

DEVELOPING AN ECOLOGICAL CURRICULUM FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Developing an ecological curriculum for English Language Learners (ELLs) involves integrating environmental education with language learning. This approach not only helps students improve their English skills but also raises awareness of ecological issues and fosters a sense of stewardship for the environment. Ecological curriculum goals and objectives includes language proficiency: enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English, environmental awareness: foster understanding of key ecological concepts and issues (e.g., biodiversity, climate change, sustainability), cultural connections: explore local ecosystems and cultural perspectives on environmental issues. Within the life domains, the educational team identifies the environments where it is most desirable for the student with severe disabilities to participate. The student's current home, school, and community environments are considered, and particular attention is placed on integrated or "typical" environments used by peers without disabilities, even if the integrated environments are not currently used by or available to the student. Following are considerations for each environment:

-Domestic Environments: The team considers the student's life in and around his/her actual home. Team members identify specific areas within and around the home (e.g., bedroom, bathroom, yard) where greater student participation is desired.

-School Environments: For children younger than 5, integrated preschools and day care settings would be among the age-appropriate school environments.

-Vocational Environments: For young children, the vocational domain is usually in the home and school environments where children may have chores and class or school jobs.

-Community Environments: These include transportation systems, streets and sidewalks, and all businesses, services, and facilities in the community. For young children, school environments would have priority over other community

environments. Therefore, children might receive instruction related to riding the bus and crossing streets. Others would be based on family needs.

-Leisure Environments; These will often overlap with environments previously identified because leisure activities occur in all these environments. Selection would reflect student interests and preferences. It may also be highly dependent upon interests and priorities of family members and typical peers, since they ultimately enable the student to access the environments.

Typically, more environments are identified that can be addressed instructionally in one school year. Therefore, it becomes necessary to prioritize. One strategy for prioritization is to project a time frame for each identified environment:

- 1) high priority for this year,
- 2) will become a priority within the next 3 years
- 3) will not be a priority until 3 or more years from now

High priority should be given to environments that are appropriate to the student's chronological age and that promote social integration.

Identify Priority Activities and Routines. The team identifies the activities and routines that typically occur in the priority instructional environments. Priority activities and routines are identified considering the student's chronological age, preference, and abilities, the family's preferences, the activities that offer the greatest opportunity for active inclusion in integrated environments now, and the possibilities for the future. Once environments in which the student will participate are identified, the next steps in designing an individualized, ecological curriculum are to identify priority activities and routines and to identify priority skills. Identify Priority Skills as priority activities and routines are identified, the team also identifies the skills that are typically required for participation.

An Individualized Curriculum. As the team identifies priority environments, activities, and skills for each student, an individualized curriculum begins to take shape. As this individualized curriculum develops, teams may discover that there is overlap of priority environments and activities amongst students making it possible to implement for a group of students. The biggest variations will be in the skills selection for each individual. Creating and using an ecological curriculum is a process which occurs over a period of time. Early curriculum development provides the foundation for use with students later, making the process easier and faster each time it is used. Using the ecological approach to curriculum development provides students with severe disabilities a more relevant and successful instructional program. Another result is that team members find their own work more meaningful and rewarding. Further, positive collaboration occurs between school personnel and families because of the significant input required from all concerned. Given the legal requirement to develop an IEP prior to placement, initial goals and objectives may be projected as teams

identify priorities for the curriculum. Before finalizing goals and objectives for the IEP, however, teams must assess student performance in the environments and prioritize activities. An ecological curriculum for ELLs not only nurtures language development but also cultivates informed citizens who are conscious of their impact on the planet. By connecting language learning with real-world ecological challenges, educators can create an engaging learning experience that empowers students both linguistically and environmentally.

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