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Passports for Learning in Inclusive Settings

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You can make the most out of a child's preschool experience by planning for his or her success in your program. In a sense, you are preparing a passport for the child's learning in your setting. You can think of a passport as a document that verifies who you are and provides entry or access into new activities and experiences. In the same way, passports for learning provide a way of thinking about the unique characteristics of an individual child in order to plan for his or her active participation in a variety of settings and activities.

Young children with disabilities enrolled in typical early childhood settings have enormous opportunities for increasing their developmental competence. In fact, inclusive preschool settings have been found to facilitate increased social competence and advanced play skills while providing more opportunities for children to practice newly acquired skills in functional settings (Demchak & Drinkwater, 1992; Diamond, Hestenes, & O'Connor, 1994). However, simply attending typical preschool programs is not enough. It takes a team of adults including the child's primary caregivers, preschool teachers, and possibly related service professionals (speech/language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists) to ensure that a child with disabilities has access to and is supported in taking advantage of the preschool experiences that are available (Minzenberg, Laughlin, & Kaczmarek, 1999). How can you ensure that the children in your care are getting the most out of your early childhood environment?

"Can-Do" Thinking

You can begin to develop a child's passport by learning what the child can do and what he or she prefers to do in several activities or routines throughout the preschool day. We call this "can-do" thinking because it focuses on noticing a child's preferences and identifying the ways in which a child typically functions in a particular setting (Hull, Capone, Giangreco, Ross-Allen, 1996). This can-do model is based on research related to the role of children's preferences in learning and on intervention strategies that are embedded in everyday routines (Bricker, Pretti-Frontczak, McComas, 1998; Dyer, Dunlap, & Winterling, 1990; Koegel, Dyer, & Bell, 1987; Venn, Wolery, Fleming et al., 1993; Wolery, 1994).

There are many reasons for focusing on children's preferences including the fact that young children with disabilities are more engaged in activities they prefer, thus reducing inappropriate behaviors and increasing their learning (Dyer, Dunlap, & Winterling, 1990; Koegel, Dyer, & Bell, 1987). Understanding what a child can do during daily activities and routines provides the basis for embedding focused learning opportunities throughout the day through the use of activity-based interventions (Bricker, Pretti-Frontczak, & McComas, 1998), incidental, and milieu teaching (Hart & Risley, 1980; Kaiser, Yoder, & Keetz, 1992; Venn, Wolery, Werts, et al., 1993).

You can learn about children's functional competence through direct observation and by collaborating with the child's caregivers to determine ways in which the child typically acts and/or reacts to various activities and routines. You will want to know what children prefer and what they can do in a variety of activities and settings.

What Does Shelby Love to do?

Shelby is a four-year-old child with Down syndrome recently enrolled in an inclusive preschool program located in an elementary school building. She will be learning with a group of 21 other preschool children with and without disabilities. After observing Shelby as she played in the preschool classroom, Shelby's team (her mother, speech/language pathologist, preschool teacher, and special educator) met to talk about making the most out of Shelby's preschool experience. They began by looking at Shelby's preferences using the following questions to guide their discussion:

- What is Shelby interested in doing?
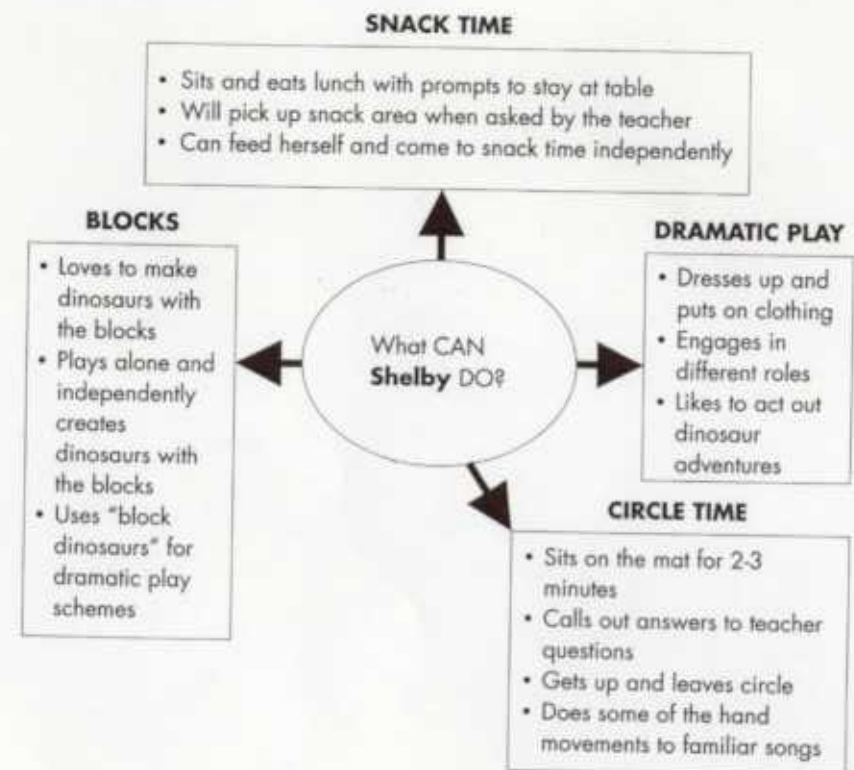- If given a choice in this preschool setting, where would she spend most of her time?
- What are her preferences for materials and other children?
- Is there a particular time of day when she is more active?

These questions enabled the team to identify the kinds of activities that might attract Shelby's attention so that they could create a comfortable and engaging environment where new learning experiences could be built into Shelby's preferred activities.

What CAN Shelby DO?

The Can-Do Chart is one planning vehicle that you can use to assist in writing down exactly what you see a child doing during several key activities/routines in your classroom or childcare setting. Figure 1 provides an example of Shelby's Can-Do Chart.

Figure 1: Shelby's Can-Do Chart

SNACK TIME
- Sits and eats lunch with prompts to stay at table
- Will pick up snack area when asked by the teacher
- Can feed herself and come to snack time independently

BLOCKS
- Loves to make dinosaurs with the blocks
- Plays alone and independently creates dinosaurs with the blocks
- Uses "block dinosaurs" for dramatic play schemes

What CAN **Shelby** DO?

DRAMATIC PLAY
- Dresses up and puts on clothing
- Engages in different roles
- Likes to act out dinosaur adventures

CIRCLE TIME
- Sits on the mat for 2-3 minutes
- Calls out answers to teacher questions
- Gets up and leaves circle
- Does some of the hand movements to familiar songs

If you look at Shelby's Can-Do Chart you will know what she typically does in various activities. This information was added to other information from Shelby's mother to develop a summary of her competencies. An inventory such as the one in Figure 2 can be filled out collaboratively between primary caregivers and preschool or early intervention professionals to assist in summarizing children's abilities and needs.

Figure 2: Shelby's Can-Do Inventory

I. Mobility

A. What are the ways in which **Shelby** moves from place-to-place?

II. Communication

A. I know that **Shelby** understands because she:

B. **Shelby** tells me what she wants, likes, and doesn't like by:

III. Intellectual Growth

A. **Shelby** lets me know what she is thinking by:

B. **Shelby** learns new things easiest by:

IV. Self Care

A. **Shelby** helps with dressing and bathing by:

B. **Shelby** helps with eating and toileting by:

V. Socialization

A. **Shelby** socializes and relates to other children by:

B. **Shelby** socializes and relates to family members by:

VI. Play

A. The ways in which **Shelby** plays with other children can be described by:

B. The ways in which **Shelby** plays with objects/toys can be described by:

C. The ways in which **Shelby** interacts with books can be described by:

Planning for Effective Inclusion Experiences

Planning is a crucial factor in the effectiveness of inclusive settings for young children with disabilities (Salisbury, Mangino, Petrigala, Rainforth, & Syryca, 1994; Santos, Lignugaris/Kraft, & Akers, 1999; Venn, 1997; Wolery, 1994). By examining your learning environment you can begin to identify the ways you can modify your typical routines and roles to more fully support all of the children in your care.

What CAN the Teacher DO?

Having gathered information about Shelby's abilities and preferences, her team began to think about the activities, routines, materials, and teacher's roles in Shelby's preschool classroom. They examined what Shelby would be expected to do throughout the day and where she would need support to experience the environment more fully. Shelby's team used the following questions to guide their analysis of her preschool classroom.

1. *What is the structure of the daily preschool activities and routines?*
   All routines and activities have a beginning, middle, and an end. If you carefully analyze each component of the activity/routine, you can identify or build in opportunities to address children's unique needs.

2. *What are the expectations for the children in activities/routines?*
   Often times you have spoken and unspoken expectations for children during a particular activity/routine. Your expectations may be based on viewing the children as a collective "we" or "group" instead of thinking about the strengths and needs of an individual child within the group. You will want to understand how each individual child responds to an activity/routine and ask yourself whether your expectations for children match their developmental needs and unique preferences.

3. *What kinds of roles do the teachers adopt throughout the day?* You wear many hats across the day, often changing hats on a moment-by-moment basis. During planning, take a look at your typical roles during a particular activity/routine. You may be able to identify what you do that supports children to be successful during the activity/routine, as well as clarify the new roles that you may need to assume to assist a particular child to be successful.

Figure 3, *Analyzing Daily Routines*, presents an example of the kinds of questions you might ask to guide your thinking as you analyze your activities or routines.

Figure 3: Analyzing Daily Routines
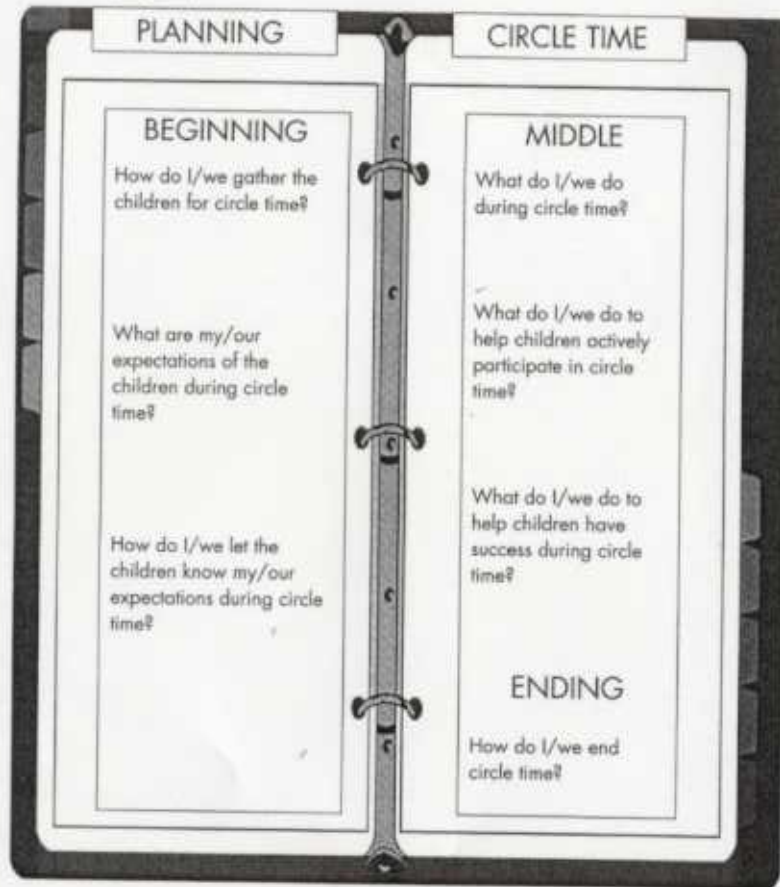
Identifying Daily Passport Objectives

Shelby has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with annual goals and objectives related to increasing the length of time she is engaged in activities and increasing the quality and quantity of her communication. Her team wanted to ensure that those goals and objectives were addressed throughout the day so that Shelby would be given multiple opportunities to learn and practice new skills. With the IEP document as a road map, Shelby's team used their knowledge of what Shelby could do and looked at the expectations and characteristics of her learning environment. In this way they were able to determine specific ways to support Shelby in getting the most out of her preschool experience. The following questions were used to determine the kinds of daily objectives that

would enable Shelby to get more out of circle time and increase her knowledge and skills.

Given what **Shelby** currently does during circle time, do we want her to:

- **Do the same behavior:**
  - In more areas of the room?
  - With new partners?
  - For longer periods of time?
  - During new activities?
- **Learn a new behavior?**
- **Increase the complexity of the current behavior by:**
  - Adding new steps?
  - Increasing accuracy?

Shelby's team decided that they would like her to sit on the mat (a behavior she is already doing) for longer periods of time and be more actively engaged in the circle time activities. Since she is already doing some of the movements to familiar songs the team decided that they would like to see Shelby increase the complexity of that behavior by encouraging her to sing a few of the words to the songs. How will the teachers accomplish this? They can use all of the previously gathered information (Can-Do Chart and Can-Do Inventory) to create a plan for including Shelby.

Creating a Responsive Environment

The final step is to create a match between Shelby's abilities and needs and the classroom learning environment. Information collected for her learning passport provides the framework for the development of a responsive environment. The preschool environment includes the schedule of activities, the types of materials and toys used in various activities and routines, and the types of interactions among children as well as between children and teachers (Bailey & Wolery, 1992). An individual planning sheet, as presented in Figure 4, is helpful to identify possible changes in activity schedules, materials used, and teacher support necessary for Shelby to maximize her learning in this preschool program.

Figure 4: Individual Circle Time Planning

What do other children typically do during this activity/routine?	What does Shelby typically do during this activity/routine?	What are Shelby's Passport objectives?	What does the teacher do to support Shelby during this activity/routine?
• Most children sit on the mat for 20 minutes. • Most children raise their hand to respond to teacher questions. • Most children sing the words and do the hand movements to familiar songs.	• Shelby sits on the mat for 2-3 minutes. • Shelby calls out answers to teacher questions. • Shelby gets up and leaves circle. • Shelby does some of the hand movements to familiar songs.	• Shelby will sit on the mat for longer periods of time. • Shelby will be more involved in action songs by singing words as well as doing movements.	• I can sit next to Shelby and encourage her participation. • I will increase the physical movement activities during circle time and reduce sitting/listening time. • Shelby will be encouraged to choose her favorite song during circle time.

Taking information from *Shelby's Can-Do Chart* and *Shelby's Can-Do Inventory* based on the activities and routines in the classroom, the team targeted passport objectives for Shelby. In creating a responsive environment, you will want to determine if the schedule or length of the activities and routines needs to be modified to be more responsive to children's needs. As can be seen in Shelby's individual planning sheet, the teacher plans to sit next to her during circle time to help her stay on the mat for longer periods of time. Another possible action could be for the circle time to be reduced or split into two time periods, with Shelby's favorite activities occurring first. The circle time could then gradually be increased in length of time. The types of materials present in the environment could be changed by giving Shelby props to use while singing, which may increase her participation. Opportunities for interactions, including instructional interactions, should be planned and monitored for Shelby. These instructional interactions may consist of environmental changes (e.g., use of novel materials) or more direct teaching strategies. Finally, within a responsive environment, Shelby's passport will be continually updated to ensure effective communication, collaboration, and an environment that is responsive to her changing strengths and needs.

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