



PROJECT ACCESS FACT SHEET #6



projectaccess.missouristate.edu
projectaccess@missouristate.edu
866-481-3841

LIFE REFERENCED CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

Nothing is more central to the development of a functional education program than longitudinal planning. This is true for students with autism or any developmental disability. The ultimate educational goal for a student with autism is to produce a clear thinking, employable, independent, socially competent adult. It is important to keep these goals in mind when determining the functionality of curriculum.

Life Referenced Curriculum (LRC) focuses on the teaching of skills that promote increased independence for students in their natural environments and throughout life. Three features are essential to a life referenced curriculum. First, the skills taught must be matched to the needs of the learner. Secondly, for each activity we must ask ourselves, "If this student doesn't learn to do this for himself, will someone have to do it for him in 'real life'?" Finally, the activities used must facilitate the development of skills that are essential for participation within diverse integrated environments -- including vocational, domestic, and recreational.

Life referenced Curriculum and the IEP

The individual education program (IEP) for a functional educational program is developed for instruction in activities in four domains. These are:

Domestic/Personal Management, which encompasses activities such as eating and food preparation, grooming and dressing, hygiene and toileting, budgeting/planning/scheduling, and household and outdoor maintenance.

Vocational/Academic, which encompasses classroom/school jobs, community work experience, and neighborhood jobs.

Recreational/Leisure, which encompasses school and extracurricular activities, solitary activities at home and in the neighborhood, interactions with family and friends, and physical fitness.

Community Integration, which encompasses travel, community safety, grocery shopping, general shopping, eating out, and using services. Embedded into the activities within the domains are communication skills, social interaction skills, work behaviors, problem solving/critical thinking, self-monitoring, non-traditional academics, and generalization skills.

Making life referenced curriculum work

Three principles are critical to the notion of the life referenced curriculum for students with autism. These are the concepts of age appropriateness, zero inference, and partial participation in activities.

Age appropriateness: By teaching age-appropriate tasks, and using age-appropriate materials, the stigmatizing discrepancies between students with autism and their age peers without disabilities are reduced. Opportunities for inclusion in the mainstream of the school and community are increased for students with autism who are able to approximate the behavior of their peers. Increased opportunities for mainstreaming, along with direct instructions, provide more opportunities for peer modeling and, in turn, further mainstreaming opportunities because of improved perceptions of teachers, administrators, and students regarding the abilities of students with autism.

Zero inferences: If zero inferences (i.e., no instructional inference) are made it means that we make no assumptions that skills learned in one environment will spontaneously generalize to other environments. That makes it essential to teach skills in the settings in which they actually occur in life.

Partial participation: The principle of partial participation refers to allowing a person access to school and community environments and activities, even if he or she is unable to perform all of the skills independently or is unable to attend for the entire length of the activity. For example, an eight-year-old girl with autism might be unable to tolerate an entire 30 minute third grade music class in which note reading and music theory are taught for the first twenty minutes. She can, however, enjoy and participate in the last ten minutes of singing. Application of the principle of partial participation requires that the student be allowed to participate for the last part of the music class.

Looking to the future: Functional educational programming for students with autism looks beyond the school room, the school building, the school day and the school year. It looks to life in the 'real world' as its reference point. Such programming is truly a life referenced curriculum.

Developed by Edna A. Smith Ph.D.

Reference: Porco, Barbara. Functional programming for people with autism: Growing toward independence by learning functional skills and behaviors. *Autism Training Sourcebook*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Resource Center for Autism.