

September 15th, 2009

Issue 19

Targeting School Functional Skills as IEP Objectives

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The beginning of every school year involves developing an *Individual Educational Plan* for a number of students with very specific needs. The sensory, motor, behavioural, cognitive and social characteristics of students with ASD may create challenges with independent completion of functional school activities. Thus, in addition to assessing cognitive/behavioural skills, one needs to look at the physical tasks needed to function in various school environments as well. It is important to look at the performance of each student on functional tasks, in order to identify appropriate objectives that will promote their autonomy and self-esteem. Based on the *School Function Assessment*, these objectives include:

Travelling. This consists of moving on flat/uneven surfaces, around obstacles (e.g. desks in classroom), and through congested or narrow spaces (e.g. crowded hallways); adopting and maintaining a place in the class line-up when travelling in and around the school building (i.e. to the playground and bus, evacuating the building as needed, etc.); managing ramps/stairs, holding on or not to the rail, and while carrying objects up/down; and finally, keeping pace with peers during all of those situations.

Maintaining and changing position. This consists of transferring between positions from the floor, chair/wheelchair, toilet seat, and standing; maintaining a stable, seated position on various seats (e.g. floor, class chair, toilet seat, bus bench, etc.) for the required amount of time; as well as boarding and disembarking vehicles to get to or from school.

Participating in recess. This includes performing recreational movements, such as running, climbing, jumping, throwing/catching/kicking balls, hopping, skipping, and using playground equipment when available, in order to play with or in parallel to peers.

Manipulating objects while moving. This includes transporting belongings and materials (e.g.: schoolbag, lunchbox, bins of materials, cart of personal supplies, etc.) within the classroom/school building as needed; picking-up, carrying and putting down objects of different sizes (with one/two hands), objects that may be fragile or that contain 'spillable' substances; retrieving objects from storage spaces, cupboards and shelves; picking up supplies from the floor; distributing papers/supplies; opening and closing all types of doors (e.g. doors with rounded or straight handles, heavy schoolyard doors).

Using classroom materials. This includes using classroom/art/computer tools effectively (e.g. pencil, crayons, markers with caps, eraser, pencil sharpener, scissors, glue, tape, stapler, hole puncher, paper clip, paint brush, computer mouse, etc.); manipulating books, toys and small objects; tearing, folding and placing paper in binder/folder.

Setting up and cleaning up. This consists of gathering, setting up and putting away equipment or materials in class (i.e. classroom, physical education/art/music classes, lunchroom); opening/closing containers; disposing of waste; wiping/tidying-up table top and desk; organizing belongings at the beginning and end of a day.

Eating and drinking. This includes eating a typical meal within the allotted time; using utensils; using a napkin to clean mouth/hands; drinking from a cup, straw, bottle, and water fountain; opening/closing lunchbox, containers and bags; opening wrapped/sealed foods; as well as all other setup and cleanup tasks (see above).

Hygiene. This consists of bowel/bladder control; completing toileting routine including clothing management, wiping, flushing, washing and drying hands; opening/closing sink faucets; getting soap/paper from dispensers; blowing nose; covering/cleaning mouth/nose/face when coughing/sneezing.

Clothing management. This consists of undressing/dressing for indoor/outdoor activities (i.e. managing a hat, scarf, neck warmer, mitts, coat, sweater, boots, shoes, etc.), hanging/placing clothes on hook/in cubby, managing fastenings (Velcro, snaps, buttons, hooking/unhooking and pulling up/down zipper, belt buckle, lacing/tying shoe laces).

Reviewing this list of tasks with the school resource team should help identify areas that need to be addressed and guide the development of more specific objectives. Remember to ask parents about their child's performance on these tasks at home, and to include them when establishing priorities. As always, consider the developmental level of your student when identifying objectives, and consult your occupational therapist if you have questions when going through this process. In practicing daily living skills across the home and school environments we optimize success, generalize learned skills, and support functional autonomy.

Joëlle Hadaya, erg.
Occupational Therapist

Reference: Coster W., Deeney T., Haltiwanger J. & Haley S. (1998). *School Function Assessment*. The Psychological Corporation.

Communication Corner

The communication skills of students on the autism spectrum vary greatly. Some students are non-verbal while others appear to be quite competent communicators although they continue to have difficulties with communicating in social situations. For all students with autism, the I.E.P. should contain at least one objective that addresses the communication and social communication needs of the student.

For students who have difficulty expressing their most basic needs it is important to focus on the most critical communication skills. By addressing these skills, the student will be more equipped to participate in a meaningful way throughout the day. When a student is unable to calmly and effectively request desired items, refuse an object or activity, or ask

for assistance or a break, they will likely try other means to obtain the same outcome.

For more competent communicators it is important to focus on social/communication goals. In order to effectively participate in a group or have a meaningful conversation with a peer, more basic skills may need to be taught throughout the day. These skills may include learning about other people's body language and physical gestures as well as understanding what others might be thinking based on these non-verbal signals. These skills may lead to better perspective taking and ultimately better social interactions.

For more information on social communication skills visit:

www.SocialThinking.com

Helene Packman, Speech-Language Pathologist

Behaviour Strategies: Goals for the I.E.P.

Ask any resource teacher and they will tell you that establishing behavioural objectives for a student with an ASD is certainly a very important aspect of an IEP. The key, however, is to come up with objectives that are appropriate for the child's level of functioning. In other words, as a rule of thumb, behavioural goals should be *realistic* and *achievable*; we want the student, as well as the school professionals, to feel successful in achieving the term goals. Therefore, when choosing behaviours to target, we need to make sure that we are not setting expectations that are too high for our student. This is not to say that we cannot challenge them; we can gradually increase expectations as we teach the student new skills.

Another key component to any behavioural IEP goal is that

it needs to be specific. For example, instead of setting a goal like "will be cooperative with peers", we could write "will engage in appropriate turn-taking skills by attending to peer's turn and waiting for own turn". Another common behavioural objective on an IEP is "will be compliant"; this can be replaced with a more specific goal like "will transition appropriately from tasks, activities, and school environments". By definition, behaviour is usually observable and measurable. In keeping with this, the IEP goal should be written in a way that it can be observed and quantified throughout the day. The more specific a goal is, the easier it is to spot during the day and thus, making it easier to count how many times the student is successful in achieving the goal on a daily basis.

Writing S.M.A.R.T. IEPs

When choosing appropriate goals for students with autism, specific attention should be paid to the unique difficulties associated with the disorder. Academic, language and communication, social skills, activities of daily living, and behavioural goals can be better achieved when using the SMART strategy created by the Manitoba Education and Training Minister. With this method, IEP goals are written using Specific, clear and unambiguous language. Goals are **M**asurable in that they allow student achievement to be described, assessed and evaluated. They are **A**chievable and realistic for the student as well as **R**ealistic, relevant and meaningful for the student. Finally, they are **T**ime-limited. This means that there is a clear time frame by which goals can be achieved and revisited.

Here are some examples:

Specific

- Dylan will increase study skills for academic success.
- Dylan will demonstrate the following study skills: skimming written material and use reference materials in social studies class.

Measurable

- Owen will improve his reading skills.
- Owen will read short text at benchmark 6 independently.

Action Words

- Betsy will decrease her anger and violation of school rules.
- Provided with visual supports, Betsy will remove herself from environments that cause her to lose control and go to her quiet area.

Realistic and Relevant

- Kelsey will demonstrate improved writing skills.
- Kelsey will write a 3 sentence paragraph.

Time-limited

- Jordan will read vocabulary words.
- Jordan will read 5 new words weekly as assessed during his weekly spelling test.

For more information or additional examples please visit :

<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/iep/>



FRANK ELEVATES VAGUENESS TO AN ART FORM.

Read All About It!



The special interests of students with ASDs often pose a challenge for educators who describe how these all-consuming thoughts can interfere negatively with learning and socialization. Autism experts Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz collaborated to create a book to help teachers in this regard. The book *"Just Give Him the Whale! 20 Ways to Use Fascinations, Areas of Expertise, and Strengths to Support Students with Autism"* addresses how teachers can use special interests to inspire, motivate, and positively impact both academic and social skills in schools. It is easy-to-read, provides many first-hand accounts and examples, and is suitable for educators of both elementary and high school.

This book is available in the ASD Resource Library. For more information, please consult our website or your consultant for Autism.

Reference: Kluth, P. & Schwarz, P. (2008). "Just Give him the Whale!" 20 Ways to Use Fascinations,

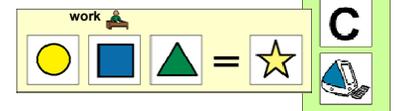
Psychology Tip

When creating IEPs for students with an ASD, especially those with intellectual difficulties, it can be helpful to consider Maslow's (1943) concept of a Hierarchy of Needs. According to Maslow, the higher needs in this hierarchy only come into focus once all the needs that are lower down are mainly or entirely satisfied. For example, anxiety or overstimulation for students with an ASD can impede learning and performance on academic tasks. For students with ASDs who often struggle with feelings of anxiety or overstimulation in a novel or demanding situation such as the regular classroom, performance on academic tasks may be impeded until modifications to the physical and social environment are made to ensure that the child feels safe. Such modifications include the establishment of routines and environmental predictability as well as adaptational aides (such as visual schedules, cues and social scripts) which promote functional autonomy and a sense of control. Consideration should be given to including the child's internalization of routine and use of adaptational aides for the purpose of independence-building as IEP goals.

Try This!

A **Work System** is a form of structured teaching used in the TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren) method. It is a strategy used to promote independence and success for students with an ASD. The task is structured and organized in such a way that the objective is **clear** (i.e. *without* any adult directions and prompts). This type of Work System is a systematic and visual way to answer:

1. What (and in what order) do I do?
2. How much do I do?
3. How will I know when I'm finished?
4. What happens when I'm finished?



A Work System is *different* from a Schedule, which instructs the student **WHERE** to go. A Work System tells a student **WHAT TO DO** once they have reached the scheduled location. For example, in our daily life, our To-Do List may tell us to go to the grocery store but it is our grocery list that tells us what to get/buy.

A Work System Schedule can be used with any type of activity (academic, leisure or daily living skills) and can be read from top-to-bottom or left-to right (see examples). You may use shelves or baskets to hold the tasks to be completed in an organized way. Lastly, create a *Finished* basket/pile on the right if desired. To use a Work System Schedule:

1. Create your Work System (see examples on the right for ideas)
2. Label your tasks (in baskets or shelves) to match the pictos on the Work System (you can use numbers, letters, pictures, colors or shapes).
3. The strip that defines the order in which to do tasks is mounted to/above the work area
4. The child removes the label of the first task and matches it to the box with the same label and then completes the task in the box/basket/shelf. (When finished, the task goes in the *Finished* basket/pile.)
5. The child does the same for the remaining tasks.
6. The last picto depicts what happens when the tasks are finished (reward or an instruction to refer to schedule)

It is important to only place tasks in the work system that the child is capable of completing **independently**. If it is a new task, model and coach the student through the task before assigning it as an independent work activity. Begin with one or two tasks and increase the number and complexity (either on the schedule or in the baskets) as the child becomes more proficient.

Reference: Henry, K.A. (2005). *How Do I Teach This Kid?* Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons Inc. <http://www.autism.com/families/therapy/teacch.htm>



