Creating individualized education plans (IEPs) for preschool children involves careful planning and collaboration with families, educators, partners, and related service providers. The IEP team contributes information about the child to create goals and objectives to meet his or her present needs and interests. The IEP then forms the cornerstone of services support and focus for the child in the preschool setting. Integration of the IEP into this setting facilitates learning and acquisition of skills within the context they occur as children are engaged in functional and meaningful activities. To ensure that the child’s IEP is individualized, and capitalizes on the possibilities for mastery of skills the IEP team must carefully formulate the functionality of goals and the opportunities to support and extend the child’s development.

The development of functional goals and objectives begins with a full assessment of the environment. This takes into consideration the daily activities, routines, outcomes, and the current level at which the child can perform in these areas (McCormick et al., 2003). Members of the team can take part in identifying the daily routines, transitions, and expectations the child will experience in the preschool setting. Once the expectations are identified, team members can share their knowledge of the child’s present levels of performance. Identifying whether the child can perform the expectations independently, or with help, or if the child lacks the functional skills that are needed, will provide information necessary to the development of functional goals.

Functional goals for a preschool child reflect the adaptations and supports needed to allow the child to participate in daily activities and routines with his or her peers. For example, during arrival the child may be expected to greet the staff, say goodbye to the family member, and place his backpack in a cubby. For each of these expectations, the team identifies the necessary levels of support or adaptation for the child and sets goals and objectives as appropriate in this activity. A functional goal might read: Drew will develop his social skills to a ___ year old level. In support, the short term objective might state: Drew will initiate social interactions with staff, peers, and his family during daily arrival and departure routines. To ensure success in meeting functional goals and objectives, a child must also have ample opportunities to practice the desired skills. Sandall and Schwartz (2002), identified a method of creating short teaching opportunities within the classroom routines and activities, called embedded learning opportunities (ELO). These ELOs highlight a specific goal or objective from the child’s IEP and embed the teaching into a matching activity or routine that is part of the child’s day. By using the embedded approach, the preschool staff can capitalize on the natural setting, the routine of the child, and limit the need for classroom changes.

To embed the instruction into the day, preschool staff must clearly understand the objective(s) and establish outcomes. Next, they use the baseline information to identify where the child is currently functioning. By selecting activities, learning areas, or routines where instruction can be effective, staff can then design a plan that outlines the teaching opportunities. To create an effective plan, staff outlines what they will say and do to prompt the child, and what will be the expected response or behavior. Identifying materials and supports necessary along with a plan to reinforce the behaviors is also crucial to creating a meaningful ELO. Once the plan is developed, staff implements the desired instruction, tracks the opportunities, and reflects on the results of the instruction. In the case of Drew’s goal the ELO plan would have the objective: When given a verbal prompt to say “hello” to his peers, Drew will follow the instruction (Continued page 2)
These newly developed videos and training sessions support high quality inclusion of preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) in early care and education settings that are responsive to the priority and concerns of families. The target audiences are early childhood professional development providers, Institutes of Higher Education, family leaders, and policy makers.

Writing functional goals web-based resources:
http://www.utoledo.edu/education/direct/virginia/docs/Functional_goals.doc
Writing Functional and Meaningful Goals
http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~inclusion/Instruments/McWilliam_Scale_of_Early_Intervention_Goal_Functionality.doc
Scale of Early Intervention Goal Functionality
chttp://www.speechpathology.com/askexpert/display_question.asp?question_id=316
Writing Functional Goals for Preschool Children
Nancy Creaghead Ph.D., & Lesley Raisor, Ph.D.
2/16/2009

References