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Chapter 5

Through Their Eyes

Creating Functional, Child-Sensitive Individualized Education Programs

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The landscape of early childhood special education is changing dramatically as young children with disabilities increasingly receive services in community-based preschools and child care settings attended primarily by children without disabilities. This emerging early childhood special education landscape is characterized by an emphasis on family-selected goals and the integrated provision of educational and related services through play, discovery, and problem solving (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Bruder, 1993). Deficit-driven models of special education focusing on what a child cannot do are being replaced with practices that build on more positive characteristics, such as the child's abilities and interests. Several program-quality indicators support the underlying characteristics of a play-centered approach by acknowledging the importance of providing environments that are responsive to children's initiations, thereby encouraging participation, self-directed behavior, and engagement with the environment (McWilliam & Strain, 1993).

As early interventionists move toward providing services within the context of inclusive, play-centered environments, it will be important to examine existing practices that may be incongruent with a play-centered philosophy. This chapter describes briefly the philosophical beliefs that shape the play-centered approach guiding many inclusive early childhood special

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education programs and highlights critical attributes of this philosophy that should be reflected in our daily practice with young children and their families. As we examine current practices, we reflect on the contradictions that surface when traditional individualized education programs (IEPs) are evaluated for their congruence with a play-centered philosophy. An alternative model of IEP development is presented that includes a refinement of our understanding of functional goals and objectives, is consistent with a play-centered philosophy, and supports the richness provided by inclusive settings.

PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS THAT SHAPE A PLAY-CENTERED APPROACH

A play-centered approach is based on the "conviction that play provides the integrative context essential to support the growth of the whole child" (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 1993, p. 9). It is widely recognized that play is instrumental in the development of intellect, creativity, a sense of self, and the capacity to interact with others (Almy & Genishi, 1982; Bergen, 1988; Cohen & Rae, 1987; Hendrick, 1990; Smilansky, 1968; Van Hoorn et al., 1993). Thus, play is critical to optimal child development; therefore, it is essential that educators develop an in-depth understanding of the nature of children's play and identify the interests, developmental levels, and learning history of individual children in the environment.

Play, by definition, is child-initiated, providing children with a meaningful curriculum that gives them choices that are interesting and challenging (Forman & Hill, 1984; Van Hoorn et al., 1993). A play-centered approach is characterized by the belief that children learn through play and from each other (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Forman & Hill, 1984; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1962). Discussion of a play-centered approach focuses on the deliberate ways in which the materials, activities, schedules, teachers' behaviors, and peer interactions are creatively managed to reflect knowledge of the individual children in the environment while recognizing that children are active learners who learn from each other when presented with opportunities to engage in meaningful learning encounters. Play-centered environments are flexible and responsive, providing adult guidance that is appropriate and relevant to children's individual needs. Many educators in inclusive early childhood special education programs have learned that play provides a context that is intrinsically motivating, creating opportunities for children at all levels of development to participate. By engaging with peers in the various play scenarios offered in the areas of an early childhood environment (e.g., sand and water, block, dramatic play, art, woodworking), children "clarify and master many fundamental aspects of development in all basic areas: physical, intellectual, social, and emotional" (Maxim, 1989, p. 222). Environments guided by a play-centered philosophy create a community of learning partners whose discoveries, ideas, and curi-

osities are enhanced by the actions and reactions of each member, creating new and exciting opportunities for children to learn within a dynamic context.

Children Are Active Learners

Knowledge is acquired through interaction with materials, peers, and adults, through questioning, poking, probing, and reflecting. Early childhood environments that translate a play-centered philosophy into action celebrate children as active explorers who seek to make meaning of their world. These environments respect the passions, styles, and needs of each child and challenge adults to design environments that address all aspects of development (e.g., social-emotional, cognitive, physical) while facilitating interactions among children, materials, and adults in such a manner that children use the environment productively and see themselves as capable learners (Johnson, Johnson, McMillan, & Rogers, 1989). Within the context of this approach, a well-designed early childhood program is defined by the extent to which the environment, activities, and interactions are rooted in the adult's 1) understanding of child development; 2) knowledge of each child's interests, abilities, needs, and learning history; and 3) ability to carefully orchestrate an environment that motivates each child to develop. In short, it is an environment that requires tremendous reflection and spontaneity on the part of educators and presents numerous and varied opportunities for children to explore and take risks.

Children Learn from Each Other

Considerable evidence has accrued suggesting that children learn effectively from other children (Katz, Evangelou, & Hartman, 1990; Roopnarine & Johnson, 1983; Urberg & Kaplan, 1986; Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky (1962) spoke about this in his discussions of the "zone of proximal development," a concept suggesting children learn new skills that are only slightly outside their current skill repertoire. Bricker and Cripe (1992) state that "less able or developmentally younger children profited more from child-driven approaches (e.g., milieu teaching, interactive approach) than from more adult-controlled approaches" (p. 55), supporting trends toward providing services for young children with disabilities in inclusive, play-centered, early childhood programs. This is not to suggest that, in play, learning involves random interactions, but rather that learning occurs within the context of a carefully orchestrated environment that enhances each child's motivation to achieve through manipulation, exploration, and feedback (Graham & Bryant, 1993).

Interrelatedness of Developmental Domains

Play-centered environments provide a learning context consistent with our knowledge of the interrelatedness of developmental domains (Berkeley & Ludlow, 1989; Van Hoorn et al., 1993). Play provides an integrated approach

that encourages children to use skills from a number of developmental domains simultaneously. For example, the child engaged in a dramatic play scene may use cognitive abilities to identify roles or props, fine motor skills to manipulate props or put on a costume, gross motor skills to climb the mountain, and communication skills to assume a role or direct the play. There is room within a dramatic play scheme to accommodate children with a diverse array of developmental competencies. Within this approach, adults must look at activities from a broad perspective to ensure that fine motor, gross motor, and other domain-specific activities are integrated into children's natural play. The goal is for children to self-select activities that foster growth in all developmental domains.

Role of the Adult

Conceptualizing the role of adults as facilitators of learning challenges educators to devote time to exploring the ways adults can become involved in children's play, without dominating the play, and to enhancing their abilities to observe children's play to develop hypotheses about what children are learning or working on. The information gained from these observations is used to deliberately modify the environment so that activities, materials, and adult behaviors constantly and consistently provide opportunities for children to use existing competencies more often, in more settings, and with greater complexity, thus developing greater competence. The role of adults in a play-centered environment is flexible and responsive to the individual needs of children, ensuring that all children are able to participate in the environment in ways that respect their interests, current level of ability, and learning history. Importantly, daily observations and stated goals and objectives for individual children provide the underlying structure to guide a teacher's intentional modification of the learning environment.

Learning Occurs Within the Context of Relevant, Meaningful Activities

Play-centered environments provide children with opportunities to select from an array of activities that are related to the real world of the child. In early childhood environments reflecting this belief, the general interests of young children and the individual interests of children in the program are considered when planning activities. Children seem to learn and remember best when the activities in which they are engaged are related to experiences they have or to materials with which they are familiar. Interest in an activity leads children to explore an object, materials, or an event to discover more about it. Children discover concepts and information through hands-on interactions with materials that have been chosen by the child and are used in the manner in which the child decides. The ultimate challenge here is that the adult's role is to set the context, the "lure," and then as unobtrusively as possible to support the child's

exploration. The ultimate goal is to motivate children actively to discover concepts, enlarging their repertoire of learning (Dodge & Colker, 1992).

An observer in a well-defined, developmentally appropriate, play-centered environment may well feel like a spectator at a ballet. The stage is set with the props clearly visible and carefully selected, waiting for the children whose curiosities prompted their presence. The adults engage in what might be termed a dance throughout the day, each moving about the room, supporting yet not dominating children's play, responding to children's discoveries and issues, and supporting children's decisions and activities. As the day progresses, the activities create an explosion of discoveries and queries that set the stage for tomorrow's learning.

FORGING A NEW RELATIONSHIP: THE MARRIAGE OF PLAY AND THE IEP

As early interventionists move toward the provision of services in inclusive settings, as well as incorporating a play-based philosophy into more traditional settings, they are challenged to reexamine the focus of IEP goals and objectives and refine prevailing beliefs about functional goals and objectives. As a result of this process, there is greater consistency between the content of the IEP and the context in which it is implemented. Ultimately, these discussions blur the lines between early intervention or early childhood special education and early childhood education practice and create a more unified and effective approach to the education of young children with disabilities.

The IEPs we develop are designed to serve as a map, guiding our practice and creating markers that determine the route we have taken and how far we have come. A 1994 analysis of traditional IEPs suggests that they do not "adequately communicate the individual needs of the students nor did they appear to serve as a useful resource to guide their general educational experience" (Giangreco, Dennis, Edelman, & Cloninger, 1994). These findings support Smith's (1990) research indicating that IEPs frequently are not useful documents. Specifically, Giangreco et al. (1994) identified five critical issues presented in Table 1.

The authors of this chapter live in Vermont, a rural state divided by a mountain range that becomes impassable during the long winter months, making the adage "you can't get there from here" a favorite saying of seventh-generation Vermonters. Similarly, many IEPs leave us wondering how we can integrate stated goals and objectives into the daily activities and experiences that a young child encounters. The current form of IEPs has changed very little over the years, even though IEPs were originally designed to guide services that primarily occurred in segregated settings. It is time to update our IEP map to guide our practice more effectively in inclusive, play-centered settings, so that we do not find ourselves looking at an IEP and feeling like we "can't get there from here."

Table 1. Illustration of IEP characteristics with alternative practices

Problematic characteristics	Potential alternatives
1. Sweeping statements: "José will improve communication skills."	1. Individualized learning outcomes: "José will initiate the use of 15 new signs in interactions with peers in his preschool."
2. Functional rhetoric without substance: "Gina will enlarge her circle of friends."	2. Family-centered priorities based on valued life outcomes: "Gina will initiate and maintain social interactions with her peers throughout activities encountered at preschool."
3. Making promises that are hard to keep: IEPs filed away, lengthy, and not incorporated into general education activities.	3. Useful IEPs: Use of a one-page "program-at-a-glance" to summarize a child's individualized education program within the learning areas of a play-centered setting.
4. Goals for staff rather than for children: "Mary Ann will have hearing aids checked daily by the audiologists" written as an IEP goal is actually a goal for the staff, not Mary Ann.	4. Goals for children are distinguished from supports provided by staff: "A teacher assistant, taught by an audiologist, will check Mary Ann's hearing aids daily" is written in the IEP as a support rather than a goal.
5. Discipline-referenced: "Darren will improve articulation of bilabial sounds in speech therapy."	5. Discipline-free shared goals: "Darren will increase intelligibility of speech in one-to-one conversation with parents, siblings, peers, and teachers."

Adapted with permission from Giangreco, M., 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*, 288-296.

Reexamining the Focus of IEP Goals and Objectives

Typically, IEP goals and objectives are identified based on a child's performance on standardized tests or other developmental or criterion-referenced checklists. Items on these measures that the child passes are used to identify the child's current level of performance, and items that the child fails are identified as areas of need and frequently become IEP goals and objectives. Although the resulting individualized plan is unique relative to a particular child's performance on a developmentally sequenced set of skills, the plan emphasizes limitations rather than maximizes capabilities and sets a course that is driven by a standard set of skills rather than one that reflects the child's individual preferences, dislikes, passions, coping strategies, and approaches to life. As play becomes the primary vehicle for learning, the IEP team is challenged to enhance its knowledge of the child by expanding the information gleaned from test situations with detailed descriptions of a child's behavior as observed in play. This new information creates a context for an IEP discussion that leads to the identification of goals and objectives that are consistent with the activities

encountered in a play-centered environment, reflect parent's priorities, and facilitate the development of a more complex and varied play repertoire.

Creating a New Definition of Functional Goals and Objectives

The field of early intervention has promoted the development of functional goals and objectives as professionals have become increasingly sensitive to the fact that children learn best when they engage in activities that are meaningful. Functional goals and objectives are described as those that are useful and meaningful within a child's life circumstances and promote generalization across materials and settings (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Notari & Drinkwater, 1991). This movement has encouraged early interventionists to abandon the practice of writing goals and objectives that address isolated skills, focusing instead on objectives that are considered functional. Because functional goals and objectives are central to the creation of relevant IEPs that support development within the context of a child's life, it is essential that educators refine their understanding of functionality as it applies to the development of IEP goals and objectives.

Art, for example, provides a context for reflecting on more traditional perspectives related to the identification of functional goals and objectives and allows us to reconceptualize functionality within the context of play. Because it is widely accepted that children enjoy interacting with art materials and using their imagination to create with paper, glue, and color, arts and crafts activities are common elements of early childhood environments. Art projects provide opportunities to practice such skills as copying a model, following a direction, cutting on lines, or tracing. In turn, art products become tangible evidence of fine motor, cognitive, and linguistic competence and the acquisition of new skills. Are goals and objectives that are linked to arts and crafts projects functional? Many would answer yes, arguing that art activities are useful and meaningful within the context of preschool, child care, and early childhood special education programs; however, they may not be useful and meaningful for a particular child.

Although some projects may appear to provide a more functional context for practicing isolated skills such as grasp and release, the activity is not necessarily meaningful for a child who has not chosen either the activity or to use the materials in the prescribed way. Because most projects are designed to facilitate the acquisition of new skills or the refinement of an emerging skill, adult-directed projects frequently frustrate children by concentrating on their limitations rather than on maximizing their capabilities. Finally, although some activities may appear to provide a context for implementing functional goals and objectives, these activities may impose an external structure to the learning environment that may inhibit imagination, experimentation, creativity, individuality, self-esteem, initiation, self-control, and organization, the very skills that most early childhood environments are designed to encourage.

Forman and Hill (1984) urge us to remember that "learning encounters must always be defined from the child's point of view" (p. 5). As we develop IEP goals and objectives that are consistent with a play-centered curriculum, we must approach the discussion of functionality from an in-depth understanding of the child to ensure that all goals and objectives are 1) relevant to the child's ability, experience, current learning environment, and passions; and 2) consistent with the definition of play as a child-initiated activity.

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR IEP DEVELOPMENT: CREATION OF A COMMON VISION

Creating a common vision has been cited as one of the single most important aspects of the IEP meeting. It is widely acknowledged that the effectiveness of an IEP team is greatly increased when the team shares a common vision regarding the relevant, functional outcomes for a child (York, Rainforth, & Giangreco, 1990). The process of developing an IEP for a young child must be guided by four critical factors: 1) knowledge of how the individual child functions in typical settings on a daily basis, 2) knowledge of the family's priorities, 3) a shared understanding of the characteristics of a play-based environment, and 4) a shared vision of how the team will work together. These four factors create the foundation for development of the IEP and serve to focus the discussion in ways that facilitate the creation of a common vision for the educational program.

Knowledge of the Individual Child

The IEP, by definition, must include a discussion of the child's current level of performance, which is determined through an assessment that is guided by evaluation questions formulated from parents' concerns and other referral information. In the traditional model for developing an IEP, this discussion of a child's current level of performance is framed by an assessment process driven by a developmental milestone model that is characterized by categorizing information into discrete domains. Typically, these milestones reflect discrete skills that are exclusively domain-referenced and hierarchically arranged.

In the alternative IEP model, the discussion of current level of performance is framed by an assessment process guided by a parent interview. This interview assists in providing a picture of the child and acts as a vehicle for noting parental concerns. The discussion of current level of performance is driven by observations of how a child integrates his or her skills in all domains during play. Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) remind us that the learning process should be viewed as a cycle rather than a hierarchy; that is, "utilization is not necessarily a more highly valued goal than is awareness and exploration" (p. 35). Thus, observations of children's participation in dramatic play yield

information about the way children currently use their cognitive, motor, communication, social and emotional, and self-help skills in the relevant, motivating context of play. Similar observations of children participating in the sand and water, art, dramatic play, and other critical component areas provide information about a child's material and activity preferences. This information presents the team with relevant integrated facts about how the child currently negotiates in the key learning areas of a play-centered environment. With this knowledge of a child's interests, preferences, and styles of interacting with a variety of materials, the team can begin to determine the kinds of learning outcomes that would be most likely to increase a child's repertoire immediately and effectively.

Knowledge of Family's Priorities

The family's active role in the process of IEP development is critical in forging the common vision. Research and declarations of best practice are unified in their assertion that the family is the constant in a child's life, and that services should reflect families' cultures and priorities (Bailey, McWilliam, Winton, & Simeonsson, 1991; Bruder, 1993). A commitment to respecting the family as the primary decision maker implies constant attention to the ways our practices actively include families and support their ability to guide the direction of services that they choose to receive.

Building a relationship with a family begins with the initial referral contact and continues throughout the assessment process, forming a basis for gathering information about the family's priorities. By the time the IEP meeting is held, the professionals should have a clear picture of family priorities, and parents should have the clear message that their participation is critical to the successful development of an IEP for their child. There are several models to assist professionals in eliciting family priorities, but the basis for each of these models is the development of a respectful relationship guided by the belief that the family is the primary decision maker.

A Shared Understanding of a Play-Centered Approach

The development of a relevant plan requires knowledge of the family's priorities and a shared understanding of the characteristics and goals of environments reflecting a play-centered approach to learning. Knowing the typical activities, experiences, and materials that are an integral part of a play-centered approach, the team can determine how a particular child may need to be supported to gain access to the richness that the environment offers in support of the child's pursuit of clearly identified learning outcomes. This knowledge of how young children increase the complexity of their play supports teams in making meaningful decisions for an individual child and reflects an understanding about the interrelatedness of learning in young children.

A Shared Vision of How the Team Will Work Together

The process of creating a common vision implies the development of a particular relationship between members of the IEP team. In this relationship, team members use their specialized knowledge to create a relevant and discipline-free educational plan. *Discipline-free* refers to practices driven by consensus decision making and shared goals that “avoid the parochial practices of retaining separate goals and decision authority by each discipline” (Giangreco, Edelman, & Dennis, 1991, p. 17). Early childhood special educators who work with preschoolers with disabilities and their families must be prepared to “reach beyond the traditional boundaries of practice to integrate a range of services in order to meet multiple and complex needs” (Fenichel & Eggbeer, 1990, p. 6). Teams move closer to developing a common framework as they strive to “purposely identify and pursue a unified set of goals” (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 1993, p. 9) as they begin to address critical issues such as 1) educational relevance; 2) gaps, overlaps, and contradictions in services; 3) the role of various related service providers; and 4) contradictions in services.

Criteria for Selection of Annual Goals

As the IEP team strives to develop an educational program that increases a child’s available repertoire for coping with daily living, it must ensure that the annual written goals are authentically individualized and prioritized. The annual goals serve to keep a team focused by providing direction for the development of more detailed short-term objectives and instructional plans. The annual goals should be observable, measurable, and reasonably achievable within 1 year.

Authentically Individualized Authentically individualized is a term used by Johnson and Johnson (1992) to describe “the willingness to change the task to fit the specific situation, as well as the learner’s needs and level of interest at the time” (p. 444). Authentically individualized annual goals are based on knowledge of a child’s current level of performance, preferences, learning history, and educational needs, and they include activity-based outcomes for a child. Knowledge of the child’s current levels of performance provides information on how a child moves, communicates, and thinks in each of the learning areas of a play-centered environment. This information lays the foundation for a team discussion of the learning outcomes that reflect the obvious next steps leading to an increase in the child’s repertoires. The team can generate a list to determine which activities best reflect a child’s interests while providing an integrated context for development and learning. Annual goals, which include the context as well as the expectations for a child’s behavior, serve to remind the IEP team about the relevant activities in which the targeted behaviors are authentically used.

Prioritized The effectiveness and efficiency of an IEP is highly related to the ability of the team to identify and prioritize the areas of a child's repertoire that will be addressed in the IEP. Annual goals can be prioritized by considering family priorities, immediate relevance, and the long-term benefit to the child. It is essential that teams agree on a reasonable number of goals that will be the focus of the educational program. Creating IEPs with a large number of discipline-specific goals and objectives increases the probability that implementation of the IEP will be less efficient and may result in parts of the IEP being addressed by single team members in isolation and without important input from other members. The team checklist presented in Figure 1 is designed to assist teams in developing or refining an IEP process that results in authentically individualized goals and objectives.

1.0	The team has gathered information about the child from
<input type="checkbox"/>	1.1 Significant people in the child's life (e.g., parents, caregivers, siblings)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1.2 Observations conducted in natural settings (home, child care, play groups)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1.3 Appropriate standardized/curriculum-based measures/checklists
2.0	The team has developed a knowledge of the child that includes
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.1 Knowledge of child's preferences (e.g., favorite materials, activities, peers)
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.2 Knowledge of child's learning history (e.g., pace, context variables, modality preferences)
<input type="checkbox"/>	2.3 A description of the ways the child integrates his or her skills in all domains during play and daily routines
3.0	The team has engaged in discussions focusing on
<input type="checkbox"/>	3.1 Identifying family priorities
<input type="checkbox"/>	3.2 Describing the activities, materials, and routines that are characteristic of a play-based environment
<input type="checkbox"/>	3.3 Identifying the child's educational needs
<input type="checkbox"/>	3.4 Determining the naturally occurring activities or routines that support the accomplishment of the child's identified educational needs
<input type="checkbox"/>	3.5 Describing the supports or accommodations that will ensure that the child has access to all aspects of a play-based environment (e.g., peers, materials, activities)
4.0	The team has developed goals and objectives that
<input type="checkbox"/>	4.1 Reflect its holistic knowledge of the child
<input type="checkbox"/>	4.2 Are linked to activities typically engaged in by young children
<input type="checkbox"/>	4.3 Support interaction with peers
<input type="checkbox"/>	4.4 Lead to the development of more complex play schemes
<input type="checkbox"/>	4.5 Are discipline-free
5.0	The team has prioritized goals and objectives based on
<input type="checkbox"/>	5.1 Family priorities
<input type="checkbox"/>	5.2 Immediate relevance
<input type="checkbox"/>	5.3 Long-term benefit

Figure 1. Team checklist for developing authentically individualized goals and objectives.

Case Study *Abby*

The story of Abby's IEP meeting provides an illustration of the alternative model of IEP development presented in this chapter. Abby is a 4-year-old child who has received home-based services from birth and began attending a segregated preschool program for young children with disabilities when she turned 3. As Abby's parents thought about her upcoming entry into kindergarten, they became committed to finding a community-based preschool program that would provide Abby with opportunities to develop friendships that could continue into kindergarten. As Abby's IEP team developed her plan for the upcoming year, three things were notably different. First, the team had grown to include the community-based preschool teacher as a member of the team. Second, Abby's parents had selected a preschool program that placed play at the center of the curriculum. Finally, as the team began to talk about Abby's current level of performance, the discussion centered on Abby's interests, play activities, and strengths, rather than focusing on test scores and developmental milestones. In short, when developing Abby's goals and objectives, the team reflected on Abby's current competencies relative to participating in a play-centered environment. The resulting goals and objectives were designed to build on those competencies, facilitate the development of more complex play behaviors, and facilitate more complex and varied interactions with peers.

Current Level of Performance: Social

Abby initiates interactions with adults through eye gaze, gestures, and vocalizations. Her initiations are typically related to requests for help or to show an adult something that is of interest to her; she does not seek adults as playmates. When approached by adults trying to enter into her play or to prompt her to engage in an activity, Abby frequently initiates a "come and chase me" game by leaving the area, moving quickly around the room, and laughing. Abby maintains the game for as long as the adult continues to play the role of pursuer, and delights in being caught if it results in a game of tickling. Abby typically does not engage in adult-selected activity if caught. If the adult does not follow, Abby moves on to observe another area of the room. Abby is observed to watch her peers intently from a distance (approximately 5
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feet). She does smile in response to peer initiations; however, she allows only one particular child, Sarah, to either enter her play or sit next to her. To date, Abby's initiations toward peers have been limited to requests for help (primarily at snack time) and sharing (presenting an item for a peer to look at with no accompanying vocalizations). When exploring the environment, Abby watches from across the room, circles around the activity, then approaches when others have left. While exploring the activity, Abby consistently engages in functional and tactile play, although recently she has been observed to imitate the behaviors of the children she observes at the water table. While Abby is exploring the play materials she also remains vigilant about other activities occurring around the classroom (distracting her from the activity at hand). In other words, Abby appears to go through the motions while looking elsewhere. Currently, Abby appears to maintain focused eye contact with her chosen activity for approximately 20-30 seconds.

Annual Goals

1. Abby imitates the play behaviors of peers in at least one additional area of the room.
2. Abby allows at least two new children to play beside her in at least two areas of the room.
3. Abby responds to peer requests and comments during play with vocalizations and gestures.

Abby's IEP document and IEP process clearly illustrate the concepts introduced in this chapter. First, in addition to facilitating the development of more complex behaviors, the goals are responsive to the strengths and interests that Abby has demonstrated in a play-based environment. Second, the goals are consistent with Abby's parents' priorities related to establishing play partnerships before entering kindergarten. Finally, the goals are consistent with the play-based philosophy of the program.

Although Abby's written IEP signifies an accomplishment, it also presents a challenge to her preschool teacher, who must now translate the IEP into action. Because the teacher is key to a play-centered approach to learning (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 1993), Abby's teacher must begin the process of combining her

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knowledge of Abby with her knowledge of children and play and arranging the environment so that Abby will accomplish her goals and objectives through her play. Her approach can best be described as a continuous cycle of observation and action.

Observation

It is highly likely that Abby's teacher will spend time over the next few days observing how Abby is currently using her environment. Although the current level of performance section on Abby's IEP is fairly detailed, Abby's teacher wants to be sure that it is current and related to the specific goals and objectives that the team has identified. To ensure that her observations are purposive, Abby's teacher will most likely develop a detailed set of questions, such as the following, to guide her observations:

- What attracts Abby's attention most?
- What action schemes is Abby imitating?
- What areas of the room or materials or activities support these schemes?
- What other children in the room are experimenting with the same concepts and actions?
- What activities does Abby's friend, Sarah, prefer?

It is important to note that although the observations are designed to ensure that the environment supports Abby's play, the teacher's observations do not focus solely on Abby. To make effective decisions, the teacher must gather information about the other children and the physical environment relative to the goals she has for Abby. As a result of her observations, Abby's teacher has discovered that Abby is using crayons in a circular motion, that Abby's friend, Sarah, prefers gooey substances like ooblick and finger paints, and that a number of other children are experimenting at the easel.

Action

Feeling somewhat like a mad scientist, Abby's teacher begins rearranging her environment driven by her new knowledge and a series of questions. Her first decision is to expand the art area to include some sensory-based activities. By putting a shaving cream activity next to

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the crayons and paper, she is hoping the gooey shaving cream encourages Abby's friend to play near Abby while Abby is using the crayons. If Abby notices her friend using the shaving cream, perhaps she will be tempted to explore the shaving cream (a new experience). But what if Abby does not join her friend in exploring the shaving cream? What will the plan be then? Having thought through a number of scenarios, the teacher decides that if she observes the two children in the area at the same time, she will quietly enter the area, sit so that Abby can see her (if she chooses), and imitate Abby's circular motion in the shaving cream. Perhaps the combination of her action (suggesting that Abby can do a preferred motion in a new place) with the fact that her friend is there will be just the lure Abby needs to try a new experience. Abby's teacher is also toying with expanding the art area to include the easels, paints, sensory materials, crayons, and glue—creating what might be called a messy area. But first she must observe again.

- What was the impact of adding another activity to the art area?
- Did Abby still use the crayons, or was there now too much activity there for her?

Each action creates a reaction that must be observed and interpreted. Each interpretation prompts an action. Children's play (and, more specifically, Abby's play) creates an explosion of discoveries and queries that must be observed and interpreted to set the stage for tomorrow's learning in a fashion that reflects the marriage of IEP goals and objectives and a play-centered approach to learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The emphasis on family-selected goals and the integrated provision of educational and related services through play, discovery, and problem solving is permeating the consciousness of early interventionists involved in the continual reflection and refinement of their practices. Partnerships with families and early childhood educators have broadened and deepened our understanding of young children, creating a need to reframe some of our practices to reflect knowledge about the ways young children learn. Although some argue that young children with disabilities are distinctively different from their peers without disability labels, many early interventionists who provide services for young children with disabilities in inclusive play-centered settings support a

philosophy affirming that children are children and focusing on children's competence, recognizing that the similarities among children far outweigh the differences. This is not to say that young children with disabilities do not have distinct and unique needs, but rather to emphasize that all children have distinct and unique needs and that play-centered environments are designed specifically to be responsive to the wide diversity that exists in inclusive settings.

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