

Lesson 3 Transcript
The Goal of Educational Supports
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Alright, I want to talk about the idea the idea of what autism looks like and what some of the problems are and you probably have seen some of that yourself. What I want to talk about a little bit is kind of what's the point and where do we want to go with all this, and where do we want to end up. I'm going to start about where we begin and how it looks when I go to a school. Now, when I go into schools, and I may see a very small subset because I don't get called if things are perceived as going okay. I'm usually called if things are a problem, so I might see a subset. But usually we see that kids are in the back, off to the side, and Judy kind of eluded to this, with an assistant. No one quite knows what to do with the child or they want to include the child, or nobody knows. It might be in a special education room, or it might be a regular room, or it might be in a hallway, but there's usually an assistant with them and they're joined together. Usually there's a lot of adult responding and interacting. An adult is responding and reacting and explaining, asking and correcting the child, a little bit out of control and the child is a little bit in control. If you think about a little bit of sometimes what we do in these situations is one of the problems with human services in general, not just schools, but the farther you are away from kids, the more valued you are. By that I mean, who gets the highest salaries, the people working with kids? No. Who has the most status, the people working with the kids? No. So the farther away you get from the actual delivery of services, in human services, any of them, whether it be schools or whatever it is, the farther you get away from that, the higher status you have, the most pay you have. So people often times working with the kid are usually the lowest paid, the least trained, and kind of the most unfamiliar with what it is you're supposed to be doing. So the more education you get, the more training you get, the more pay you get, the farther away you get from kids. It's kind of a goofy system, but that's the problem we run into, is that we put people that are most difficult to teach with the people that have the least amount of training and experience. Somebody once said the IQ of the learner and the teacher should average one hundred. If you combined them in total amount they should at least be one hundred. So the kid with the least amount of skills, needs the most powerful and skillful teacher. The kid who is most facile at learning, the gifted and talented kids they don't even need a teacher. You take a kid with autism that has a lot of trouble learning, he needs a smart competent teacher who can really think about what they're doing. And we're going to try and talk about some of those things to think about, but that's the problem we run into lots of the times is that there's usually a lot of adult responding and interacting and they're not quite sure what to do.

Along with that you have social and academic isolation. How many kids can make a friend when they've got the "police" or an adult with them? Well it's hard to intermix and make friends and fit into the school if you're dragging around this adult with you. Who's usually correcting the other kids like "don't say that," "don't do this," "put your napkin down," "don't eat that way," "don't do this, don't do that," "don't, don't, don't." They sort of have the adult police with them.

Well they're not going to fit in very well, so they get socially isolated and then they get academically isolated because they're pulled away from the all the curriculum because they don't quite fit in. It's that round peg in a square hole problem and we're going to try and talk about at how to solve some of those.

In the end when you look at it, there's often not much learning, nobody's getting much reinforcement, it's not much enjoyment, the kid might be having a lot of fun because he or she is probably thinking about ITP (Individual Teacher Plan), "I know what I can I do, I can really screw them up tomorrow." So maybe they're having a lot of fun, I don't know. I've even been to schools where they talk about 'platooning' the kid because he's so hard. So they take shifts. There's just not a lot of fun. So we're going to try and talk about maybe how to change that a little bit.

Okay the problem we're faced with is how do we build a lifestyle? And I just want to put this in a context. Kids have a lifestyle, whether you know it or not. As they get older, the lifestyle gets further and further away from the adult. By that I mean the things they do, who they do it with, what are the activities they're engaged in, who are they doing it with, where are they doing it? For adults it gets into what resources you have, what choices you have, what kind of freedoms you have, what variety of experiences you have and so forth. It gets even bigger. In High School, as adults, we're not engaged in that lifestyle at all with the kids. They go out and have their own little lifestyle in the parking lot that we don't know anything about. For those younger kids, we still can facilitate a lifestyle of fitting in to the school, fitting into the environment, increasing their choices, changing their activity, giving them variety, doing things to give them sort of a richer life that's not so isolated and contained. So it's not just remediating autism or not just about the disabilities, it about how we look at the whole picture about the kid in terms of what he's doing or who's he's doing it with. That's why we get into the notion of lifestyle.

Here's an example of a kid in our preschool: she has expressive language at 10 months and lots times people say, "well, he's doesn't have enough skills to think about these things. We have to do other prerequisites before we talk about any of that stuff." Let me just show you a couple of kids: She has receptive language, 15 months, Social Development, 17 months, IQ, 45, and Mental Age, 32 months. And there she is, she's in our preschool, she's engaged with a particular kid, and kind of invading his space a little bit. She's actively involved in the school, just isolated and engaged on what's regularly going on in activities. She's engaged and she's learning. We're going to talk about how we build those sorts of lifestyles.

Here's another kid: Expressive Language, 9 months, Receptive Language, 18 months, Social Development, 18 months, IQ, 39, and Mental Age of 26 months. Here's what the parents heard, these are taken from reports or things said to the parents, "Can't seem to learn," "Will probably be institutionalized," "Will never learn to get along," "Needs total supervision and protection," "Can't handle the mainstream will get depressed and become suicidal," "Won't lead any sort of normal life." Those are things that were either said to the parents or put on reports. There he is there. He's the ultra patriotic, double over the heart salute. There he is in the mainstream and there he is in class. You see him in the middle there. He's engaged. He's not off to the side, he's not set aside, but there's a lot of work underneath that, a lot of work to get him there. It wasn't just like we put him there and it all worked out. There he is trying to commit suicide.

He thinks he knows the answer. He's awfully confident, isn't he? There he is amongst his friends and peers. So whatever techniques we talk about or whatever strategies we try, this is where we want to end up. We want to end up somehow here. It won't happen right way maybe. It might take time, it might go slowly, it might be a ways to do it, and we build the supports and accommodations, I think we can make that happen.

Here's another example: His Expressive Language, 24 months, Receptive Language, 19 months, IQ, 28, Mental Age of 27 months. He's an "RLL", that's Real Real Low, "severely retarded", "extremely short attention span", "stubborn," "should be his own kind." This happens to be my step son and he has Down syndrome. It's hard to get slides of kids, so I had to use him. It's hard to get slides of kids so I had to use him. One of the things was that when he first went to school, they said that, "We want him to go to school with his own kind." I thought, "Well, that's swell, because he'll go to school with a lot of cute kids." That's not what they meant by his own kind. They put all the Down syndrome kids in the basement or in the trailer or somewhere else. Anyway, he "takes away from other kids," "doesn't like to be with other children," "in a world of his own," "he will always be dependent and a burden," "He won't be able to lead a full life." There he is there. He's not the one with the fingers in his ears. That's the kid with autism. He's in the red sweater in the back, in the corner there. And there he is in the classroom at his desk, just at a regular table, working on his worksheets.

We're going to show you video tapes of some kids in the classes and kind of how we do that. Can you see that? So, lifestyle has to do with building plans that support activities which are valued. Does the family, do you, do the other kids perceive them as important? Or is it kind of silly stuff that is kind of demeaning and not very valuable. Do the other kids look at them and go, "What a dope, he does that silly stuff," or is he doing some stuff that is cool that he can do that? We have a little guy that we work with, he's reading, he's nonverbal, he's just goofy as a bed bug, but it's incredible what he can do with reading. So that skill, while really kind of a neat skill for him, people also go, "wow!" They expect more from him. There's more to him than just being a goof ball. He actually has some real value. We had another guy who was in high school, he ran track, nonverbal, he talked mostly when he was mad. Most of it was, well it should have been bleeped. The only time he talked was when he was made and most of it should have been bleeped every time he said something. But he ran track, he snow skied, so every time we went to IEP meetings, we say look what he does, "he snow skies, he actually was in the high school racing team, he ran track and actually lettered." We made some accommodations for him, but all of sudden people went, "wow, I can expect more from him." Those are things people think are important and valued.

Alright, level appropriate, we don't want put kids in situations where they're just doing stuff that's hard and frustrating and not helpful to them or stuff that's so easy they're bored. So we want it to be level appropriate, age appropriate and preferred. Something they want to do as much as we possibly can. So the desired outcome is a development of more skills, of course we want to give them more skills and be more independent. Create more interest, things that they want to learn and do. We want to change their activity patterns. Remember, I said when we see a lot of these kids, they are isolated. They're kind of contained, doing the same thing over and over again, have very rigid schedules like Judy talked about. It's the nature of the beast to want to have the rigid schedules and don't want to change. Well, we want to change all that.

We want you to have more activities, more stuff to do and not just have a lot of itty bitty skills, but actually expand their world. We want to increase their choices and opportunities. How can we expand the choices they make and give them more opportunities to do more things? And of course you want to reduce any problem behaviors. Boy, we know we have a lot of those, got a lot of those problem behaviors, those PBs.

We don't want to just build a program for a kid in isolation and give you skills to work with a kid. We're going to talk about discrete trials and that kind of stuff, but we don't just want to do it in isolation in a trailer out back. We want to look at some way to include kids, because it changes our expectations and references. If we include kids, it gives us a way to assess kids against what's going on in their environments and gives us some new skills. We can say, "what do they need to know, based on where they are at?" It creates opportunity. That's another thing we do in human services. I worked at the hospital for a number of years. It was a fascinating experience because the number one rule was "put it up and lock it up." So if you had a problem, you put it up and locked it up. You know I went in and looked at the piano and it had a padlock on it. Everything had a padlock on it. If we had a problem behavior, you just locked up whatever the kid was fooling with or just put it out of sight or out of the way. The other thing they did that was kind of interesting is they created environments to adapt to kids. They adapted the environments to the kid. So you were put into an environment, if you didn't know how to dress yourself, you were put into an environment where people dressed you. If you didn't know how to feed yourself, you went to an environment where people feed you. You never really had to learn anything because you were always taken care of. They didn't do that because they were bad people, it's just kind of natural to think, "Well, he can't do that, so we'll put him in a place where things can be done for him." If we're in the regular environment, we're 'pooched.' We have got to do that stuff. We have got to come in and take our coat off. We have got to do all these things that are there. We have to participate and so we can't modify that whole environment. So what's really nice about including kids, it gives us a different reference, and gives us more opportunity for teaching and also teaches to the future.

I always look at, that book. It said everything you need to know, you learn in kindergarten. It's really true. Most of us don't remember much. I don't remember much. Well I don't remember anything from last week let alone my high school education. Really it wasn't about memorizing one hundred ducks for biology or about all that stuff that went on. You really don't remember a lot of content from high school or school. What you do know is, you know how to raise your hand, you know how to ask for help, you know how to work independently, you know how solve problems, you know how to do all these things that are really the hidden curriculum. There the sort of stuff that goes on that will help make you better at a job, make you better in the future as a citizen. Because you can do more stuff and be more independent at just getting through life. And that's really what that regular classroom gives us. You have to get along with people, ask for help, stay out of people's way, say please, say thank you, do all those things, pick up after yourself, organize yourself, work independently, correct yourself, and take feedback. Those are all the important things for these kids. It's not just all about the academic skills.

To do this, we have to be there. Once we worked with this girl who was 17 and we wanted her to go to high school because her program was in an elementary school. They said, "Why would she want to go to a high school? She doesn't have any friends there." And I went,

“Well, she can’t make any friends there unless she goes there.” You have to start out being there, to build this sort of presence and then that moves to some sort of participation with other kids. So it’s kind of a process, it just doesn’t happen over night. It could take years. Then you build some reciprocity, relationships develop, and then you have some sense of belonging.

My step son, who now is actually 27, when he graduated from high school, one of his friends or a guy from high school volunteered to be his job coach and helped him get a job. It wasn’t for pay or anything. He just did it. His friend now, is a tattoo artist living in Seattle. So it wasn’t like he was a real gentle soul. I mean he was kind of a rough looking guy, but he went out with my stepson and helped him actually get a job and coached him through it and got him a job working in a restaurant. So that was pretty neat. That was an outgrowth of just being in that environment. Nobody organized it, nobody orchestrated it. He just volunteered it. It was pretty cool. There he is there.

So, what does it take to make a change? Let me just talk a little about this. One is the values. You just want to lay the foundation that you have to have certain values about this. I know I’m preaching to the choir because you’re here. Usually the people that don’t come to these things are the people that need to come. But you’ve got to kind of believe that all kids can learn. You have got to believe that all kids are important. You have got to believe that all kids have an opportunity to participate in the real world, but most importantly you have got to believe that you make the difference. Because you do, and that’s really hard for people to accept. We have people that are successful, like in our preschool we have about 10 percent of our kids will go on almost undiagnosed and will go into the regular classrooms with no aids, no assists or anyone, and they graduate. And so what is the first response from the staff? “Wow, he got better! He really out grew it.” And I said, “No he didn’t, you worked really hard and got him there.” So sometimes when a kid is successful, we don’t take credit for it. We don’t accept our responsibility on the good side as well as when a kid is having problems. So we believe if the kid is not learning, the teacher’s not teaching and when the kid is successful, the teacher is teaching. So we have got to start with those values.

The other thing is, is skills. It takes a lot of skills to do this. Mark Twain said that kids learn in spite of their teachers. For those who have kids, they come out and tie their shoes and you wonder, “Where did they learn that?” The kids learn things all the time, the typical kids. For these kids, it ain’t happening. If you don’t teach it, they aren’t going to learn it. So you have to have a lot of skills on how to actually to teach the kids. We’re going to go through some of the techniques that we think are important to know. This is only an awareness level kind of idea, it’s important to stay committed to learning new skills. I all the time am studying and learning new stuff and trying new stuff and so at any level you should really be pushing yourself.

The last one is motivation. You have got to be motivated. It’s hard work. It really is. It’s one of the problems with this business that I’m in. It’s intellectually hard because you’ve got to be thinking all the time. It’s emotionally hard because you’re frustrated, or you’re up and down, or your parents are coming at you or school. I mean there is all this emotion around everything. You know there are big issues for people. So it’s intellectually hard. It’s emotionally hard, physically hard. It’s hard to run around a room all day, chasing a kid. You know you’re tired, physically tired. And you know what the result is. You get small changes. Those small changes over time turn into big changes, but you only get small changes.

And if there is anything we know about human behavior, if it's real effortful and you only get small changes, you're not likely to stick with it. You know, why do we eat that piece of chocolate cake? Because, well that one little piece of chocolate cake is not going to make a big deal on my diet. That one chocolate cake won't make that much of a difference, it's just a small change, and it's only three hundred calories, big deal. Enough of those, pretty soon you're thinking, "I gotta go buy new clothes." So that's the problem, sometimes you don't get a big outcome. We have a problem in our work where people will gravitate toward those things that are easy to do, you don't have to think much, aren't physically hard, but you get a great outcome. People love to fold towels, do laundry, and mow their lawn. They like to do those things because they don't have to think much, but you get a good outcome. So this work is hard, but when it all comes together, it's pretty cool, and there is just that small little window where it all comes together.

A lot of times as parents we want our kids to socialize, to be around regular education and general education just to socialize, but we think they can actually get a real education in the mainstream. We also know that instructional supports are contextual. They have to fit the person, the people providing the direct support, and fit the surrounding environment. We can, and have, designed programs that are really great. I love them, but nobody else likes them and nobody does them so they're completely useless. I think they're pretty cool, but nobody cares what I think. A lot of times we have to adjust our programs based on the skills of the staff and the motivations of the staff. There is no one program. People show you canned programs, but sometimes those aren't as good. You kind of have to really be thinking about combinations based on the people, the parents, the family or the school system environment or the teachers themselves or the assistants. So it always is contextual. It's interesting, a lot of our programs are fairly scripted so that we get consistency and with a couple of people it will work fine for the kids, then another person comes in and it won't work at all. It just depends on their personality, and I can't see it myself, but the kid just won't react to that person. Sometimes you have to change up personalities.

Ok, so that's the idea, that's where we want to go, that's sort of our bias, that's what all of this is going to lead to, somehow trying to help kids and the next sessions will talk about how do we help kids accomplish this goal and how we accomplish this goal through our IEP. I'll turn it over to Judy.