, OT is a related, "helper" service. The role of the therapist is to support the teacher and the student in meeting his IEP goals and becoming as independent and successful as possible in the school environment. OT does not have separate goals that they work on separately. The OT is linked to educational goals in the service section where the team has decided at an IEP meeting that the needs of the child can only be met with the integration of the related OT service.’

The following guidelines have been established to meet IDEA expectations in providing related services to students receiving special education:

1. Related services are provided for students with disabilities as a service related to their specialized instruction. For this reason, the teacher will write the “one set” of instructional goals for the IEP with input from the related services personnel.
2. The related service is provided according to the educational model and is delivered due to demonstrated need of the student. In order to provide the related service, it must be determined that without it, the child would not be receiving FAPE.
3. The related services are to be provided at the closest point of instruction. This affords the greatest likelihood of transfer of skills and maintenance of the intervention throughout the week. The related service person provides the expertise to design and assure that an intervention is effective. Many other educational personnel will also carry out the intervention.

COMPARISON OF SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS

	<u>MEDICAL MODEL</u>	<u>EDUCATIONAL MODEL</u>
ASSUMPTION	Underlying cause exists which requires intervention	Emphasis is on product/ skill
PROBLEM	Resides in the individual	Is due to poor fit between skills and environment
PURPOSE OF ASSESSMENT	Identifying underlying dysfunction	Identifying environmental context (necessary skills)
TREATMENT FOCUS	Often addresses underlying cause, not symptoms Focus is on the individual	Develop skills/achieve goals as efficiently as possible Focus on “fit” between student skills and environment
SERVICE DELIVERY	Direct treatment	Variety of intervention modes
COURSE OF TREATMENT	May be long term and expensive	Usually short term and cost effective
RATIONALE	To improve individual’s overall functioning/ independence	To assist student in meeting IEP goals designed to lead to independence as an adult