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## **DEVELOPING FUNCTIONAL, ROUTINES-BASED IEPs**

By Kathleen Trumbull



A child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a reflection of the supports and services a child needs in order to maximize the child's participation in the classroom. The IEP is a guidance document for the IEP team that is intended to enhance the child's growth, development, and learning by identifying needed modifications, adaptations, and accommodations and integrating planned learning opportunities within the usual classroom activities and routines.

Routines-based IEPs are based on the daily routines of a child's natural environments – school, home, and community. The key characteristic of a routines-based IEP is that the instructional interaction is planned and embedded, as naturally as possible, within an ongoing classroom activity or routine. The teaching focuses on enhancing the child's individual learning objectives within the environment that the child typically experiences. This is done by providing multiple opportunities to practice targeted behaviors/ skills within and across preschool activities. The child's attainment of identified goals and objectives is supported by planned teacher behavior. Opportunities are created to perform the behavior or skill and responded to in such a way to accelerate the child's

acquisition of the behavior and/or skill.

The routines-based IEP is developed through in a process that includes:

- Collaborative goal setting;
- Development of meaningful and motivating routines and activities for the class; and
- Development of functional goals and identification of short-term functional objectives for individual children.

Functional goals identify meaningful skills used in a variety of settings to promote independence, engagement, and social relationships. To be truly functional, a goal should be:

- Written for a naturally occurring environment;
- Relevant to meaningful activities; and
- A generalized skill.

Developing functional goals and objectives is a multi-step process. The team must first:

- Identify skills that permit the child with disabilities to participate in routine daily activities with typically developing children;
- Identify skills that build upon the child's strengths and interests; and
- Identify skills that will increase opportunities to participate in future activities.

When determining the importance of teaching a skill, the team must answer to the following questions regarding the functionality of that skill for the particular child:

- Does the child need or use this skill in his/her daily routine?
- Will learning this skill allow the child to be more like his/her typical peers?

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- Will learning this skill enable the child to participate in the community?
- Will learning this skill encourage the child to interact with his/her typically developing peers?
- Does the child need this skill both now and in the future?

The early childhood curriculum is broad and presents many learning opportunities throughout a child's day. Our teaching efforts must focus on the whole child and appreciate all of the important areas of learning as well as the variety of opportunities for learning. The IEP process provides the venue for the planning and attention necessary to support children's ability to participate in the naturally occurring activities and routines in their environments.

#### References

1. Sandall, S.R., & Schwartz, I.S. (2002). *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
2. Early Childhood Collaborative Services Project. (1996). *Routine based IEP*. Farmington, CT: University of Connecticut Health Center.



 **Harriet's Corner...** Notes from Harriet Forman, Preschool Consultant, Special Education Bureau, New Mexico Public Education Department 

Dear Colleagues,

Ms. Denise A. Koscielniak has joined the Special Education Bureau (SEB) as our new State Director. Ms. Koscielniak was most recently the principal at the Los Alamos Middle School, and prior to that, she served in administrative positions including Director of Special Education in the Santa Fe Public Schools. Her background is in Special Education and Nursing. She brings many strengths and ideas to the New Mexico Public Education Department, Special Education Bureau.

All districts that serve preschoolers will be

participating in a pilot preschool assessment program this spring. Below is an excerpt from the April 18, 2005 letter describing the pilot:

*"The Annual Performance Report (APR) that the Special Education Bureau (SEB) completes has come to include this probe: "Are the early language/communication, pre-reading, and social-emotional skills of preschool children with disabilities receiving special education and related services, improving?"*

*Examples from each area are listed below:*

- Early language/communication: Child will use gestures, sounds, words, or sentences to convey wants and needs or to express meaning to others; child will respond to others' communication with appropriate actions or communicative reply.
- Pre-reading: Child will give and receive nonverbal and verbal messages to attach meaning to experiences, events, and interactions; child will experience written language functions by listening to nursery rhymes, songs, and stories or by selecting books they would like to have an adult read to them.
- Social-emotional: Child will interact with peers and adults and show increasing ability to maintain social relationships and demonstrate social participation in play; child will demonstrate appropriate assertion, affect/emotion, and problem-solving skills in interactions with others....

*For now, we are establishing a pilot project to collect information on a random sample of children."*

We anticipate repeating the pilot for one more year after this sampling. We will establish a Task



Force of interested stakeholders next year to design a statewide assessment system that reflects how pre-kindergartners who are receiving special education and related services are benefiting from their services. We'll also survey districts to learn how they currently make judgments on how the children are doing.

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This pilot is likely to spotlight the need to write clear, measurable goals. We anticipate that it will highlight a need for in-service on how to write quality IEPs. Feel free to go to <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/se/iep/index.htm> to review the technical assistance manual “Developing Quality IEPs” developed by the Special Education Bureau. Below is an excerpt from that manual:

*“When writing a goal, state what the student will do as a result of the special education services being provided. The goal should be written in such a way that even someone unfamiliar with the student could implement it and assess its mastery. Include these components in each goal:*

- *Conditions: under what conditions progress will be measured;*
- *Behavior: identify measurable performance; actions by student;*
- *Criterion: quantifies how much, how often, to what extent;*
- *Timeframe: exactly when mastery is expected; and*
- *Method of Measurement: how progress and/or mastery will be measured” (p.46).*

Keep in mind:

- The three goal areas listed above (early language/communication, pre-reading, and social-emotional) were identified by the Office of Special Education Programs and reflect areas we should be addressing;
- Providing access to the general education curriculum is key, especially for preschoolers;
- Goals should always be developmentally appropriate for the child’s age;
- The examples given for early language/communication and pre-reading/early literacy illustrate the kinds of activities children should be engaged in—play, imagination, drama, and exploration are rich sources for developing a structure of language, foundational for all later learning; and

- As preschool educators, we cannot jump straight to the ABC’s before we have built that strong experiential foundation.

Thanks for all your efforts in conducting 90-Day Transition Conferences and your thoughtful, caring work with our young children!



## **INCLUSION: PART TWO**

by Sophie Bertrand

(Note: This is the second part of *Inclusion: Part One* which was the feature article in our March 2005 newsletter.)

Best practices in inclusive early childhood education include a curriculum that is functional, age appropriate, and linked to an assessment system; a process for IEP development that reflects assessment and is compatible with normalized early childhood education; systematic, data-based instruction; and an integrated delivery of services.

An integrated model of service delivery gives therapists and special educators the opportunity to observe children in natural settings and to involve children without disabilities as peer models. Early childhood staff are able to observe the specialists facilitating interactions, individualizing instruction, etc., and can utilize the observed techniques when the specialists are not in the classroom.

This approach supports therapists and special educators in doing assessment in context of daily routines, which leads to the development of more functional IEP goals. Therapists, and special and early childhood educators facilitate embedding the IEP into daily routines and activities, leading to functional outcomes for children.



# Classroom Activity



This month's classroom activity provides ideas for curriculum modifications that can be made at circle time. These ideas are taken from *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs*, reviewed in the book review section of this newsletter.

- If a child has difficulty with keeping his or her hands to him- or herself during circle time... *provide children with individual boundaries by having them sit on individual carpet squares.*
- If a child has difficulty with attending to rhymes or songs... *use objects or puppets to act out rhymes or songs to make them more meaningful.*
- If a child is disinterested in circle-time activities... *allow the child to make a choice of songs, books, or finger plays by presenting the choices in picture form.*
- If a child has difficulty with understanding stories... *use objects or flannel board pieces that represent characters or objects in the story. The child may make connections between the physical object.*
- If a child throws a tantrum and tries to leave circle time... *let the child hold a favorite quiet toy (e.g., teddy bear, Barney). Give him or her the toy at the beginning of the group.*
- If a child does not yet use verbal language and is disruptive or passive during songs and rhymes... *allow the child to participate by providing him/her with objects or flannel pieces associated with the song or rhyme.*
- If a child is hesitant to go to circle time... *have a favorite person (child or adult) sit next to an empty carpet square so that the child knows he or she can be near a favorite person as soon as he or she sits at circle time.*
- If a child has difficulty with maintaining trunk stability while sitting at circle time... *allow the child to sit in a cube or bean bag chair so the child is still at the same height as his/her peers but the sides of the chair provide stability.*

*Once a child's trunk and hips are stabilized, the child can increase his or her active participation because he or she can expend more energy moving his or her arms and hands to songs and finger plays and less energy sitting.*

- If a child does not participate in circle-time activities such as movements to songs or finger plays... *have an adult sit behind the child and provide hand-over-hand assistance to prompt the child to do the movements. As the child becomes more independent, the adult should lessen his or her assistance.*
- If a child is asked to choose the picture that shows today's weather and put it on the chart but he or she doesn't know which one to pick... *ask a peer to pick a picture and give it to the child so that the child can still put the picture on the chart.*
- If children are asked to choose an animal whose name has the same first letter as theirs (e.g., elephant for Eric) and pretend to be the animal during the zoo activity, but one child can't think of any animals that he or she can pretend to be... *ask other children to give suggestions and then let the child decide which animal he or she wants to pretend to be.*
- If the teacher passes a "magic bag" around during circle time, and each child has a turn to pick one thing from the bag without looking, but one child doesn't want to put his or her hand in the bag... *ask the child's buddy to pick one thing from the bag for the child. The child can still hold it while the other children hold theirs.*
- If a child gives nonsensical or inappropriate responses to circle time question... *call on a child who will model an appropriate response just before calling on the target child.*
- If a child is unsure of what to do at circle time... *utilize a seating arrangement so that the child is seated between and across from peers who will consistently model appropriate actions.*





### ***Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs***

Sandall, S.R., & Schwartz, I.S. (2002). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

**BOOK REVIEW**

Inclusion is about belonging and participating in a diverse society. Inclusion of young children with disabilities and other special needs in early childhood classrooms is now a primary service option supported by research. The building blocks model offers practical suggestions to help teachers provide the specialized instruction needed by children with special needs without interfering with the social ecology or curricular integrity of the early childhood classroom. This book offers teachers in early childhood classrooms practical strategies for making curriculum modifications,

embedding learning opportunities into the early childhood general education curriculum, and developing child-focused instructional strategies. It also demonstrates application of the building blocks framework to the following classroom content areas:

1. Independent classroom behavior;
2. Developmentally appropriate classroom behavior;
3. Emergent literacy in the early childhood classroom; and
4. Friendships and relationships.

The aim of this book is to help teachers make good decisions when selecting and using appropriate levels of assistance, working in teams, and using effective teaching strategies to help children attain important and worthwhile objectives.

### ***MARGARET MACTAVISH RETIRES...***

In her bio, Margaret Mactavish writes that she began educating young children when she was in first grade, "teaching" her four younger siblings for as long as they would cooperate. Her teaching career formally ends this summer as Margaret retires from her current position of Coordinator for Early Childhood Education at UNM-Taos. Over the years here in New Mexico, Margaret has developed the Early Childhood Multicultural Education Program; co-chaired the state Higher Education Early Childhood Articulation Task Force; served as president of the New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children; and co-authored the first Common Core Content for Early Childhood Education degrees. She also wrote the Learning Outcomes document for the New Mexico Early Learning Pre-K Plan. Many educators of young children in New Mexico have had the pleasure and honor of learning from and working with Margaret. May her passion for education and joy of young children live on!



### **Professional Development Opportunities**

Check out the early childhood training calendar on the CDD Early Childhood Division website at: <http://cdd.unm.edu/ec/calendar.html>

***Transforming the Difficult Child: The Nurtured Heart Approach.*** May 12, 2005. Albuquerque Marriott, Albuquerque, New Mexico. To register online: [www.cmehelp.com](http://www.cmehelp.com); by phone: (888) 854-0555.

***The Young Child with Special Needs.*** May 5—7, 2005. Las Vegas, Nevada. To register online: [www.contemporaryforums.com](http://www.contemporaryforums.com); by phone: (800) 377-7707.

***NAEYC's 14th National Institute for Professional Development.*** June 5—8, 2005. Miami Beach, Florida. Register online at [www.naeyc.org/conferences/institute](http://www.naeyc.org/conferences/institute).

***It's Only Natural.*** May 20, 2005. Tresco TOTS, Las Cruces, New Mexico. To register, call or email Mary Zarembo at (505) 272-1042 or [mzarembo@salud.unm.edu](mailto:mzarembo@salud.unm.edu) or Bird Podzemny: (505) 272-6511 or [bpdzemny@salud.unm.edu](mailto:bpdzemny@salud.unm.edu).

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