16

Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children (COACH)

Curriculum Planning for Students with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms

Michael F. Giangreco

WHEN A STUDENT with disabilities is placed in a general education class, one of the most universal concerns expressed by families and school personnel is the need to develop a relevant educational plan that meets the student's individual needs and makes sense in the context of general education. This chapter presents information about Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children (COACH) (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1993), a planning tool designed to assist teams with their individual student planning efforts. The chapter is divided into three major sections. First, COACH is described. Second, the results of recent research pertaining to COACH are discussed. This section includes 1) national expert and social validation of COACH, 2) cross-cultural feedback on COACH, and 3) what has been learned about the use of COACH and its impact on students, families, and professionals. Third, implications for the future use of COACH are discussed.

WHAT IS COACH?

COACH, Choosing Options and Accommodations for Children (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1993), is a planning process designed to assist individual student planning teams in identifying the content of individualized education programs for students with significant disabilities in general education settings and activities. Although COACH has been used primarily with this low-incidence population, its concepts and procedures are generally applicable for use with students who have a much wider range of characteristics, with minor adaptations to its content. COACH is based on a series of six underlying principles as well as on a set of five valued life outcomes (see Table 1). The valued life outcomes included in COACH originally were generated through interviews with 28 families with children with significant and multiple disabilities (Giangreco, Cloninger, Mueller, Yuan, & Ashworth, 1991) and were further validated as important indicators of a quality life by 44 additional families (Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis, & Edelman, 1993).

COACH is organized into three major parts. Part 1 (Family Prioritization Interview) is used to identify a small set of priority learning outcomes for the student. These priority learning outcomes are individualized and selected by the family based on their proposed impact on valued life outcomes. Part 2 (Defining the Educational Program Components) is used to 1) translate the family-selected priority learning outcomes into individualized education program (IEP) goals and objectives, 2) assist the full team (which includes the family) in identifying other important learning outcomes in addition to those selected by the family, and 3) determine general supports and accommodations to be provided to or for the student to allow access and participations in the education program. This part of COACH ensures that the selection of a small set of priorities will not unnecessarily limit the breadth of the student's learning opportunities and explicitly documents the contents of the education program in a succinct format (i.e., Program-at-a-Glance) for practical use by classroom staff. Part 2 further assists team members by distinguishing between student learning out-

Table 1.   The basis of COACH

Underlying principles

1. Pursuing valued life outcomes is an important aspect of education.
2. The family is the cornerstone of relevant and longitudinal educational planning.
3. Collaborative teamwork is essential to quality education.
4. Coordinated planning is dependent on shared, discipline-free goals.
5. Using problem-solving methods improves the effectiveness of educational planning.
6. Special education is a service not a place.

Valued life outcomes

1. Having a safe, stable home in which to live now and/or in the future.
2. Having access to a variety of places and engaging in meaningful activities.
3. Having a social network of personally meaningful relationships.
4. Having a level of personal choice and control that matches one's age.
5. Being safe and healthy.

comes and supports or accommodations. Particularly with students who have significant disabilities, confusion regarding this distinction has led to conflicts among team members and to IEPs that are unnecessarily passive (Downing, 1988; Giangreco, Dennis, Edelman, & Cloninger, 1994). Part 3 (Addressing the Education Program Components in Inclusive Settings) is used to determine options for addressing students' education program components in general education class settings and in other settings (e.g., community, vocational) with people without disabilities through the use of a scheduling matrix and a set of lesson adaptation guidelines. Table 2 provides an overview of the various parts of COACH.

RESEARCH ON COACH

Although COACH has been publicly available since 1985, it has only been in the early 1990s that any systematic evaluation has been undertaken regarding its validity, use, and impact. The seven updated versions of COACH, which were available between 1985 and 1993, were influenced by anecdotal, although extremely valuable, feedback primarily from special education teachers, related service providers, and parents who used COACH.

National Expert Validation

Initial data exist establishing COACH as a tool that is congruent with a variety of exemplary educational and family-centered practices (Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis, & Edelman, 1993). Seventy-eight experts in the area of multiple disabilities, all of whom met specified criteria, reviewed and rated COACH. Forty-eight percent ($n = 37$) of these experts had used or observed previous versions of COACH. Thirty-seven of the respondents were national or state experts, such as university faculty, state coordinators for deaf-blind services, and regional consultants for national technical assistance networks. Forty-one respondents were people who have expertise by virtue of their field-based involvement with students who have disabilities, such as parents, special educators, general educators, and related service providers. Respondents indicated that COACH was highly congruent with characteristics of family-centered practitioners (Capone, Ross-Allen, DiVenere, & Abernathy, 1991) and several exemplary practices in the categories of 1) family–school collaboration, 2) collaborative planning, 3) curriculum planning, 4) social responsibility, and 5) individualized instruction (Fox & Williams, 1991). Respondents supplemented their high ratings of COACH with positive written comments regarding its purpose, philosophical basis, content, process, and presentation (see Table 3). Respondents offered comments such as the following:

> I think the most valuable aspect of this tool is that it moves from assessment to program implementation without stopping. Too many assessments don't consider that their final purpose should be to develop a program that assists the child to learn meaningful skills. This one does!
>
> COACH is a comprehensive and sensitive approach to providing quality education for all students with disabilities. The utilization of the family-centered approach is key in the development and implementation of programming which effectively meets the

Table 2. Overview of COACH

Part of COACH	Divergent aspect	Convergent aspect
Part 1.1 Valued Life Outcomes	Gather information about the current status and desired future status of valued life outcomes to set a context for the rest of COACH.	Select one to three valued life outcomes that the family feels should be emphasized during the year as part of the school experience.
Part 1.2 Selecting Curricular Areas to Be Assessed	Consider all the curriculum areas in COACH to determine which areas need to be assessed in Part 1.	Select a subset of the curriculum areas in COACH to assess in Part 1, those that include potential priorities for this year.
Part 1.3 Activity Lists	Gather information on the student's level of functioning regarding activities listed in the curriculum areas being assessed.	Select activities needing work this year.
Part 1.4 Prioritization	Within each assessed curriculum area, reconsider all the activities identified needing work this year.	Select which activities needing work are potential priorities and rank the top five.
Part 1.5 Cross-Prioritization	Consider a maximum of the top five priorities from each of the assessed curriculum areas.	Rank the top eight overall priorities and determine which priorities to include in the IEP.
Part 2.1 Restating Selected Priorities as Annual Goals.	Consider the contexts where the priorities to be included in the IEP might be used.	Determine the contexts within which the student will use the priorities and combine to write annual IEP goals.
Part 2.2 Breadth of Curriculum	Consider a variety of general education and other curricular areas for potential inclusion in the educational program.	Select curriculum areas and learning outcomes to be targeted for instruction this year in addition to the IEP goals.
Part 2.3 General Supports	Consider the variety of general supports/accommodations that may be needed for the student.	Select which general supports are needed for the student to have an appropriate education.
Part 2.4 Program-at-a-Glance	None	Summarize educational program components (Parts 2.1, 2.2, 2.3).
Part 2.5 Short-Term Objectives	Consider various conditions, behaviors, and criteria.	Write objectives based on selected conditions, behaviors, and criteria.
Part 3.1 Organizing the Instructional Planning Team	Identify the individuals who will be affected by team decisions, and consider possible tasks.	Determine which team members will make up the core and extended team and who will be responsible for identified tasks.
Part 3.2 Becoming Familiar with the Student	Consider a broad range of facts and needs about the student.	Summarize and document the facts and needs that pertain to the educational experience.

(continued)

Table 2. *(continued)*

Part of COACH	Divergent aspect	Convergent aspect
Part 3.3 Becoming Familiar with the General Education Program and Setting	Consider a broad range of facts about the general education curriculum, instructions, routines, and settings.	Summarize and document the information relevant for the student, and clarify what each team member needs to know.
Part 3.4 Scheduling for Inclusion	Consider possibilities for addressing the student's educational program in inclusive settings.	Develop a schedule addressing the student's educational program components in inclusive settings.
Part 3.5 Considerations for Planning and Adapting Learning	Consider specific lesson adaptations to meet student needs.	Select specific lesson adaptations to meet student needs.

From Giangreco, M.F., Cloninger, C.J., & Iverson, V. (1993). *Choosing options and accommodations for children: A guide to planning inclusive education.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.; reprinted by permission.

needs of the student and the family. So often, professional disciplines fail to recognize the family as not only a viable, but necessary, member of the collaborative planning team. COACH certainly balances the professional and consumer input.... (Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis, & Edelman, 1993, p. 112)

Feedback About Cultural Sensitivity in Family Interviewing

The perspectives of individuals from cultural minority groups were substantially underrepresented in the national expert validation of COACH (Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis, & Edelman, 1993). The education community increasingly has placed importance on providing services for families and individual students in ways that respect, acknowledge, and promote their cultural diversity and strengths (Harry, 1992). Attention to cultural sensitivity is particularly important for special educators because 1) the number of non-Caucasian children in the United States is increasing, so that, by the year 2000, 38% of children under 18 will be of non-Caucasian heritage (Hansen, 1992); 2) the numbers of children who are from minority ethnic and racial groups who receive special education services are disproportionately high (Harry, 1992); and 3) the majority of educators in this country (over 80%) are white, and most are women (Banks, 1994). Because of minority underrepresentation in the validation studies, a group of 14 people were asked to review COACH from a cross-cultural perspective and provide their feedback (Dennis & Giangreco, 1994). Respondents were 1) members of a cultural minority group within the United States (i.e., African American, Hispanic/Latino, Chinese American, Japanese American, Native American/American Indian, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Native Alaskan); 2) knowledgeable about cultural issues related to their own heritage; and 3) knowledgeable about recommended practices in the education of students with significant disabilities in the United States. Each person read COACH, submitted a written report of his or her findings, and was subsequently interviewed by telephone.

Although there may be a number of approaches to culturally sensitive family interviewing, it is ultimately the quality of interaction and conversation between fami-

Table 3. Positive features of COACH identified by expert respondents

Purpose

   Assists in developing individualized education programs and in setting priorities
   Moves from assessment to program planning without stopping
   Facilitates access to general education settings and activities
   May assist with transition of students into integrated settings
   Limits IEP goals to a reasonable number

Philosophical basis

   Emphasizes inclusion
   Is family centered
   Is based on actual use in general education settings
   Emphasizes valued life outcomes

Content

   Is up-to-date, representative of current exemplary practices
   Is thorough, complete, comprehensive
   Includes curriculum areas and activity lists that are succinct yet complete
   Includes activity lists that are functional and age-appropriate
   Builds on existing general education curriculum rather than replaces it

Process

   Provides ample opportunity for family input
   Facilitates collaborative teamwork; balances professional and consumer input
   Has practical, common sense approach
   Is systematic, linear, yet flexible
   Has sensitive, informal participatory tone
   Stresses involvement with the general education program and staff.
   Moves quickly
   Includes use of problem-solving strategies embedded in COACH
   Includes guidelines for developing goals, objectives, breadth of curriculum, and general sup-
      ports
   Includes self-monitoring and peer coaching, which enhance proficiency
   Uses staff time efficiently; streamlines assessment and planning

Presentation

   In-depth description and explanation
   Clear, easy to understand, readable
   Well-organized, logically ordered
   Program-at-a-Glance effective for keeping the team focused
   Scheduling provides concrete way to show what is being worked on in integrated settings

ly members and professionals as individuals that yields the important information needed to design and implement meaningful educational programs for students with disabilities. Although Table 4 lists some of the respondents' major points regarding cultural sensitivity in family interviewing that were prompted by their review of COACH, these points are applicable to family interviewing in general.

Table 4. Respondents' perspectives on cultural sensitivity in parent interviewing

1. Each family should be approached individually. The family is a cultural group, each unique and distinct from other families (including those from the same ethnic or racial group) by virtue of the values, beliefs, and experiences shared by its members. Therefore, we need to guard against stereotyping based on cultural affiliation.

2. Individual families may view their own roles (within the family), the role of children, and particularly children with disabilities, differently than do the professionals who serve them in school.

3. Professionals should develop an appreciation of the environments in which families live. Literally "knowing where families are coming from" can help professionals understand family priorities concerning community activities and social, recreational, and vocational goals they consider important for their children.

4. Professionals need to be aware that they introduce their own culture into their relationships with families. Their position, as a representative of public agency, can be perceived differently by the families with whom they work. The policies, forms, and other written materials that professionals commonly use may be based on concepts not necessarily valued by the families, which may cause them to seem illogical, overwhelming, or intimidating to families unfamiliar with special education rules, regulations, language, and procedures.

5. Personal interactions can bridge cultural differences experienced by both professionals and families if professionals are sensitive and respectful of cultural interaction styles. It is incumbent upon the professional to be open to different cultural norms and customs with which they may be unfamiliar.

6. The family's understanding of the purpose of the interview, use of family members' preferred language, issues of time, and preferred style for sharing information are important aspects of cultural sensitivity when interviewing families.

7. Professionals who acknowledge the importance of culturally sensitive practices must purposely seek ways to enhance their understanding and knowledge about "other ways of thinking and being." These ways may include study and reading on the topics of families and ethnicity in interdisciplinary professional and nonprofessional literature, coursework, or more experiential learning with the help of people and families from cultural groups other than their own.

8. The extent to which professionals need to learn specific details about a particular cultural group varies and must be balanced with an understanding of cultural processes and an appreciation for the individual family's experience, for family members' levels of acculturation, and for the changing nature of culture itself.

Use and Impact of COACH

Between 1991 and 1993, a multisite evaluation of COACH was conducted across eight states with 30 teams who served students with significant and/or multiple disabilities. This evaluation consisted of interviews, observations, and document analysis (e.g., completed COACH forms) (Giangreco, Edelman, Dennis, & Cloninger, 1995). This study yielded some valuable, if not surprising, data.

When Used in Ways Incongruent with Its Underlying Assumptions, COACH Was Less Effective Professionals found it more difficult and less valuable to use COACH when they attempted to use COACH without 1) a thorough understanding of its underlying principles, 2) a working knowledge of the instructions for its use, and/or 3) the adequate involvement of other team members in deciding whether to use the tool.

As an adjunct to this study, a conceptual analysis of the COACH forms collected from the teams being studied was conducted in an attempt to identify adaptations to the

COACH process made by team members. Adaptations were defined as any documentation on the COACH forms that did not follow the instructions outlined in the manual. Because COACH is not designed to be a standardized process, adaptations to the process are not inherently positive or negative. As adaptations were identified, a judgment was made by this author (as the originator of COACH) whether each adaptation was congruent or incongruent with the underlying principles of COACH as listed in Table 1, and, if congruent, which underlying principles have been compromised. Table 5 lists examples of how individuals have adapted COACH in ways that were incongruent with its underlying assumptions; these examples are offered to assist future consumers of COACH in avoiding these same pitfalls.

When Used in Ways Congruent with Its Underlying Principles, COACH Was Considered Effective Professionals' attempts to interact more collaboratively with families were either facilitated or hampered by how they chose to familiarize themselves with the principles and instructions for using COACH (Giangreco et al., 1995). As with anything new, proficient use of COACH requires an investment of time and energy (e.g., reading the manual, viewing a competent model on videotape or in person, having discussions with team members to facilitate understanding, role playing prior to actual use, providing feedback after use). Results of the study suggested that relying on team members to learn together through practice and peer coaching could mitigate some of the problems inherent in solitary learning and application (e.g., difficulty explaining COACH to families, misunderstanding written instructions, individual errors in judgment, lack of motivation to complete various parts, lack of ownership by team members in using the results of COACH) (Giangreco et al., 1995).

In situations in which people used COACH as described in the manual or with minor adaptations congruent with its underlying principles (e.g., scoring variations, individualization of question-asking language), reaction to its use was positive. As two special educators said, respectively, "I very much like it because it's a very directed and organized way to be able to discuss things that are sometimes difficult to discuss." "It's a combination of structure, but flexibility...so we can tailor it to everyone's individual needs" (Giangreco et al., 1995).

Professionals and parents reported that the use of COACH caused them to think differently. A parent commented, "I like the structure because it enabled you to maybe think about things that you would not have considered before." The use of COACH "spurred on some conversations I don't think would have come up if we had not been doing COACH" (special educator). This thought-provoking aspect of COACH may be attributed primarily to the multiple and alternating use of divergent and convergent questions. This strategy is an adaptation of the Osborn-Parnes Creative Problem Solving Process (CPS) (Parnes, 1985, 1992). CPS methods for eliciting new ideas are facilitated by creating opportunities to actively defer judgment (divergence) as well as opportunities to actively engage judgment (convergence). The multiple fact-generating and decision points in COACH distinguish it from other planning tools, such as checklists, which may provide for reporting a student's level of functioning but offer no

Table 5. Adaptations incongruent with the underlying principles of COACH[a]

Section of COACH	Adaptations to written instructions	Principles with which the practice is incongruent	Why the practice is incongruent
General	Documentation of team involvement was incomplete (e.g., did not list all team members; did not document dates reviewed with other team members)	Collaborative teamwork is essential to quality education	Not sharing information or developing a shared framework and goals interferes with teamwork
	Completed Part 1 of COACH (Family Prioritization Interview) but did not complete Part 2	Pursuing valued life outcomes is an important aspect of education	Family Prioritization Interview provides an incomplete and unnecessarily narrow view of the student's educational program
	Family filled out the COACH forms at home by themselves	Using problem-solving methods improves the effectiveness of educational planning	Both the divergent/convergent problem-solving and interactive aspects embedded in COACH are lost
Part 1.2: Selecting Curricular Areas to Be Assessed	Did not complete this section	Using problem-solving methods...	The field of possibilities was not narrowed
Part 1.3: Activity Lists	Added the score NA (not applicable) to the existing range of scoring options	Pursuing valued life outcomes...	Addition of NA interferes with providing the greatest opportunity for, and least restriction on, student potential
Part 1.4: Prioritization	Skipped "Potential Priorities" column and went directly from Scoring to Ranking	Using problem-solving methods...	If more than 5 items were circled "Y" under the heading "Needs Work", nonuse of the Potential Priorities column fails to take advantage of the divergent/convergent problem-solving approach

(continued)

Table 5. *(continued)*

Section of COACH	Adaptations to written instructions	Principles with which the practice is incongruent	Why the practice is incongruent
	Checked all items that "Need Work" as "Potential Priorities"	Using problem-solving methods...	Marking all items as potential priorities does not assist in narrowing the selection of priorities
	Ranked Activity Listing (e.g., Personal Management) items 1–9. (These were all marked "Yes" for "Needs Work" in Part 1.3.)	Using problem-solving methods...	Uses time inefficiently because only a maximum of the top five ranked items go on to be considered at the next level (1.5)
	Checked items as "Potential Priorities" and ranked them as priorities although they were marked as N in Part 1.3, indicating that they do not "Need Work" this year	Using problem-solving methods...	Only those items that "Need Work" are considered as "Potential Priorities"
Part 1.5: Cross-Prioritization	In "Other" category, added the item "Maintain range of motion by positioning/stretching"	Coordinated planning is dependent upon shared, discipline-free goals	Part 1.5 addresses learning outcomes only in an attempt to distinguish them from general supports
	Added "increase kicking" to "Other" category	Coordinated planning...	This item is not an "activity" but rather a "subskill"; it would need to be put into a functional context to be considered an activity
	Listed Overall Priorities as "Communication," "Academics"	Using problem-solving methods...	Such descriptors are merely curricular categories, not learning outcomes
	Did not list the Valued Life Outcomes that correspond with the family's "Overall Priorities"	The family is the cornerstone of relevant and longitudinal educational planning	May interfere with professionals adequately understanding the underlying meaning of the family's selected priorities
	Did not indicate whether the Overall Priorities should be "Included in the IEP," "Breadth of Curriculum," or "Home"	The family is the cornerstone...and collaborative teamwork...	Fails to clarify expectations among team members
Part 2.1: Annual Goals Worksheet	Did not set context for annual goals	Pursuing valued life outcomes...	Interferes with the pursuit of Valued Life Outcomes because it does not place learning outcomes in contexts that are individually meaningful for the student
Part 2.2: Breadth of Curriculum Worksheet and Listing	Listed only general education classes in which the student is currently placed rather than those available to all other students in that particular grade	Using problem-solving methods..., pursuing valued life outcomes... and special education is a service not a place	Listing does not account for the divergent consideration of all possibilities available to the student
Part 2.3: General Supports	Did not indicate the Valued Life Outcomes sought by providing the General Supports	Pursuing valued life outcomes...	May interfere with team members adequately understanding the underlying meaning of the selected General Supports

·See Table 1 for underlying assumptions of COACH.

Part 2.1: Annual Goals Worksheet	Did not set context for annual goals	Pursuing valued life outcomes…	Interferes with the pursuit of Valued Life Outcomes because it does not place learning outcomes in contexts that are individually meaningful for the student
Part 2.2: Breadth of Curriculum Worksheet and Listing	Listed only general education classes in which the student is currently placed rather than those available to all other students in that particular grade	Using problem-solving methods…, pursuing valued life outcomes… and special education is a service not a place	Listing does not account for the divergent consideration of all possibilities available to the student
Part 2.3: General Supports	Did not indicate the Valued Life Outcomes sought by providing the General Supports	Pursuing valued life outcomes…	May interfere with team members adequately understanding the underlying meaning of the selected General Supports

"See Table 1 for underlying assumptions of COACH.

process for decision making about the information that is gathered. Although some families are articulate and anxious to give their input when asked open-ended questions, the discrete, short-answer format of COACH provides a vehicle for many families to organize and communicate their ideas.

One of the most common comments about COACH was that it assisted people in focusing on priorities for a student. As one general education classroom teacher said, "I think COACH helps focus the families' priorities for the students and really makes them look at what's important to them and what's not important to them." Parents echoed this sentiment, and one mother said, "Of everything we've tried, and we've tried lots of different approaches over the years with Sandra of coming up with IEP goals, this just gave us so much assistance in really getting what we wanted for her and helping us crystallize what we really did want."

This focusing reportedly added clarity and relevance to the IEPs that were developed based on the family-selected priorities from COACH. Families reported that the priority learning outcomes they selected using COACH accurately reflected the needs of their child.

Breadth of Curriculum (Part 2.2) was found to be an effective mechanism for making decisions about a broader set of learning outcomes to complement the priorities selected by the family. Included in this broader view were learning outcomes from the general education curriculum, a source for outcomes that reportedly was considered infrequently, if at all, prior to the use of COACH. As one special education teacher observed, "Looking at the regular education curriculum, I think people were surprised...it made a big difference when people look at the elementary curriculum and say, 'Wow!' Boy, there's a lot here that we can be focusing on."

When professionals realized that the Breadth of Curriculum component provided a substantial opportunity for them to share their knowledge and perspectives, they reported that it made it easier for them to relinquish control for decision making to the parent through the Family Prioritization Interview. Some teachers found the General Supports (Part 2.3) a useful mechanism for distinguishing and documenting the difference between what they wanted a student to learn and what they needed to do for a student.

Traditionally, special education checklists and curriculum guides provided no mechanism for considering the content of the general education curriculum. The Breadth of Curriculum component explicitly includes fact finding and decision making about learning outcomes in the general education curriculum as a way to augment and extend the listings included in Part 1 (Family Prioritization Interview) of COACH. This expansion ensures that students' learning options are not artificially limited. The combination of the Family Prioritization Interview (Part 1), Breadth of Curriculum (Part 2.2), and General Supports (Part 2.3) is designed to offer breadth and balance to the education program unlikely to be achieved if using only Part 1 of COACH.

While acknowledging the time commitment involved with COACH, study participants commented that it was "worth it" and indicated that they were "really happy with the results." Use of COACH served as a motivating prompt for teams to work together. "I believe that COACH committed us to really working hard to see how we

could fit those learning outcomes of COACH into her school day more." In some cases, COACH-identified priorities were observed being taught in classrooms as staff referred to the student's Program-at-a-Glance (Part 2.4), which is a one- or two-page summary of COACH results. As one general education classroom teacher said, "We use it everyday. There's a pretty discreet [sic] number [of priority learning outcomes] that we're trying to address; this has let everyone be able to remember what's being worked on."

One physical therapist summarized her perspectives about COACH use by saying,

> I firmly believe in the process and just thought it was extremely challenging and exciting and it made a much better educational program for the child. It was just a very satisfying way to work because you felt you had a road map of where you wanted to be and a way to get there. It was exciting to see....

COACH was used by some teams as one component of the annual transition planning from grade to grade as well as a component for major transitions such as those from early childhood programs to kindergarten and from high school to postsecondary experiences. In two cases, the use of COACH was reported to be instrumental in helping students make the transition from part-time special class placements to full-time general education placements when team members recognized that the Valued Life Outcomes and learning outcomes identified for the student could not be adequately pursued in separate environments. As one mother said, "COACH was instrumental in transition to regular class placement because we were able to say, 'Well gee, how do we do a large group in a self-contained class?'"

How Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) Changed Based on Use of COACH Use of COACH often resulted in a smaller number of goals included on the IEP than has been typical. IEP goals, which have tended to be broad and general (e.g., improve communication skills), tended to be quite specific (e.g., makes requests to get out of his wheelchair) (Giangreco et al., 1995). For students placed full-time in general education, the shift was from functional skills traditionally associated with special classes (e.g., personal management/self-care) to communication and social skills that reflected the changing needs of students who are in environments with students without disability labels. One special educator stated, "This will be the first time that Kevin hasn't had an eating goal on his IEP, which is kind of interesting; that is something that will change as a result of having COACH done." Using COACH to consider potential priorities and other learning outcomes (i.e., Breadth of Curriculum) in general education settings also shifted some teams toward considering academic learning outcomes (e.g., literacy) for the first time.

COACH Positively Affected Relationships Between Families and Professionals It was reported that COACH enhanced relationships between parents and professionals by providing a process for families to express their ideas and priorities, while the professional's primary role was to listen and seek to understand the perspectives of families (Giangreco et al., 1995). As one special educator said, "I think COACH really gave an opportunity for her parents to have an articulate way to contribute to her educational life, and for us as a team to hear from them."

For some families, using COACH was reported to be the first time they had actually been asked for their input rather than presented with professional recommendations for their approval or disapproval. Parents indicated that COACH gave them an acceptable way to say no to professionals that did not require them to explain or rationalize their decisions. COACH helped some families clarify their thoughts within the family unit. As one mother said, "I think it helped my husband and I because we did it [COACH] together, because sometimes we have different views on what Eddie should be doing or what our vision is for Eddie."

This change in the nature of interactions between parents and professionals was reported to increase the level of parent participation in educational planning and to open dialogue about previously undiscussed topics: "It helped us broaden our ideas...." For some teams, this developing relationship between parents and professionals established a sense of mutual support and interdependence. "People feel so much better about teaming; that you're not out there by yourself trying to work miracles on this kid.... Getting people to sit down and communicate and talk really helped."

Initially, some professionals in this study negatively characterized a student's parents (e.g., not knowledgeable, low expectations, unrealistic, demanding, poor judgment). Using COACH was reported to prompt several professionals to view parents in a more favorable light. Professionals reported being pleasantly surprised by the depth, quality, and realism of parental input elicited by the use of COACH. "They [the parents] are working so hard the whole time [during the Family Prioritization Interview]. It is like they are thinking and they have so much to say.... The comments the parents made were all very valuable." In reference to a set of parents who had originally been described as "very demanding," one service provider said, "Once we started working with them and really working with them as an integral part of the team they were exceptionally fine parents and a joy to work with."

Professionals said they misinterpreted low levels of parental participation in previous meetings as disinterest, lack of caring, or lack of ability to make appropriate decisions. These professionals said COACH offered a way to draw out important information and insights from parents who tended to be quiet during meetings. COACH provided opportunities for families to display their knowledge about their child. What professionals learned from listening to families helped them to better understand the families and work with their children. As one special educator said:

> I was impressed with how well this mother knows her child. I was very impressed with her present goals and expectations for the future and I didn't necessarily have that understanding of the mom up until going through COACH with her the first time. I felt her goals and expectations were very realistic. It exposed a side of the mom to me that I hadn't seen at that level before, and I was very pleased and I felt very comfortable with that.

When professionals act on the priorities established by parents, they have the potential to send a powerful message of respect for the family by backing written and spoken words with substantive actions.

COACH Shifted Control of Educational Decision Making Use of COACH challenged traditional types and levels of professional control regarding edu-

cational decision making, shifting more control to parents, particularly through the Family Prioritization Interview (Giangreco et al., 1995). As one parent acknowledged, "We feel like we have more control." Some professionals reported that the prospect of losing some of their control was "scary" and "uncomfortable." As one special educator said, "I felt like I couldn't surrender the agenda that we [professionals] had...." Some of these same professionals indicated that COACH helped legitimize this shift of control. As one special educator mentioned, "COACH really surrendered that feeling of guilt for me [about not being in control of all educational planning decisions]." For other professionals, relinquishing some level of control was reported to provide a sense of relief:

> One thing that was nice for me was some of the letting go, that I could defer to somebody else. I didn't have to have all the answers. They [the parents] could say, "How about we try this?" and I would say, "Great idea!"

Whether professionals sensed relief or anxiety, several recognized the value of relinquishing some of their control. As one special educator said,

> Even though initially it was like, "Oh, this is hard for me," you know by the end of it because of the way I saw it follow through, the way it made the IEP much smoother, the way it made our team work so much better, it made me feel real good. It just made a big difference overall, and the whole relationship I've had with parents. I can honestly say that they are part of our team now.

Providing parents with a mechanism to assume greater control distinguishes COACH from many other planning processes. Greater control for parents has the potential for changing the relationship between family and professionals from adversarial to more collaborative, encouraging professionals to clearly see their roles in providing families with strategies for making sound educational decisions.

Impact of COACH on Valued Life Outcomes for Students   Changes in valued life outcomes were facilitated by the use of COACH and were reflected in new programmatic and social opportunities (Giangreco et al., 1995). However, it is clear that the reported changes cannot be attributed to COACH exclusively. Contextual elements believed to enhance COACH use are 1) general education placement; 2) collaborative teamwork; 3) willingness of team members to learn new ideas and skills; 4) willingness to share control; 5) active participation of students in general education class activities, even if they have different learning outcomes; 6) peer and other natural supports; and 7) taking action on plans.

Therefore, Valued Life Outcomes discussed in this section are those that team members said were facilitated by using COACH in combination with other effective practices. The impact on students' Valued Life Outcomes began for some study participants with a basic awareness about what might make a student's life better. As one parent said, "I think probably if anything has benefited my thinking and the team's thinking about what is appropriate for Sam, it is the Valued Life Outcomes." Asking questions about Valued Life Outcomes as a context for educational planning did not necessarily yield immediate results; team members reported that this sometimes had a delayed impact, just like seeds planted that sprout at a later date.

For several students, use of COACH led to new opportunities and raised expectations, some of which were as basic as riding the school bus with classmates, having access to human touch, or actively communicating with peers. Parents talked about the routines of their families and the new opportunities their children had as a result of priorities established using COACH. For some families, this meant their children were now attending the ballgames of an older sibling, attending religious services with the family, going shopping, or participating in general education classes. As the mother of a high school student said, "Her repertoire of activities has expanded and a lot of those things that were identified [during the COACH interview] have been dealt with." New opportunities in school led to other opportunities after school. These new experiences were reported to have provided opportunities for students with disabilities to make friends. One mother said, "He went to dances, he went to games, he was just part of it. He was a kid in the sixth grade or seventh grade. It was just exciting to see that; things that people generally take for granted."

Often the Valued Life Outcomes identified in the COACH process are interrelated. For example, Tim's parents were concerned about his health; they selected fitness activities as priority learning outcomes for him. The team arranged for Tim to work out at the local YMCA. While there, Tim met new friends with whom he exercised on a regular basis. In this example, at least two other family-identified Valued Life Outcomes were also addressed: 1) having access to a variety of places and engaging in meaningful activities, and 2) having a social network of personally meaningful relationships. The ways in which the team chose to address improvements in Tim's health—at a community setting with other people—created additional opportunities to pursue additional Valued Life Outcomes.

New opportunities frequently prompted both professionals and parents to change, expand, and raise their expectations regarding the ways in which the students could participate in school, at home, and in the community. The mother of a high school student with deafness-blindness came to consider supported employment as a realistic and attainable outcome for her daughter, something she said she previously would not have even considered. This mother's optimism was rooted not in speculation, but in the reality of her daughter's high school experiences. As her mother said, "She's a teenager; she's got money; she's getting minimum wage."

Use of COACH prompted natural peer supports. When teachers created climates conducive to interaction among students, "They [peers] know when he needs somebody with him so the kids automatically go to be with him." As one mother explained,

> If she needs something, if she needs help opening the paint, she'll tap one of the other kids and hand them the jar like, "You know, I can't get this cover off." And they have gotten so they've been as excited as I have. "Hey, Holly wants me to open it! Holly asked me to do it! She's communicating!"

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE USE

COACH has been continually evolving since its inception; in order for it to remain a viable planning tool, such change will need to continue. The original emphasis of COACH on students with significant disabilities should be extended to students with a

wider range of characteristics by considering the similarities in Valued Life Outcomes sought for students, including curriculum individualization needs for students without disability labels. Therefore, COACH should move in the future toward generic process steps that are increasingly applicable to an ever-widening audience. To accomplish this extension, the Valued Life Outcomes and specific learning outcomes included in COACH will need further consideration and change so that they can be interpreted in individually meaningful ways by more families with diverse characteristics and needs. The process of COACH will also need to undergo continual reevaluation to retain its problem-solving attributes while simplifying and streamlining it so that it becomes more user friendly. Although these potential revisions should be facilitated through continued research, the greatest sources of ideas for potential improvements are the thoughtful adaptations to the process invented by professionals and family members who join together on behalf of the students they care about and seek to educate. Therefore, as stated in the COACH manual, "Consumers are reminded that COACH is a flexible tool. Its process is specifically intended to help teams develop educational plans that reflect valued life outcomes identified by the family and to encourage participation in a variety of inclusive settings. Your team is encouraged to modify COACH as necessary to be useful under unique circumstances" (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1993, p. 31).

REFERENCES

Banks, J.A. (1994). *Knowledge construction, curriculum transformation and multicultural education* [Cassette Recording No. 2-94145x99]. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Capone, A., Ross-Allen, J., DiVernere, N., & Abernathy, N. (1991). *Characteristics of family-centered practitioners.* Burlington: University of Vermont, University Affiliated Program of Vermont.

Dennis, R., & Giangreco, M.F. (1994). *Creating conversation: Reflections on cultural sensitivity in family interviewing.* Burlington: University of Vermont, University Affiliated Program of Vermont. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Downing, J. (1988). Active versus passive programming: A critique of IEP objectives for students with the most severe disabilities. *Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 13,* 197–210.

Fox, T., & Williams, W. (1991). *Best practice guidelines for meeting the needs of all students in local schools.* Burlington: University of Vermont, University Affiliated Program of Vermont.

Giangreco, M.F., Cloninger, C.J., Dennis, R.E., & Edelman, S.W. (1993). National expert validation of COACH: Congruence with exemplary practice and suggestions for improvement. *Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 18*(2), 109–120.

Giangreco, M.F., Cloninger, C., & Iverson, V. (1993). *Choosing options and accommodations for children: A guide to planning inclusive education.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Giangreco, M.F., Cloninger, C.J., Mueller, P., Yuan, S., & Ashworth, S. (1991). Perspectives of parents whose children have dual sensory impairments. *Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 16,* 14–24.

Giangreco, M.F., Dennis, R., Edelman, S., & Cloninger, C. (1994). Dressing your IEPs for the general education climate: Analysis of IEP goals and objectives for students with multiple disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education, 15*(5), 288–296.

Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., Dennis, R., & Cloninger, C.J. (1995). Use and impact of COACH with students who are deaf-blind. *Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 20*(2), 121–135.

Hansen, M. (1992). Ethnic, cultural and language diversity in intervention settings. In E. Lynch & M. Hansen (Eds.), *Developing cross cultural competence: A guide for working with young children and their families* (pp. 3–18). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Harry, B. (1992). *Cultural diversity, families, and the special education system: Communication and empowerment.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Parnes, S.J. (1985). *A facilitating style of leadership.* Buffalo, NY: The Creative Education Foundation, Inc.

Parnes, S.J. (1992). *Sourcebook for creative problem-solving: A fifty year digest of proven innovation processes.* Buffalo, NY: The Creative Education Foundation, Inc.