

ACR 216 draft

Tue, May 07, 2024 5:10PM 17:08

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

goal, writing, skill, student, teach, objectives, directions, show notes, prompts, year, step, iep, initiate, data, visual prompts, enabling, iep goals, iep, classroom, count

SPEAKERS

Chris

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom, to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm so glad you're joining us. And today I am going to be talking about writing IEP goals. This tends to be our fifth season when I am airing this of IEP season for many of you. For many of you, you are writing new IEPs some of which you'll use next year, some of which you won't. Many of you may have inherited IEPs from other people. So I want to talk today about things you want to think about before you write that IEP goal to make your future self Thank you.

And if you are looking for more resources on writing IEPs, conducting IEPs, writing good present levels of performance and things like that, you should definitely come check out the IEP bootcamp as part of the Special Educator Academy. It is a do it as you like course on your own time, it is broken down into small components, and it has tons of forms to structure and examples for you to follow for writing goals for students who sometimes don't always fit into what's in our goal bank. So you can find more information about that at autismclassroomresources.com/SEA, as in by the seaside, or Special Educator Academy, and I will make sure that's in the show notes as well.

Now, let's get started. So obviously, when we are writing IEP goals, there are a lot of things that we need to think about. We need to make sure that it's matching our present level of performance, we need to make sure that it is meeting our curriculum goals if you're required to write goals that align with your state curriculum, we also need to consider what parents feel are important for us to work on in the coming year.

Now obviously, IEPs can be written at the beginning of the year, in the middle of the year, anniversary dates, end of the year, different districts do it in different ways. But regardless of when you're writing it, there are some questions that you can ask in addition to those things, which tell you kind of what the goal should be about. These are going to be five things that you want to think about before you actually put the goal down on paper.

These are five questions that I asked, in addition to that standard of is your goal measurable? Is it clear? And is it related to present level of performance? Which you also need to think about. But these are things that are going to make your life easier, and make it a better goal for you to teach and track throughout the coming year.

So the first is, is this a goal that has been written before? Now that sounds a little funny. But over the years, I have seen a lot of IEPs where a student has the same goals or similar goals every single year. And that is a really good indication that the student is not making the progress that we need to be making as part of a free and appropriate public education. Or that we are not writing goals that are really fitting his needs. Or we're writing goals maybe that are too big for him. And we need to break them down and make them smaller and smaller steps. Or we're writing goals and they're not practical, or not really clear so people are really struggling with them.

I know that a lot of times, you as teachers inherit IEPs and goals from other people, but if we have been teaching the skill or it was taught before, we want to make sure that we know why the student was having a problem achieving it, and that we are optimizing the goal. Maybe we do need to continue to work on that skill.

For instance, I had a middle schooler who we were working on counting. We worked on counting for many, many years. But each time we wrote it, we optimized it based on the data that we had of what he was able to do. So, you know we started with being able to recognize the numbers and then we moved up to being able to count them in a number line and then we worked on actually matching objects to their numbers. And we eventually, in middle school when he was still really struggling with those skills, we eventually made it so that it also became a life skill. He will be able to count out somewhere up to five to be able to set the table for his family. And we actually wrote one of the objectives that he could do it with a template.

So you want to think about a realistic goal, and what you're going to be able to really change to change the outcome so it's successful. Because we want to be able to see our students make progress. It's reinforcing for us, it's reinforcing for families. But we also want to make sure that we're teaching them what they need to know. So there definitely are skills that we need to continue. But we want to really think about what they're going to look like. And that means we need to make sure that we're changing them in some way to make it more likely that he's actually going to get where we want him to go. That might be the end that we wanted to get to, or it might be the goal itself.

Another question number two, that I always ask, is, Is this a goal of what I would call an enabling

goal? Now, an enabling goal is one that opens doors for students. That can be academic goals, they can be life skills, they might be vocational, they could be social skills, they could be any area of skill. The key is that it is a goal that in the long run, this is going to make the student more independent, and give him or her more opportunities, they are going to be able to do more things because they learned this skill.

So an example might be for some students, a phonics goal might be an enabling goal. Because learning phonics is a way that we expand reading much more quickly than only reading sight words. It greatly expands their ability to read new material. Now for others, for whom you've tried phonics, and those have not been successful, learning to read functional environmental words may be more appropriate. That might be an enabling goal, because it allows them to go into different environments, and read the environmental print.

So I have a blog post about enabling IEP goals. And I will make sure that that's in the show notes, if you want to know more about those.

Number three is, is what you're teaching, doing what I call teaching to the next environment? What skills does this student need in the next setting they're going to? So that's going to depend obviously, on the age of the student. If you have a preschool student, what are the skills that that student is going to need when they go to kindergarten next year, to be as successful as possible?

Now, if he's a high school student, then we're looking at What skills does he need to go to college? We'll actually be talking about that next week, or what, what skills does he need to go into the workforce. You know, even a student who is getting a high school diploma, may need things that are focused on things like social skills on the job, or executive functioning skills, or independent living skills to be successful in that next environment.

So if we think about what that means, that may not only be academic or life skills, kinds of things. It might be for that preschooler being able to follow the routine, being able to look at the group and see that they need to follow lead of the group, understanding how to or being able to follow a direction that's given to a group instead of just to them.

Now you can do all of those with a combination and might be being able to follow the classroom routine when they're given a visual schedule. So you can adapt it, but think about what this is going to look like when they leave your environment. And that's a really important thing for our students to begin to really focus and increase their independence.

So our next question to ask yourself is number four, how are you going to teach the skill? Now, this is really important to think about before we write the goal, because you want to make sure that you are writing the goal in a way that is consistent with the way that you are teaching it.

If you're writing a goal for students that you know, you have the advantage of the data of knowing what strategies work with him, and what don't, of knowing how big a step does he need to make. Is he a kid when we're working on staying in a group, does he need to start with one minute and then can he jump to five minutes? Or does he need to start with one minute and then go to two minutes and then go to four minutes and then go to five minutes? So you're going to know that and you're going to want to write your objectives accordingly.

So as an example, if I am writing a goal that uses performing a skill as objectives, then you have to use those steps as your objectives. Each step then has to be mastered.

So let's say that I have a student that is learning to follow one step directions when he's asked in one to one situation by an adult with 80% accuracy over three consecutive days. If I am doing a very structured kind of discrete trial approach, I would typically teach one direction, then teach another direction, put them together, or I might teach two directions randomly, and then add a third, and then add a fourth to the mix and a fifth to the mix. I'm going to be teaching by increasing the number of directions I expect the student to learn and follow.

So in that case, I might have a goal that says he'll follow a 10 step direction, and my objectives would be a follow two one step directions. Then my next one might be he'll follow five one step directions. And my next one might be he'll follow eight one step directions. If, however, I am teaching it by fading prompts, and I'm introducing all 10, one step directions at the same time, and I am just decreasing the kinds of prompts that I'm giving, I might write it as he'll follow 10 One step directions with partial physical prompts. He'll follow 10 One step directions with verbal prompts. He'll follow 10 one step directions with visual prompts.

Now, in this case, I might really prefer the first one if I'm going to teach it because that's the way that it makes sense to me to teach it rather than trying to bombard him with 10 directions, and fade them out, unless it's a student who learns best that way. On the other hand, I might have a washing hands goal, where he'll wash his hands with independence. And I may teach that he'll do steps one and step two, then steps one through four, then steps one through seven. Or I might write my objectives that he will wash his hands with this many partial physical prompts, this many verbal prompts, and then this many visual prompts, and then that he'll do it independently. Getting to the same goal, but the way that I'm going to teach it is going to look very different.

So you really want to make sure that you've thought about that, so that you are not trying to teach something in a way that isn't fitting with the mastery of the objectives. So if I'm teaching with all 10, and I'm just giving prompts, then he probably isn't going to master two in that first objective. If I'm only teaching two to start with and I've got objectives by prompting, then you may run into problems because you haven't introduced eight of the directions yet so how can he follow 10 one step directions? So you really do want to think about what you're going to do teach it. What are you going to use as your program steps are your objectives for that?

And finally, the last thing, the fifth thing that you really want to think about is how are you going to measure it? And this goes beyond just checking off teacher collected data as the form of data. Because if we don't know what we're actually going to do to track the behavior, then we may end up with a behavior or a skill that we're really struggling to figure it out.

I have done this 100 times. I have written a goal that says he will initiate on three out of four opportunities. Well, in reality, what is an opportunity to initiate. He can initiate any single time he wants to. So if I've written at a three at a four, what am I counting is that four? How am I actually measuring that goal? That is not a measurement criteria that works well with that skill. I might be better off saying right now, in his present level of performance, he initiates once during recess with a peer.

And so maybe I'm gonna say, in that 15 minute recess time, he will initiate two times or three times by the end of the year. And that way, I just have to count the initiations. I have to set them up, I have to teach them, but I just have to count the ones that were independent.

Similarly, we also want to think about ways that are easy for us to collect data. If you can use a permanent product or work product, whatever you want to call it or test, use that. That's going to be the easiest way to measure skills. You don't have to necessarily count every single skill.

So we might want to really think about how we are going to measure the goal. And really think about what that data sheet is going to look like or what that data form is going to look like, what we're collecting as actual product, if we're saying it's permanent product, or what a test like this would look like if we're saying it's going to be a test. Those are things we really want to think about ahead of time, because it's going to make it so much easier down the line, because you're not going to get into the middle of measuring it and go oh, this really doesn't work. He really, I don't know what that initiation time looks like that he doesn't know how to do it. So you really, really want to think about that.

If you're looking for more ideas about data collection, you can also come to the Special Educator Academy where we also have a whole course on data collection in small bits and data tools to help you with those. So I will make sure that that information and the IEP bootcamp are both in the shownotes. But you can always come and check out a free trial at the Special Educator Academy at autismclassroomresources.com/SEA. And I will put that in the show notes as well.

So I hope that that gives you some ideas about things to try when you're writing your IEPs. Maybe you've written some recently and you're thinking I might need to tweak that. Sometimes, even though I know it's hard, you don't have to have a long IEP to tweak a goal. And sometimes it's useful

to tweak it. So if you happen to be listening to this, for instance, with the beginning of the year, think about whether or not it makes sense to go and tweak that goal that you don't understand that somebody else wrote, or that was written in a way that just doesn't work for you.

Hopefully, that will give you some ideas to move forward with with IEPs. I will be back next week when I am actually going to have a special guest talking about how we prepare our students for post secondary education. I'm really, really excited for you to hear this one. So come back for that one. And until then have an amazing week.

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