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Footsteps Toward the Future

Implementing a Real-World Curriculum for Students With Developmental Disabilities

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Council for Exceptional Children | DADD Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities

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Introduction

This book is part of the Division on Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD) Prism Series. Prism Series volumes target topics of special interest to practitioners and other DADD members in the area of education for individuals with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, or other developmental disabilities. This particular volume focuses on a functional curriculum—or what we are referring to as a *real-world curriculum*—for elementary and secondary students with these disabilities. *Footsteps Toward the Future* presents the what, how, and where of implementing a real-world curriculum.

In Chapter 1, we provide an overview of a real-world curricular approach (i.e., functional curriculum). The focus of the chapter is on providing an operational definition of a real-world curricular approach, including (a) the components; (b) the historical perspective of using a real-world curricular approach to educate students with intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, or other developmental disabilities; and (c) the current perspective of using a real-world curricular approach given today's educational context and climate. We also discuss the importance of using ecological inventories to develop curricula appropriate for the current and future environments of students.

In Chapter 2, we discuss in-depth components of a real-world curricular approach and how to implement these components in practice. In particular, we draw from the research to provide practitioners with evidence-based practices as well as instructional delivery models for teaching a real-world curricular approach to students with disabilities. The focus of Chapter 2 is on the provision of a real-world curricular approach across age and grade spans (i.e., elementary and secondary).

In Chapter 3, we provide practitioners with strategies for taking more traditional content—including the Common Core State Standards—and translating it into a real-world curricular approach. Specifically, in Chapter 3 we discuss the core content areas—literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies—and how practitioners can meet content standards and expectations in a way that addresses the real-world needs of students.

In Chapter 4 we discuss how to effectively implement community-based instruction and provide practitioners with information on both why and how to implement a real-world curricular approach within these different settings. The material in this chapter also provides practitioners with information to determine when and how to implement community-based instruction.

Finally, in Chapter 5 we discuss the role of related and support services within a real-world curricular approach. Specifically, we discuss the provision of a real-world curricular approach in light of paraprofessionals, speech-and-language therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, transportation services, orientation and mobility specialists,

Chapter 1

An Overview of Real-World Curricular Approaches

A *real-word curriculum*—synonymous with a functional or life skills curriculum—represents one type of curriculum that teachers can use to educate students with intellectual disability and other developmental disabilities (Bigge, 1988). A real-world curriculum represents one answer to the age-old question of *what* to teach students with disabilities. The question of what to teach and what curriculum to use when educating students with disabilities is an important one and one that is subject to much discussion and debate.

Real-World Curriculum

A real-world curriculum is designed to prepare students with disabilities to learn useful skills that may benefit them after leaving school and to be as independent as possible in completing these activities in real-world settings (Storey & Miner, 2011; Wehman, Renzaglia, & Bates, 1985). In other words, a real-world curriculum focuses on skills that allow students to participate in all facets of life in an inclusive society: living, working, and having fun (Brown, Branston, Hamre-Nietupski, Pumpian, Certo, & Gruenewald, 1979). Important within the understanding of a real-world curriculum is that the skills being targeted must be ones that actually translate into real activities that an individual may perform in society. A real-world curriculum does not involve artificial tasks for students to perform.

A real-world curriculum incorporates a variety of components and is defined in different ways. Some suggest a real-world curriculum contains skills related to functional academics (e.g., mathematics, literacy), vocational education, community access, daily living, finances, independent living, transportation, social relationships, and self-determination (see Table 1.1; Patton, Cronin, & Jairrels, 1997). Others categorize the components of a real-world curriculum as career education and work; community living and participation; personal health and safety; self-determination; travel and mobility; home living; functional academics and postsecondary education; financial planning and management; and socialization, recreation, and leisure (Wehman, Targett, & Richardson, 2012). Regardless of the specific component names, the aim of a real-world curricular approach is to prepare students to successfully and independently complete real-world activities in the home, work, learning, and community environments.

Chapter 2

Real-World Components in Practice

To provide practitioners with an evidence base to support their use of a real-world approach or curriculum, this chapter describes the w*hat*, *where*, and *how* for teaching real-world skills to students with disabilities who are served in their least restrictive environment. Throughout, the instructional objectives, contexts, a plan for skill maintenance and generalization, instructional procedures, and embedded content that might be included in their instruction will be described. Supporting strategies for data collection are discussed and evidence linking a real-world approach and curriculum to planning for postsecondary transition is provided. Last, practitioner tools are provided that include web sites and resources to support teachers and other service providers in implementing a real-world approach and curriculum with their students.

A *real-world curriculum* comprises several essential components leading to greater student independence in critical skills. These components include the identification of instructional objectives, contexts, evidence-based instructional procedures, embedded content, data collection, and a plan for maintenance and generalization (Collins et al., 2010). The components of a real-world curriculum are grounded in a student's individualized education program (IEP), ecological assessment, and postsecondary outcome goals.

Real-World Objectives

The first step in planning for instruction is determining *what* to teach. Systematic planning is required for students whose focus is to acquire skills leading to greater levels of independent functioning across settings. Teachers may use assessment information to identify student deficits and areas for instruction. For example, the *Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills II* and the *Brigance Transition Skills Inventory* (Curriculum Associates, 2013a, 2013b) provide information related to student performance in academic and real-world skills. Functional skills in general may be assessed using the *Assessing and Monitoring Progress of Functional Skills* (Bender et al., 2008) instrument, which offers teachers a means of assessing student functioning ranging from self-care and living skills to communication, academics, and interpersonal skills. In addition, *The Assessment of Functional Living Skills* (Partington & Mueller, 2012) and the *Functional Skills Screening Inventory* (Becker, 1986) both specifically focus on assessing real-world skills. The Council for Exceptional Children's *Life Centered Education* (Wandry et al., 2013), includes a performance and knowledge battery that assesses students' functional skills in the domains of daily living, self-determination, and employment. One of the most effective tools is an ecological assessment or ecological inventory (see Chapter 1). Using an ecological inventory,

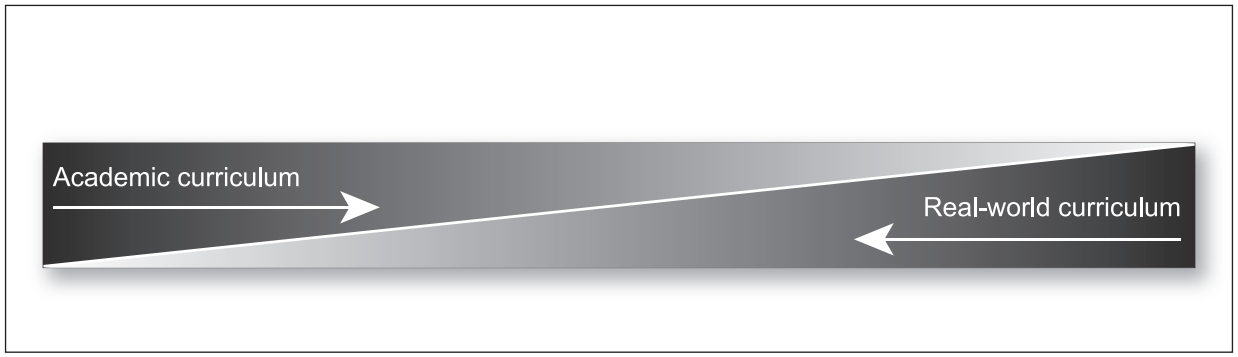
Chapter 3

Real-World Curriculum Meets Content Area Instruction

Although curricular options for students with intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or other developmental disabilities are sometimes set up as dichotomies with dueling perspectives, curricular options can also be viewed as a continuum; aspects of one (e.g., real world curriculum) can be infused in another (e.g., academic curriculum) and vice versa (Bouck, 2012; Collins et al., 2010; see Figure 3.1). A real-world curriculum can be integrated into content area instruction and an academic curriculum, including standards, and content area instruction can be embedded into real-world curricular content (Collins et al., 2010). This chapter will discuss strategies for connecting traditional academic content (e.g., literacy, mathematics) and the real-world needs of students with intellectual disability, ASD, or other developmental disabilities.

When considering the connection between academic and real-world curricula and how those two perspectives can be combined, two possibilities exist: embedding academic content into a real-world curriculum and embedding real-world content into an academic curriculum (Collins, Hager, & Galloway, 2011; Collins et al., 2010; Kleinert, Collins, Wickham, Riggs, & Hager, 2010). Collins and colleagues (2010) discussed general ways to approach both curricula: (a) determine appropriate instructional objectives; (b) determine where instruction will occur and what is needed for instruction; (c) select evidence-based instructional approaches, implement the approaches, and collect data; and (d) perform both maintenance and generalization. In other words, a key element to fusing real-world and academic content is planning and developing

Figure 3.1
Continuum of Academic and Real-World Curriculum



Chapter 4

A Real-World Curricular Approach in Community-Based Settings

Community access was first identified as a priority for individuals with disabilities in the 1970s with the introduction in the United States of the Principle of Normalization. Nirje (1969) described this principle as "making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of everyday life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream of society" (p. 181). The idea was to enable individuals with disabilities the opportunity to equally participate in all aspects of community life, including work, recreation and leisure, community living, and social relationships (McDonnell, Hardman, McDonnell, & Kiefer-O'Donnell, 1995). From this idea grew the need for linking the skills necessary for successful community participation to the skill requirements for actively contributing as a member of one's community. This chapter discusses the legal foundation for community-based instruction, as well as the methods and details for implementing such a comprehensive program for individuals with intellectual disability, ASD, or other developmental disabilities.

Community-Based Instruction

Community-based instruction (CBI) is an instructional format that bridges community participation with instructional preparation. This model provides a framework through which real-world skills are taught in small groups and in the settings in which they ultimately will be used (McDonnell, 2010a). In other words, students learn skills in natural settings. Students learn to use academic skills in real-world contexts (e.g., comparing prices in a department store, reading and following schedules according to time). They learn to get around their communities by using different forms of public transportation as well as to cross streets and parking lots in the community settings in which they need to use these skills (e.g., crosswalks, parking lots, pedestrian walkways). As such, students are exposed to all of the natural stimuli that accompany instruction in natural settings (Bates, Cuvo, Miner, & Korabek, 2001). Watching for and avoiding cars, moving with pedestrian traffic, standing in line, using money, asking questions, using escalators and elevators, and dealing with a variety of external stimuli (e.g., lights, crying babies, overhead music, loudspeakers, honking horns) are all community skills to which individuals are exposed when engaged in these activities.

Different from field trips, which are one-time excursions into the community (e.g., one-day field trip to the zoo or local theater), CBI involves repeated trips to the same and similar community locations to acquire, maintain, and generalize the skills that are used in those settings. Students with disabilities often

Chapter 5

Working Together to Promote a Real-World Curriculum

For a real-world curricular approach to be successful, many individuals must work together towards a common goal. Students benefit when teachers, family members, and specialists share a vision for success (Snell & Brown, 2006). In the preceding chapters, we discussed what real-world curriculum is and how practitioners can implement this curriculum across different ages and environments. This chapter will target collaboration among team members; how related services can assist in the implementation of a real-world curriculum; the roles paraeducators play in the provision of an effective real-world curriculum; and, last, how related services are incorporated into Mary's, Tate's, and Robert's educational programs.

Collaboration Among IEP Team Members

Students with disabilities are typically supported by a number of professionals. Individualized education program (IEP) team members are supposed to work together to provide the necessary services for participation and progress in school. IEP team members, according to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006), should include parents, a general education teacher (for students participating in the general education environment), a special education teacher, a representative from the local education agency, and the student when appropriate (34 C.F.R. §300.321). Additional members to the IEP team may be included based on the particular needs of a student (e.g., speech and language pathologist, adapted physical education specialist). From assessment to systematic evaluation and implementation of interventions, this group collaborates to promote successful student outcomes.

Teaming Models

There are three major teaming models common in special education: multidisciplinary teams, interdisciplinary teams, and transdisciplinary teams. The multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches emphasize a discipline-specific approach (Westling & Fox, 2009); for example, a related service such as physical therapy may only occur during the physical therapy-allotted service hours with the physical therapist. Receiving services in this isolated way, however, can decrease the student's ability to generalize skills learned from related service professionals to other environments. In contrast, the transdisciplinary approach involves a shared approach of the highest prioritized student objectives across different disciplines (Hamill & Everington, 2002). Thus, with a transdisciplinary approach, if physical therapy objectives are a high priority for a student, then team members determine how physical therapy objectives will be integrated into all disciplines. Physical therapy may occur during physical therapy-related service hours as well as across other environments with the