

Lesson 9 Transcript  
Creating A Place within the School Building  
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We're going to talk about creating a place within the school building. The very first thing or course, you get a new student into your program that you don't have a lot of background information on, and you're going to start to place some assessment to find out where is it that student, who are they about, how are they starting to match this environment. And so the purposes of our assessment is to provide an estimate of developmental functioning, to describe the skills needed for planning and intervention, and to document the progress over time.

When we look at that, there are a couple different kinds, and I'm not going to focus a lot on these formal types of assessment, but we know that we have our norm referenced standardized testing to compare that student's performance to that performance of his peers. With your kids with pretty severe expressions of autism is that really programmatically helpful information? Probably marginal at best, but it does give us that comparison of where's the student functioning in relationship of skills to the typical peers, but it's usually not specific enough to help us with the programming design. This assessment provides a summary of quantitative scores. It certainly is based on the typical developmental sequences, and it describes a child's performance relative to that normative sample.

Then we move into more informal, that's not standardized that the results do lead us to intervention. Those are often curriculum based assessments used to determine instruction, document individual progress etc. So the next level is that you kind have certain curricula you might be using and so where does the student place within the context of the curriculum. The only thing about that, that's a red flag, is make sure that we don't just teach the next step on the curriculum sequence. I mean isn't that kind of our tendency is we've done the assessment, this is where they're at, this is the next step. That step may or may not be applicable to the student in his immediate environment.

We know we have a lot of a lot assessment tolls out there. There are autism diagnostic skills, adaptive behavior skills, a variety of educational assessment, play assessments, etc. What I'm going to reference you to is that the State of Idaho has developed...You know how you spend a lot of time on a committee, produce a product, and it may sit on the shelf. Well we want you to get this assessment. When we did this at the Boise workshop, some of the state department people who helped develop it were saying, "Yeah where did that go?" When you have questions of what are the best assessments to use, in speech and language, in motor development, in social development for kids on the autism spectrum, this booklet outlines that for you. I'm not sure we got information about the best way to get that but here's the address and we'll keep you posted on it. Pardon Me? I think it's free. It's a publication. I think the intent was to put it on the web, but with all the changeovers it kind of got lost in transition. It's excellent for describing the purpose of the assessment, what information you might get, and where you might purchase that.

Let's review these formal assessment challenges. The reason that those assessments give us information but they don't tell us the whole story is that often, as we know performance varies between the natural environment and the controlled test situation.

Do you ever have where, "Well he did it on the test," or "He didn't do it on the test, but then he went out and did the skill"? Another thing that's a limitation is you get a limited scope of information obtained for planning instruction. It's really hard to take a standardized test and then plan instruction because we want that instruction to be: who's the student, what's the environment, what's the match, what's the mismatch. That becomes our critical skill list. The qualities and behavior not adequately represented by a standardized measure. Development often follows a divergent path, so we get kids that are all over the board. Have you had that experience? It's hard to pick that exact entry level because they can do a little of this, a little of that inconsistently across from day to day. Those are definite limitations.

So how do we decide what to teach our kids with spectrum disorders in the regular classroom? Well we do the ecological approach. And how many of you in here have done thorough ecological inventories of your students in their environment? OK. So this is really important. That's usually the case. People say, "Wow that sounds interesting, but I haven't really done it." This is a really useful tool for you. In this process we survey and analyze environments to find out: What are the desired outcomes for the student? What skills are needed to achieve those outcomes? How should they be taught and by whom? Where should the instruction take place? And how will the curriculum be evaluated? So look at that list of questions. Is that not what we need to know to start developing effective programs? And that is not what you get through some of the other formal and standardized assessments.

So the advantages are that it puts the emphasis of what we're going to teach on what the student needs to know to be successful in his current placement and environment. It's also going to provide opportunities to engage that student in the same activities as his typical peers. Did we not talk about how important that is with the major component of the philosophical underpinnings of our programs? How do we get kids to function in a manner equal to their typical peers? It also emphasizes access to normal setting and opportunities. And it will have immediate application to the general curriculum and alignment with general education standards. So if that's what ecological inventories do, how good could that be? And they're really not that hard to do. It's just a different process to go through.

So when we gather information: We identify the functional curriculum needs of the student. We identify the general education curriculum needs of the student. After we have that information we prioritize the goals and then from the goals we decide where will they best be taught. Do I need to work on these goals in the general education settings, school building settings, community settings. Many of our goals when we talk about the pivotal skills are taught across all activities and settings throughout the day.

In identifying those functional curriculum needs, we do a lot of inventories. An inventory is simple surveying the people in the environment to see what they're doing, what their priorities might be, the skill assessments, the record reviews, etc. One process that helps set the stage for the environmental analysis is the MAPS process. Hope many of you have done a maps planning session? OK. For some of those that have done it, did you get a lot of valuable information? Usually after you go through this process, people go, "Oh of course, that's exactly what we need to be teaching. Now let's go to the environments and see how they're being taught." The process involves an explanation about what's the MAPS and then a history: Who is the child? What's the story? What's the background?

This of course is a team process of which parents, teachers, peers, the student themselves, anybody who has an interest in the outcome for the student participates. At that point then we go to what is the dream. The dream is those broad level goals. So here's John and he's a second grader and his skill levels have huge discrepancies. But what is it that the family wants John to be able to do by the time he goes to middle school? You pick a point in the future two to three years down the road. They say, "Oh man, we want him to be going from class to class, participating in some organized sports activity." So the preferences and the dreams come out quite clearly. Then from the dreams, we go to the nightmares.

Now when we were preparing one student for the process that he was going to participate in with this family, he obsessed over and over one night and he came the next morning. He says, "I don't have nightmares. I really don't have nightmares." It's not about what his nightmares are, but it's about what don't we want to see happen. Often when you do this process - I remember doing it in a small rural district in Eastern Idaho and peers were involved, and as the adults were talking about what the nightmares are, the kids were saying, "Well I think he's getting that right now. I think he's isolated, I think he doesn't have access to his peers." This is a great story. They said, "We're having what they call a Lockdown which is an all night long activity. We would like him to come to the activity." The superintendent says, "No that's not possible." The kids go, "Why would that not be possible?" And they came up with their own plan of how to include him in this after school social experience and activity that worked well.

So the nightmare we want to avoid. Who's the person? What are the strengths? What are the needs? And then what's the action plan. So we use this process very appropriately at those transition points. I know in the Meridian School District with some of their populations, we use the MAPS process for assessment and team involvement from preschool into elementary, elementary into middle, middle to high school, and high school to transition.

Another process that's used is called the PATH process. Similar design, get's at the same information, just in a different way. And this process helps us figure out what's that broad level dream for the student, what would we like to see them do as a young adult. What are the goals? If those are the goals, then what do we need to do now? Who is going to help? How do we build strength? What's the first step? What's next month's work? So these are processes again with a lot of information. We just want to give you an awareness and an acquaintance with them. When we come in on site to help you, it might be a process that we'll want to start to try to figure out what really are the critical skills for this student that we want to identify.

We come out then with the student profile of: Who is the student? What does he do? What are their favorite activities? What causes frustration and upset? What are their motivators? Notice that's bolded, underlined, critical information to know. Strengths. What are the student's successes? Under what conditions in the past have they been successful? What are their challenges? What are their supports needed, present levels of functioning, services needed, learning style, and other important information? When you look your students as they go from classroom to classroom, is this not the critical information that we need to be passing on? We often tell parents, "Wouldn't it be nice if on the day your child was born, they came out with an owner's manual, and we knew how to operate them from the very beginning?" That's some of the critical pieces.

Now the inventory of the general education settings and Curriculum. So we know a lot about the child and we know what he's been successful in and what the parents and family want for goals etc, but we have to find out how is this specific classroom operating? And what are the skill sets that are going to be required and reinforced? What are the other kids doing in this regular education classroom? So here are some of the things that we need to look at: What's the degree of structure? This is really timely when you look now at this time of year for moving transitions from year to year. What's the social context of the classroom? What are the social rules? Do you know how many variations there are of this same school wide thing from classroom to classroom, individual interpretations and applications. We wonder why sometimes kids are successful one year and then the next year they're not quite so successful. And then the following year they're successful. It has a lot to do with the social context. The level of comfort in that classroom. The sensory sensitivities in that classroom. I did have a student who had really blown out of the middle school, and when we were preparing him to go to high school, we took him to the high school. He was very visual. We gave him a map, said here's the map of the school, here's your schedule, go find your classes, and he without any prompting from anybody was scanning the environment. Where would he sit in the classrooms? Where's the direct lighting? Really doing his own sensory evaluation of that classroom. The range of learning opportunities. We need to know the activities and materials that are typically used. We need to know the level of control: How much of that class is adult directed? How much is child directed? What's the balance? Where's this kid going to fit in? Success ratio. Is that classroom using a five to one positive to negative reinforcement process? Response to the child's behaviors. How is that teacher currently in the classroom? How is the teacher responding to all kid's behaviors?

This is a great little story of a student who they thought maybe was on the autism spectrum. He did not talk. He was in kindergarten and the teacher would go, "I think he talked the first couple days, but he doesn't talk anymore. He won't look at anybody." When we looked at that response to child's behavior, this was a kindergarten teacher who had been teaching for years. She was a great teacher but had a very sarcastic sense of humor with kids. This kid did have very literal interpretations of what was said. After being placed in a different classroom, he starts talking and we're going, "Gosh we don't even think he has a disability or anything going on at all." So I went to observe the kindergarten to kind of put some pieces together, and this teacher looked at her kids and she said, "If you guys run down the hall one more time I'm going to cut off your head and roll it down the hall." It was just simply fear that caused him to stop talking. Like nightmares. "I'm not going to school anymore. I've had it."

We look at in classrooms, what's the delivery of instruction. What are those instructional materials that are being used? What critical skills are being needed for success? Supports and accommodations in the classroom. What are they going to need? The motivation level. How much will we need to motivate this kid? And the behavior challenges. Expected outcomes. So if you knew that about every learning situation for your student, would it make it easier to look at programming within the context of the regular classroom?

So now let me show you a process of how you can figure that out. First we need to look at the areas to be assessed: classroom routines, teacher directed activities, how do they do transitions, what are those self directed activities, what are the class conventions in place. We need to know how we assess. Is it to observe a peer?

To compare the performance of a peer with the target student's abilities. Identify the discrepancies. Not just in the performance of the routine, but also in these incidental skills of how do they initiate, prepare, perform, and terminate. What's the communication, social problem solving requirements, the choices that they'll need to know. What are the tempo and the quality? And you'll notice a lot of students may go through the same routines but not with the same tempo and quality.

So when we look at what those are, some of the typical routines we'll look at: Coming in and hanging up your coat, replacing your chair, saying the pledge, raising your hand for help, lining up and waiting (that's always an interesting one to go and observe; what all kids do in lines and lining up and waiting.), passing out papers, transitioning between classes using your locker, getting your lunch.

So here's an observation form that we use to start to analyze those routines. And it really is a good simple process to do. This first column over here looks at recording the time the activity happens during the day. You can use this observation sheet to observe multiple activities, just drawing a termination line. What you're going to start recording and observing is: Where are the activities occurring within the school? What's occurring? What's involved in the activity? What are the steps involved in that activity. Then here's the critical part of what's the peer doing? So record what activity the student is doing. So just step by step what do you see those peers doing? If we were going to go and do this - We'll just do it as a group for a minute here. Let's say we're observing that lunch line. So in your school when you look at peer activities - At your table groups just close your eyes, and pretend you're back at school and what are the process and procedures? What's the routine that kids use when they go into your lunch room? They're in that lunch line. The approach and go through the counter and then sit down and eat. Take a few minutes in your group just to start mapping out what are some of those steps with the peer activity. I'll give you just a few minutes. How do they go through the lunch line? What are all typical peers doing?

What I'm hearing as I go around from group to group is that there's quite a bit of discussion about how do the kids actually do that routine, right? It sounds like an easy thing if you just write it down step by step but now you have to look at it and analyze it pretty clearly. How are all the students in the regular education program whether you're looking at a lunch line, instructional formats in the classroom, arrival, how are the other students doing it, because that becomes your focus for what you want to teach. The other thing that I heard as I wandered around as you're going through the steps that regular ed students are doing the routines in is comments like, "Well I think he does it but he always does it with an aid." So remember, by analyzing the environment, we're also looking at, maybe he does go through the process and that's not a problem area, but does he have an aid coaching him and cueing him to do everything? Is that the independence? Is that doing it like other kids do? This process becomes very helpful at analyzing the environmental discrepancies. It also tells us a lot about what the regular peers are doing and sometimes as a result we want to change what the regular peers are doing.

I remember going in and I had a referral from a kindergarten teacher and she said, "John just simply cannot have snack in our classroom."

And it's like, "Well why?" "Well you should see what he does in there." "Ok we will" So we went in and used this routine analysis, and the student sitting next to John that I had targeted as how does the typical peer do it, sat there and stuffed raisins up his nose. Nobody saw. Nobody said anything. So then the joke afterwards...and John actually did pretty well today. And she's going, "Yeah cause you were in there watching." "Well you know the student that I targeted put raisins up his nose." She goes, "He did?"

But the idea behind this is that whether it's a routine start to finish, instructional formats, what are other kids doing, and then we go to what's John doing? What's out target student doing? What's the discrepancy? Then what are those instructional things that we are going to put into place? By doing this process across environments, across activities, we come up with a good critical skill list of what we're going to teach John. What are those pivotal skills, those incidental skills that are going to be most effective across environments? What does he most need to know to be successful in the school experience during that curriculum calendar year? So does that make sense?

When Mike and I come in to do a consult, that's one of the first forms we take a look at just to get an idea of what's everybody doing, what's the student doing, what's the problem areas, what will we do. And remember that as we do these analyses, you're not just looking at the steps in a routine, you're also looking at what's the problem solving, what's the communication, what's the social requirements, where does the student make errors, what's the tempo and quality.

So we're really trying to close the gap. And that analysis, what does a typical kids do, what do we do, that's where the IEP goals and objectives flow from. So if you do that type of analysis, your instructional program is going to be a lot more closely aligned for student success. So when we look at that curriculum in regular education classroom, of course we look at those math assessments, reading, language, writing, and content subjects if you have a student who is interfacing with the regular educational program. Then we sit down as a team. We're going to prioritize. Of all the information we collected, what are the priority skills? What needs to be taught? How will they be taught? Where will we teach them?

How to choose those goals. These are some of the questions. Can this objective be used in current and future environments? Will the objective allow the student to have daily opportunities for interaction with typical peers? If it does then that might be one that you put on the IEP. Does the objective reflect the student's chronological age, culture, preferences, profile, strengths, and needs? So again it matches what the other kids of the age are doing. Does it focus on those skills that lead to meaningful routines and activities? Does it reflect the student's personal and social needs? Can the student participate in the activity in a meaningful way? If that forms the basis of your IEP and program, then you'll have good program.

So we have a new definition of these functional skills. And this is really important because this is where it starts to all make sense. In 1998, we have a statement that "skills such as communication, cooperation, problem solving, self-initiation, responsibility, have been shown to be related to job stability than the ability to perform specific vocational tasks." So think about that for a minute. What does that mean? That it's not just about teaching an activity, it's about those skills those critical skills that are necessary across a variety of activities. And that "the academic and social benefits of inclusion rely on students being full-time members of general education classes and their school communities."

As Mike said, how many of you remember what you did in high school biology class? What I always remember is what deviant behaviors we had in high school biology class. And I was great one for getting the guys in trouble, because we were just sweet girls. Nobody caught on.

So what about community based instruction? Because we always thing, at a certain point we should just be teaching to the community skills. Well we do do that. But we have transition programs now for 19 through 21 that if we've done a great job of teaching these critical skills, then we start to apply those skills to the community environments, because that will be the next future environment. So before students with disabilities had access to the core curriculum in middle and high school, these community-based instructional programs were a reasonable way for self contained classes to come up with a variety of skill clusters for their students. But now we're saying that learning critical and functional skills in general ed classes alongside peers who have been prepared to interact with the students is a better alternative.

So when we talk critical skills we need to consider the skills that allow the student to participate in-school and out-of-school activities with other students of the same age. We also should identify natural situations during the school day or during extracurricular activities that teach these skills. The criteria: Is it a critical skill? Is it age appropriate? Is it required now for the student? Is it required as an adult? Will it be useful? Is it a preference by the student and family? Will it enhance the student's status, their increased social contexts, or physical well being, and their social competence? Does expand community participation and is there a possibility of acquisition? Can the student really so this? Because if it's a skill that the student really can't do, we also make a lot of accommodations. So after that analysis: Here's where the discrepancy is. What will we teach? What will we accommodate? So that we get partial participation in those activities that are a program for success.

So critical skills are broad classes of behaviors required to complete part or all of the activity. It is not the activity. Now think about your current IEPs. It is not an objective, sweeping, taking out trash, washing dishes, instead it might be communicating the need for materials. It might be using both hands together to complete the task, initiating social interaction. Repeated use throughout all daily activities and routines. So your goals, your critical skills are more those that are imbedded across a variety of activities and routines of which we'll match the performance to the age appropriate peers.

So skills necessary to complete activities versus the activities themselves. So an annual goal: "Increase independence and self-help skills" Associated activities: It might be fastening shoes, zippering pants, washing hands, that you're going to teach with in. But the actual skill outcomes: problem solving, initiating requests for help when necessary, selecting appropriate or preferred clothing for occasions, communication times to perform necessary self-help skills. So see that shift in focus? So your short term objective could be something to the effect of, When presented with activities requiring the student to identify colors the student will correctly identify the color during nine out of ten opportunities over a three week period. But the alternative meaning authentic ways the child can demonstrate the skill: Playing a game with colored pieces, putting on socks of the same color, setting a table with various colored dishes, following color coded directions, etc.

So an example of a goal statement, the student will increase communication skills in the areas of receptive and expressive language.

Critical skills: sequencing daily activities, making choices, initiating social interactions, following one-step commands, expressing concerns. So you see the pattern start to develop. Another example, when involved in activities involving objects and/or people and given a category the student will make the choice by verbally expressing selection nine out of ten opportunities. Some sample activities: a choice of what to wear, a choice of peers to work with on a class project, a choice of centers/interest areas to attend, a choice of classroom chores, a choice of sequence of homework activities, a choice of length to work until break. So you start to brainstorm where throughout the day can we do all the different kinds of choices.

So we're imbedding instruction across a variety of activities and routines in which we've made teachers aware of the outcomes and the content associated with each unit of study. The team aligns and imbeds the instructional objectives of the student with a disability. Some objectives may require a different setting or context or a smaller teacher student ratio. That's a decision that can be made.

So the way we start to organize all of this. It's like it makes sense but it's kind of a management fiasco if we just sit down and start brainstorming. So we have an activity curriculum matrix that helps educators through this process. So by putting the classes of the student throughout the day, and the goals and objectives off the IEP, the team sits down and starts to say, if these are objectives, and these are the classes, where can we work on these skills? So in this example, if he reads silently to comprehend, he can do that in Language Arts, he can do that in Math, he can do that in Science. The team says, that's probably not going to happen a lot in Music, but he could do that in Art. So we start to identify all those environments and activities. Here's another example of a critical skills matrix. The IEP goals for this student: calculating problems requiring addition, problem solving, using information to make decisions, managing assets (money and possessions). His activities throughout the day. Where can he calculate problems requiring addition? He can do that on a worksheet in addition problems. He can do that during lunch by adding up the lunch total. Where throughout the day can he do problem solving? Look how many boxes are filled. He can solve the morning meeting news and announcement problem that the teacher has in the classroom. He can answer questions regarding a character in the story. He can work with peers to solve the lab problem. At lunch time he can decide between two items. See how nicely that starts to fit together? It's really fun to do these matrices. Teachers get so excited. The go, "Wow, there's multiple learning opportunities to teach these critical skills." Then what's a criteria for success? Multiple learning opportunities throughout the day. Here's a Communication Matrix. So the skills: being rejecting, confirming and denying, making comments. This is where he could do it through English, Math, History, and PE.

After we do the activity matrix then it's time to look at the activity analysis which is taking those environments that you said yes he can do that and just defining it a little bit further. Now we look at in reading silently to comprehend we said that he do that in English 9. Now let's give him a script of how we're going to do that. He's going to read the warm-up directions silently prior to discussing to ensure comprehension. How is he going to do that through Math? He's going to with practice before class or homework the night before. He'll have the role of reading directions silently, explaining to the class or cooperative group for math games and activities each Friday. Again there are multiple examples.

So, in your packets you have more activity analysis and curriculum matrix. And they're right in the section where you are at. It looks like this. If you found the ecological inventory form, it's the next one. What I'd like you to do for a few minutes, and again we don't have time to complete one of these, but just to get your feet wet, is to look through some of those matrices because they're great examples and start to engage in discussion about the critical skills. The first question you have to ask is, do we have those critical skills identified. Because if your IEPs don't include those skills, the activity matrix is going to come up with, you know he can do this one skill and this one activity and that's it. And so if you finish your matrix and you don't have a lot of those boxes filled, then they're not critical skills that are necessary for the student to work through in that environment.