

A Case For Teaching Functional Skills

It is not uncommon to find instances in curricular content for students with moderate and severe handicaps primarily based upon norm-referenced evaluation instruments. A dilemma, which often results from such practice, is that of taking test items failed at particular levels and then attempting to translate these items into actual tasks to be taught. Not only were these evaluation tools never intended to be used in this manner, but the end result is that students end up spending a majority of their school day being taught skills that are totally artificial and/or extremely age-inappropriate. Given the time it takes students with moderate to severe mental handicaps to acquire and maintain even functional skills, there is no time nor justification for devoting instruction to teaching items that are selected from a developmentally-based hierarchy of supported "pre-requisites" skills. A scenario of the outcome for one such student is portrayed below:

"My Other Brother Daryl"

18 years old, moderately/severely handicapped.

Been in school for 12 year.

Never been served in any setting other than an elementary school

He has had a number of years of "individualized instruction."

He has learned to do a lot of things!

Daryl can now do lots of things he couldn't do before!

He can put 100 pegs in a board in less than 10 minutes while in his seat with 95% accuracy.

But, he can't put quarters in vending machines.

Upon command he can "touch" nose, shoulder, leg, foot, hair, ear. He is still working on wrist, ankle, and hips.

But, he can't blow his nose when needed.

He can do a 12-piece Big Bird puzzle with 100% accuracy and color an Eater Bunny and stay in the lines!

But, he prefers music but was never taught how to use a radio or record player.

He can now fold primary paper in halves and even quarters.

But, he can't fold his clothes.

He can sort blocks by color; up to 10 different colors.

But, he can't sort clothes; whites from colors for washing.

He can roll Play Dough and make wonderful clay snakes!

But, he can't roll bread dough and cut out biscuits.

He can string beads in alternating colors and match it to a pattern on a DLM card.

But, he can't lace his shoes.

He can sing his ABCs and tell me names of all the letters of the alphabet when presented on a card in upper case with 80% accuracy.

Continued

My Other Brother Daryl (*Continued*)

But, he can't tell men's room from ladies when we go to McDonald's.

He can be told it's cloudy/rainy and take a black felt cloud and put it on the day of the week on an enlarged calendar (without assistance).

But, he still goes out in the rain without a raincoat or hat.

He can identify with 100% accuracy 100 different Peabody Picture Cards by pointing.

But, he can't order a hamburger by pointing to a picture or gesturing.

He can walk a balance beam frontward, sideways, and backwards.

But, he can't walk up the steps or bleachers unassisted in the gym or go to a basketball game.

He can count to 100 by rote memory.

But, he doesn't know how many dollars to pay the waitress for a \$2.59 McDonald's coupon special.

He can put a cube in the box, under the box, beside the box, and behind the box.

But, he can't find the trash bin in McDonald's and empty his trash into it.

He can sit in a circle with appropriate behavior and sing songs and play Duck Duck Goose.

But, nobody else in the neighborhood his age seems to want to do that.

I guess he's just not ready yet.

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