Early Childhood Special Education

Facilitating Individual Planning for Young Children with Disabilities in Developmentally Appropriate Classrooms

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INTRODUCTION

As more children with disabilities are included in classrooms with children who are developing typically, practitioners must continue to identify and refine strategies for making inclusion successful. These efforts require the synthesis of accepted practices from two related but distinct fields: Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and Early Childhood Education (ECE). Although the two traditions share much common ground (Fox, Hanline, Vail, & Galant, 1994), key differences in the basic premises that guide practice in the two fields make synthesis and collaboration challenging. This article focuses on one example of effective synthesis, a method of observation-based curriculum planning that integrates proven methods from both ECSE and ECE. In particular, a discussion of observation-based curriculum planning in an inclusive program, an analysis of this type of planning for children with disabilities, and discussion of a procedure that facilitates the implementation of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) within the context of this planning is presented.

Historically, early childhood special education has focused on intervention, that is, activities intended to bring about progress toward specific developmental goals for children with disabilities. Intervention is based on the assumption that it is both possible and desirable to move a child through a developmental sequence more quickly than would occur without the intervention (Carta, Schwartz, Atwater, & McConnell, 1991). Within this framework, children with disabilities are taught functional skills that enable them to adapt to and be competent in the inclusive environment. Interventionists

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often use directive teaching methods that have been proven effective at moving children toward adult-defined developmental goals (Wolery, 1994). These goals are usually set out in the child's IEP or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

Early childhood education has been guided in recent years by the tenets of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), as defined in a position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple 1997). DAP emphasizes the importance of child-chosen activities and child-directed exploration of a rich environment structured by the teacher or caregiver. It is assumed that each child will develop at an individually appropriate pace when given the opportunity to explore such an environment, and is supported by facilitative interactions with early childhood professionals. Although activities are planned and the environment structured with each child's developmental status and individual needs in mind, DAP does not emphasize trying to accelerate children's progress toward specific adult-defined developmental goals.

The basic premises of ECSE and ECE described above have led some writers to argue that DAP is an inadequate framework for serving young children with special needs (Carta *et al.*, 1991). However, the differences described above may be overstated. Fox and Hanline (1993) pointed out that naturalistic teaching techniques, which are child-initiated and occur during ongoing activities in the natural environment, are a blend of accepted practices in ECE and ECSE. Such techniques are accepted as consistent with "best practice" in ECSE (Noonan & McCormick, 1993). Within the DAP framework, emphasis is placed on individual appropriateness as well as age and cultural appropriateness (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Although DAP does not provide specific guidance about the choice of instructional techniques for children with disabilities, it also does not rule out the use of more directive techniques to meet the spe-

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cial needs of a particular child (Fox *et al.*, 1994). Thus, the question is not whether the two approaches can be blended, but rather what are effective ways of doing so.

INTEGRATING INDIVIDUAL CHILD GOALS

For many years, teachers in early childhood special education (ECSE) programs have implemented individual child goals (IEP objectives or IFSP outcomes) using a pull-out model. These objectives were taught in isolation from other activities so that intensified practice could occur and documentation of their acquisition could be monitored more precisely. The implementation of IEP objectives or IFSP outcomes in a pull-out situation did not facilitate generalization of skills nor did it foster the development of these skills across other environments. Consequently, teachers have been struggling for years to provide a functional curriculum that meets the needs of the young child while also responding to the IEP objectives identified for a child with disabilities. In particular, teachers have been interested in procedures that facilitate generalization and that are ecologically valid. If teachers use activities initiated or preferred by the child to implement IEP objectives and IFSP outcomes, the child will be more motivated to participate and more likely to be successful. Likewise, teachers will be more inclined to continue implementing IEP objectives in more functional contexts and, thereby, facilitate generalization of skills. Several procedures have been developed to facilitate this process (Bambara & Warren, 1988; Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Guess, Jones, & Lyon, 1981; Helmstetter & Guess, 1987).

One procedure, Individual Curriculum Sequencing Model (Guess *et al.*, 1981; Helmstetter & Guess, 1987), has been developed for children with severe disabilities. It is a systematic framework for organizing IEP objectives in a way that emphasizes functional and age-appropriate practice and facilitates skill acquisition and generalization. The major focus of this model is skill chaining or skill clusters. That is, several skills are linked together for practice within the context of naturally occurring activities. For example, a skill cluster might look like this: When asked, the child *crawls* to the snack table, *pulls up to stand* at the chair, *requests* a cookie, and *drinks* juice from a cup (the italicized items are related to IEP objectives). Or, the child *initiates to a peer* by asking for a truck, *identifies* the truck by naming it, and *pushes* the truck on the floor (IEP objectives related to *fine motor skills*). Included in the description of the skill cluster are the materials, adults implementing the skill cluster, and the procedure for implementing the skill

cluster. Although this model is based on functional, age-appropriate activities and facilitates generalization, it involves direct teacher intervention, extensive time for preplanning, is not based on child-initiated activities nor does it provide for the monitoring of the spontaneous implementation of IEP objectives.

Activity-Based Instruction is another procedure developed to facilitate the inclusion of IEP objectives within the natural environment (Bricker & Cripe, 1992). The underlying premise of this technique is to organize the integration of specific IEP objectives within the daily routines and activities to ensure their implementation. Using a matrix, this procedure specifically identifies the adult responsible, the types of materials, adaptations, the location, and instructional strategies. It is anticipated that this matrix would be used on an ongoing basis. For example, during circle time in the morning, a child's IEP objectives of initiating to a peer, identifying objects, and attending to an activity could be facilitated. While this procedure encourages the implementation of IEP objectives within the naturally occurring times of the day, the matrix is developed in advance (usually several months), and assumes a consistent routine for the child's day. In addition, it is teacher-directed, involves long-range preplanning, and does not provide regular opportunities for monitoring the spontaneous implementation of IEP objectives or the implementation of these objectives within child-initiated activities.

ECE CURRICULUM PLANNING

In ECE curriculum planning, the notion of the "grassroots curriculum" (Cassidy & Lancaster, 1993) or "emergent curriculum" (Jones & Nimmo, 1994) has been proposed. This concept implies that curriculum in appropriate classrooms for young children emerges from ongoing teacher observation of individual children rather than from predetermined themes or objectives chosen by adults. Although many ECSE and ECE teachers have routinely followed the interests of children with whom they work, the focus is now on detailed descriptions of an observation-based planning process (Cassidy, Myers, & Benion, 1987; Cassidy & Lancaster, 1993; Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Observation-based planning is a flexible, dynamic system by which teachers develop daily activities based on continual observations made of individual children or small groups of children. The naturalistic teaching espoused by ECSE differs from this process in that interventions are designed in advance to accomplish specific goals, often emphasizing the IEP objectives or IFSP outcomes in the absence of ongoing observations.

Cassidy and Lancaster (1993) have described a

classroom that utilizes observation-based planning. The activities planned on a daily basis reflect only a small number of the possible observations that a teacher might choose to respond to with a formally planned activity (some observations are responded to immediately through incidental teaching). However, the activities that are planned based on those daily observations represent the teacher's perspective on what is appropriate and necessary for the development of the children in that classroom. Teachers cannot make decisions about which observations are worthy of a follow-up activity and which should be disregarded without acknowledging their own bias in such a process. Undoubtedly, teachers' personal and professional values affect their interpretations of the observations, the decisions that they make about the observations they choose to see, and the activities that they develop in response to these observations.

IMPLEMENTING IEP OBJECTIVES IN CHILD-INITIATED ACTIVITIES

As is noted above, integrating the implementation of IEP with observation-based curriculum planning, which is embedded in DAP, is not an easy process. Observation-based curriculum planning is based on children's current interests while the IEP objectives/IFSP outcomes are determined on an annual or semiannual basis, often at the beginning of the year. Although these two concepts appear to be diametrically opposed, they actually can be interrelated.

To be responsive to the observation-based planning model encouraged by DAP, and to address the concerns related to the implementation of IEP objectives, Niemeyer (1996) devised a method that includes components of both the Individualized Curriculum Sequencing and Activity-based Instruction models. The Naturally Implemented Program Plan (NIPP; Niemeyer, 1996) is a model developed to implement IEP objectives/IFSP outcomes within a developmentally appropriate classroom and specifically within activities that are based on child observations. A major premise of the NIPP model is that each individual child's objectives must be functional and facilitate competence.

There are seven basic principles on which the NIPP model is based (Table I). Principle I assumes that the philosophical approach of the program is developmentally appropriate and that the child's IEP goals and objectives are fully implemented within that setting. In other words, the child is not singled out for specific activities or practice of certain skills. For example, occupational therapy is conducted within the context of daily activities and involves other children in the classroom. The teacher

Table 1. Naturally Implemented Program Plan Principles

1. The IEP goals and objectives are fully implemented within a developmentally appropriate classroom structure.
2. The child's IEP goals and objectives (skills) are functional and based on child competence.
3. The IEP goals and objectives are easily embedded with the natural routine of the child's day.
4. The child's IEP goals and objectives are easily generalized.
5. The teacher must be a perceptive observer of child behavior.
6. The child's IEP goals and objectives are implemented within child-initiated activities that are based on teacher observation.
7. Some children with disabilities may need special supports provided by the teacher to engage in or to self-initiate an activity.

does not take children with disabilities aside to work on fine motor, language, or other skills that are included on the IEP.

The second and third principles are interrelated in that they assume that the child's IEP objectives developed by the child's team are functional and facilitate competence so they can be naturally implemented. This ensures that the child's plan is easily implemented within daily activities and routines. For example, an IEP objective of stringing beads or putting pegs in a board limits the natural opportunities for implementing the objectives but the skill of using a pincer grasp expands the possibilities for practice throughout the day in many other contexts (i.e., water play, block building, dressing dolls, serving cookies at snack time).

The fourth principle, generalization, is critical for young children with disabilities to achieve competence. When the child's goals and objectives are functional, the possibilities for generalization are enhanced. Because functional goals can be implemented throughout the day and in many contexts, generalization typically occurs without preplanning. For example, an IEP objective of initiating to peers can be facilitated during many activities and routines such as, snack and mealtime, water play, block building, leaf identification, bubble blowing, and so on. During these activities, the child has the opportunity to interact with many different children and adults in different contexts, hence facilitating generalization.

Principle 5 assumes that the teacher is a keen observer of child behavior and, consequently, will identify activities of interest to the child. Often teachers introduce activities that are of interest to them and are dismayed when the children do not show interest. By perceptively observing the children's behaviors, teachers can identify what interests the child and build on it to enhance development. Also, it is sometimes difficult to identify the interest of a child with disabilities without

extended and perceptive observations. For example, a child with disabilities may move quickly from one activity to another making it difficult to determine an area of interest. But by *carefully* observing that child, eventually an activity that interests them will be detected.

Principle 6 builds on the previous one because the child's IEP objectives are implemented within child-initiated activities developed from the teacher's observation. Only after the teacher identifies an interest of the child is an activity developed within which specific IEP objectives are implemented. For example, if a child shows interest in pouring water at the water table, the teacher will be able to build on that interest by providing different size objects for pouring and then suggesting to the child that he or she identify which objects hold more water. Specific objectives related to the child's IEP, such as, pouring, interacting with peers, identifying big and small, identifying shapes, and so on, could be facilitated within this activity.

Finally, the seventh principle indicates that some children with disabilities may need additional or special supports provided by the teacher in order to engage in or to self-initiate an activity. Sometimes children with disabilities cannot participate fully in an activity because of restrictions imposed by their disability. Therefore, the teacher must be creative in providing opportunities and adaptations so that the child can participate as fully as possible. For example, if a child who has limited use of his or her hands wants to paint at the easel, the activity could be adapted so that all of the children are encouraged to try painting by putting the paintbrush in their mouths. Another example, if a child has difficulty sequencing certain parts of an activity, the activity could be structured so that it is completed by pairing with another peer; or the teacher could develop a picture board sequencing the steps of the activity that could be used with all of the children.

Using the above principles as a foundation, the NIPP model facilitates the implementation of IEP goals and objectives within the DAP classroom. Once the IEP objectives are identified, regular observations of the child are conducted at numerous times throughout the day and in different settings. Teachers often record these observations as anecdotal notes in order to refer to later in the day. These observations are then discussed with other adults in the classroom and specific activities in which the child shows an interest or enjoys are identified. Children show an interest in specific activities in a variety of ways: (a) observing from a distance, (b) trying to engage in an activity unsuccessfully despite numerous tries, (c) using materials from another activity in a different way, (d) asking questions about something they

Table II. Example of Procedure

Several times throughout the day, Amy (who is in a wheelchair and has limited verbal ability) moves to the housekeeping area and watches as several of the children serve tea to each other. At snack time she volunteers to help pour the juice into her cup. From this observation, one could conclude that Amy is interested in pouring. So, from this observation the teacher develops a curriculum activity that is based on Amy's interest and that is related to her IEP. One activity the teacher could develop would be to set up a special area in the classroom that is called "tea party" and provide opportunities for the children to participate in a tea party. Another activity could be to set up the water table with lots of different types and sizes of objects and/or colored water to experiment with pouring, or another activity could be to set up a swimming pool outside with a variety of different objects for pouring. After developing the activities, possible situations for implementing IEP objectives within these activities then are identified. For example, in the tea party activity, Amy's social skills of initiating to peers, identification of concepts such as more and less, and eye-hand coordination skills could be facilitated. For initiating to peers, Amy could ask another child for a teacup, ask a child if they want tea, if they want cookies or if they like the cookies. In identification of concepts, Amy could be provided the opportunity to designate more or less tea in cups or cookies on the plate. She could also identify different colors of napkins or plates, or she could identify differences between the taste of cookies or tea. Eye-hand coordination could be facilitated by prompting Amy to pour tea in a cup, place napkins on the table, and place cookies on plates. In order to facilitate some of the IEP objectives, the teacher may need to set up the environment in a certain way, provide specific materials or provide verbal or gestural prompts to the child and/or their peers.

have seen or experienced, or (e) bringing a particular object or toy to the teacher or other adult. Table II describes the procedures using Amy as an example.

Activities could last for days, weeks, or just 1 day, depending on the children's interest. Therefore, activities and situations for implementing the IEP objectives/IFSP outcomes could change daily, weekly, or monthly. Oftentimes activities developed based on an observation for one child become interesting to other children. When this occurs, the activity is adapted or modified to meet other children's interest. The building of one activity on another creates a curriculum web depicting the child initiated activities. (e.g., see Cassidy & Lancaster, 1993.)

Teachers may find it difficult to plan for individual children based on observations of their interests, however, children in the classroom often have similar interests. So, the teacher is not necessarily developing 20 distinct activities each day but perhaps 4 or 5. Although an activity may be based on an observation of an individual child but because it is age appropriate, other children in the classroom will want to participate in the experience. To facilitate the involvement of children with disabilities and the implementation of their individualized program plans, the teacher needs to preplan possible situations in which the IEP objectives/IFSP outcomes could be performed for each of the activities.

NATURALLY IMPLEMENTED PROGRAM PLAN
Routine/Activity Planning

Child's Name ____Amy____

Date(s) October 1 - December 15

Activity/Routine	Objective 1 Initiating to peers	Objective 2 Identification of Concepts	Objective 3 Eye-hand Coordination	Objective 4 Independent Dressing
Tea Party	X	X	X	X
Pouring at Water Table	X	X	X	
Swimming Pool	X	X	X	X
Snack/Meal Time	X	X	X	
Bean Bag Toss	X	X	X	
Toileting		X	X	X

Fig. 1. Form used to implement the NIPP model.

As with Individualized Curriculum Sequencing and Activity-based Instruction, the NIPP model also facilitates a structure for implementing IEP objectives during daily routines (Figures 1 and 2 for samples of the forms used). An example of a routine activity might be snacking or hand washing. Using the example of Amy from

NATURALLY IMPLEMENTED PROGRAM PLAN

Child Initiated Situation Form

Child: ____Amy____

Date: ____October 1-8____

Objective: ____Initiating to Peers____

Routine/Activity	Possible Situations
Tea Party	*Ask for tea cup from peer *Ask peer if they want tea *Ask peer if they like the cookies *Ask peer if they want to play tea party
Pouring at Water Table	*Pour colored water into peer's truck *Ask peer if she could use the mixing bowl *Show peer how to pour into funnel *Ask peer to pour with her
Bean Bag Toss	*Show peer how to toss bag into bucket *Ask peer for the yellow bean bag *Hand bean bags to peer to throw *Show peer how many bags went into the box

Fig. 2. Form used to implement the NIPP model.

NATURALLY IMPLEMENTED PROGRAM PLAN
Monitoring Form A

Child: ___Amy___   Date: October 1- December 15

Routine/Activity: _____Tea Party_____

IEP Objective										Dates	October - November																
	1	2	3	6	7	8	9	10	13	14	15	16	17	20	21	22	23	24	27	28	29	30	31	3			
Initiating to peers	-	0	-	0	+	-	0	+	+	+																	
Identification of concepts	-	-	-	0	-	+	-	0	+	-																	
Eye-hand coordination	-	-	-	0	-	+	-	+	+	-																	
Independent Dressing	-	-	0	-	-	+	-	-	0	-																	
+ = Successful completion - = Unsuccessful 0 = No opportunity																											

Fig. 3. Monitoring form A used with NIPP model.

Table II, social skills of initiating to peers, eye–hand coordination, and identification of concepts could be facilitated during snack time using similar situations that were designated for the tea party activity. In the routine activity of hand washing, initiating to peers could occur by prompting the child to ask another child for a towel. or asking a child if the sink could be shared. Identification of concepts could occur by asking the child to describe the difference in using liquid soap and bar soap, the difference in hot and cold water, and to describe

NATURALLY IMPLEMENTED PROGRAM PLAN
Monitoring Form B

Child: _Amy_   Date: October 1- December 15

Objective: _____Initiating to Peers_____

Routine/Activity										Dates	October- November																
	1	2	3	4	6	7	8	9	10	13	14	15	16	17	20	21	22	23	24	27	28	29	30	31			
Tea Party	-	-	+	-	-	+	0	-	+	+	-																
Pouring at Water Table	-	-	+	+	0	-	0	+	-	-	+																
Swimming Pool	+	-	0	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+																
Snack/Meal Time	-	+	-	-	0	+	-	-	-	+	-												+				
Bean Bag Toss	-	-	-	+	+	-	0	0	-	+	+											-					
+ = Can occur - = Cannot occur 0 = No opportunity																											

Fig. 4. Monitoring form B used with NIPP model.

the texture of the towel. For eye–hand coordination, the child would have opportunities to practice this skill by putting their hand under the faucet in the water, drying both sides of their hands, rubbing the soap in the hands, and so forth. There may be some routine activities or other planned activities that do not facilitate the implementation of a specific IEP objective/IFSP outcome, so not all objectives can be practiced with in all activities and/or routines.

MONITORING IEP OBJECTIVES

Finally, the process of monitoring IEP progress is of critical importance. It is often difficult for teachers to link the implementation of IEP objectives to an appropriate assessment procedure for monitoring the child's progress. In the past, a teacher often interacted directly with the child in a structured or semistructured situation to ensure the viability of the achievement of an IEP objective. This information was then compiled and used for documenting progress toward the achievement of the IEP objectives. In actuality these data did not always truly reflect the child's progress but one aspect of their performance, typically in a structured, teacher-directed situation.

However, the NIPP model enables the teacher and other professionals to collect information about IEP objectives in many contexts, settings, and situations. It is not limited to those settings when the child is directly interacting with the teacher. Because the teacher is a keen observer of child behavior (Principle 5), on data collection days s/he records anytime the child is observed performing the objective specified in the IEP. Therefore, data are collected during routine, child-initiated, teacher-planned, and spontaneous activities by all personnel working in the classroom. To facilitate this process and to make it manageable for the classroom staff, there are five recommended guidelines: (a) functional, data collection forms, (b) accessibility of data collection forms, (c) scheduled data collection days, (d) summarization of data, and (e) staff consistency in implementation of IEP objectives. Each guideline is discussed in more detail.

First, data collection forms should be functional, directly related to the IEP objectives and easy to use. (Sample forms used with the NIPP model are included in Figures 3 and 4.) In addition, the forms should be reflective of the teacher's style for collecting data. Since competence is the ultimate goal of the IEP objective, the coding schemes on the forms should reflect this. For example, a check could be recorded if the child successfully performs the IEP objective and a circle if they did not. Or a plus (+) if they are successful, a minus (-) if they are

not, and a check if they attempt it but are not successful. The ease of scoring enables the teacher to reasonably collect data and still obtain an accurate picture of the child's progress.

Second, the data collection forms should be readily accessible in all activity and routine areas. One suggestion is to keep the forms on clipboards or in a notebook (pencil attached) placed out of the reach of the children. Another suggestion is to keep post-it note pads throughout the areas in the classroom and to make notations of the observed implemented objectives. The data collection forms should be available for all classroom staff so that IEP objectives can be consistently and regularly monitored.

Third, a regular schedule for collecting data on all the IEP objectives should be developed. It is recommended that data be collected on each objective a minimum of 2 days per week. For example, the teacher could decide to collect data on Amy and Vicki's objectives on Mondays and Wednesdays or Tuesday and Wednesdays or Monday afternoons and Wednesday mornings. The teaching assistant would collect data on these same days for Brad and Dean. During the next week, the teacher would collect data on Brad and Dean and the teaching assistant, on Amy and Vicki. Any combination of days and children could be developed. It is important that a designated person collect the data consistently and regularly.

Fourth, the data must be summarized on a regular basis to determine whether or not the IEP objectives are being achieved as planned. Data should be summarized weekly, but at least biweekly. This facilitates the teacher's ability to monitor the child's progress at a reasonable rate and make regular program modifications to address the child's specific needs. Graphing the data is the easiest and clearest procedure for summarization. Teachers, parents, and administrators can easily analyze the child's progress toward achieving the IEP objectives. When this is done weekly, paperwork is minimized. However, at a minimum, progress toward the IEP objectives should be summarized and reviewed quarterly.

Fifth, consistency in the implementation of each child's IEP objectives is necessary so that success can be ensured. While this is more difficult than the other guidelines, there are ways for facilitating consistency. Communication between team members (including parents) is the most critical. Brief weekly meetings (about an hour) are helpful for discussing the situations and strategies for implementing the IEP objectives. Written notes can be made on the forms used with the NIPP model to identify problem areas or suggestions for changing the situations or strategies. Because the data

are summarized weekly, these notes can be used to make changes quickly if needed. Another, but less desirable way, is for staff to observe each other and offer suggestions for changes. By far, the most reasonable procedure for maintaining consistency in implementation of IEP objectives is through discussion at team meetings.

The NIPP model facilitates the implementation of IEP goals and objectives in a developmentally appropriate classroom and is congruent with observation-based curriculum planning. Teachers will find this model easy for implementing and monitoring IEP objective progress within the natural settings in the classroom. No longer will they need to set up a special time to work on IEP objectives when the child may or may not be interested. Consequently, the NIPP model helps the teacher to attain a more realistic view of the child's abilities in a variety of settings and contexts. In addition, this model helps the teacher to be more responsive to child interests and facilitates the generalization of skills. The NIPP model is a naturalistic, functional, and nonintrusive procedure that facilitates full inclusion of children with disabilities in preschool classrooms.

CONCLUSION

Because young children with disabilities are included in classrooms for children who are developing typically, procedures for facilitating full participation in classroom activities becomes an important task for teachers. Much could be learned from collaboration between the two disciplines of early childhood and early childhood special education. In fact, it seems apparent that a synthesis of effective practices from the two fields could be realistically implemented in inclusive settings. This article illustrates one possible collaborative practice: using observation-based planning (best practice in early childhood) with naturally implemented program plans or NIPP (best practice in early childhood special education). In other words, child-initiated activities form the basis of curriculum planning for both children with and without disabilities and at the same time, procedures for implementing and monitoring IEP objectives and IFSP outcomes for children with disabilities are included. Consequently, through collaborative practices between

early childhood and early childhood special education, children with disabilities can be fully included in early childhood settings, the legal mandate of individualizing their program is fulfilled, and, at the same time, a quality experience in a developmentally appropriate manner is provided for all children.

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