

Excerpted from **The Syracuse Community-Referenced Curriculum Guide for Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities**, edited by Alison Ford, Ph.D., Roberta Schnorr, M.S., Luanna Meyer, Ph.D., Linda Davern, M.S., Jim Black, M.S., & Patrick Dempsey, M.S.

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Overview

Growing numbers of students described as having moderate and severe disabilities have gained entrance to regular public schools since the late 1970s. Their entry into these schools poses some new curricular challenges. We know that many of the curricular offerings in today's schools (e.g., language arts, math, science, social studies, physical education, fine arts) can accommodate these new students when adaptations are planned and instructional supports are made available. But further examination reveals that the existing scope of most schools' curricula is not broad enough to encompass all the activities or areas of competence that may be appropriate for a given student. This is particularly evident in the community living areas. While it is true that most students in our public schools will not need explicit instruction in skills that fall within the community living areas, such as learning how to use a pay phone, getting dressed to go swimming, or shopping in a grocery store, it is important to acknowledge that there are some students who will. If schools are committed to the mission of educating all students, then attention must be given to expanding the scope of public school curricula to include these community living areas.

Philosophy

This community-referenced curriculum guide is based on the premise that every student, no matter how severe his or her disabilities, is capable of living, working, and recreating in the community. Therefore, this guide has been designed with the following principles in mind:

- When necessary, schooling should include direct preparation for the activities of daily life. Some members of a student body may need direct instruction in areas pertaining to community living in order to become active participants in everyday life.

- Social integration is an essential element of an appropriate education. Becoming a part of school life is viewed as an essential step toward becoming a part of community life.
- Home-school collaboration is vital to the success of an educational program. Sincere efforts to establish strong partnerships with parents must take place.
- Instructional decision making must be individualized. Decisions should reflect unique learner characteristics, chronological age, student and parent input, and so forth.
- Interdependence and partial participation are valid educational goals. Students should not be excluded from an activity because they will not be able to do it independently.
- Structured learning can occur in a variety of settings. Meaningful instruction is not limited to school settings; it can also take place in the surrounding community where students can learn and practice skills in real-life settings.

Intended Population

The Syracuse Community-Referenced Curriculum Guide is intended for teachers and parents of students with moderate and severe disabilities (ages 5–21). It is not intended, however, to be used as a prescription for the exact curriculum that would be offered a particular group or population of students. Rather, this guide provides a framework for decision making that should be applied to individuals on a student-by-student basis. We would expect individualized decisions to vary considerably depending on a range of factors, including the student's age, present ability to participate in community living activities, personal and parental preferences, and so forth.

The term "teachers" is used broadly throughout this guide. It is meant to include classroom teachers, therapists, teaching assistants, vocational teachers, and others who assume instructional responsibilities within a given school district. The term

"moderate and severe disabilities" is also inclusive of many individuals. It includes student who traditionally have been labeled moderately, severely, or profoundly retarded, as well as individuals who may be labeled multiply handicapped, autistic, sensory-impaired, and/or deaf/blind.

Content and Coverage

The core of **The Syracuse Community-Referenced Curriculum Guide** is devoted to the content areas that directly prepare a student to function in the real world: self-management/home living; vocational; recreation/leisure; and general community functioning. We have also included a section on functional academic skills. Finally, there is a section devoted to skill areas that we believe are best thought of as "embedded" within daily activities: social, communicative, and motor. In addition to these sections that outline the content areas, the Guide contains sections on home-school collaboration, and other implementation strategies, including: developing individualized education programs (IEPs), scheduling, managing classroom operations, and planning and implementing activity-based lesson plans.

Each section offers practical strategies for decision making. The community living, functional academics, and embedded skills sections begin with a framework that organizes the content. There are scope and sequence charts for each community living area — self-management/home living, vocational, recreation/leisure, and general community functioning — and for functional academics. And, there are skill functions charts for embedded social, communication, and motor skills. Each of these charts is followed by a step-by-step decision process that will lead to the identification of individualized goals and objectives for a particular student. Examples and illustrations are used in various places; one case study example is carried throughout to afford the user a more complete picture of the Guide's impact on one student to whom we refer as "Mary Z." A series of frequently posed questions appear in most chapters with answers based on the experiences of those who have implemented a community-referenced curriculum. Finally, at the end of each chapter we offer a list of suggested readings and resources that should assist the user to locate materials and to become more knowledgeable in a particular area of interest.

Scope and Sequence Charts

The scope of a curriculum consists of the range of content areas for which knowledge and skills are delineated. As previously mentioned, the scope of the Guide consists of four major community living areas: self-management/home living, vocational, recreation/leisure, and general community functioning. It also includes functional academics and embedded social communication, and motor skills. The sequence of a curriculum refers to the order in which learning activities occur, across ages or grade

levels. The sequence of this guide covers an age span of 5 to 21, with the community living content organized into the following grade and age levels: kindergarten (age 5); primary elementary (ages 6–8); intermediate elementary (ages 9–11); middle school (ages 12–14); high school (ages 15–18; and transition (ages 19–21). Chart 1.1 depicts the areas covered by the scope and sequence charts in the community living section of the Guide.

Many community-referenced curriculum guides contain unwieldy lists of activities. (Some guides contain literally hundreds of activities that are listed with few guidelines as to their relative importance.) While these listings are helpful to teachers and parents, their usefulness is diminished unless they are accompanied by guidelines for decision making. Without such guidelines team members are left with many questions, such as:

- How can we possibly address all of the community living activities within the practical constraints of a typical school program?
- If we can't address all community living activities contained in the listings, which are the most essential to learn?
- At which age should a particular activity be introduced? (For example, should a student as young as 10 or 11 years old leave school for vocational training?)
- When are logical times of the day to provide instruction? Aren't some activities better suited to after school hours or on weekends?

The scope and sequence charts that are included in each community living chapter have addressed these questions in the following ways. First, we recognized that it is unrealistic to expect that all community living activities can be sufficiently addressed during a student's educational career. Therefore, the scope and sequence charts in the Guide are organized into an inventory of priority areas; they are intended to serve merely as a framework from which the team will select the individual goals that seem most important for a particular student at a given point in time.

Second, we acknowledged that learning does not stop at age 21. Too often, our curricular decisions are driven by a "now or never" attitude. That is, if a student does

not master an important community living skill during his or her school year, he or she will never have the opportunity to learn it in adulthood. This belief has led to having young students learn activities such as how to prepare family meals, do laundry, work in several different jobs, and so on — sometimes long before most nondisabled peers would be expected to engage in these activities. To remedy this, we have designed the scope and sequence charts with typical age expectations in mind. Activities are sequenced to the ages at which most children might be expected to participate in them.

Third, attention has been given as to when instructional opportunities more "naturally" occur. We recognize the overlap between many community living activities and the activities that already exist in the schedules of many regular education students. Activities such as learning how to use the school cafeteria, manage belongings at one's locker, play games at recess, and perform school or community (work-study) jobs are just a few of the activities represented on the scope and sequence charts that are applicable to students with and without disabilities. Furthermore, many recreation/leisure activities can be addressed within the extracurricular program offered by the school district (e.g., ski club, gymnastics, band, art club).

Finally, we have seen how other community living activities — that do not necessarily overlap with typical school schedules — can be reasonably incorporated into students' programs (e.g., shopping for food items that will be used at snack time or in home economics; making a trip to the public library and later stopping at a restaurant). We have also addressed community living activities that more naturally occur at times and in settings that extend beyond the school program. Such activities might include preparing breakfast, keeping the bedroom neat, and raking the lawn. With this in mind, we have devised two separate kinds of charts. One kind appears within the body of the Guide, and contains activities for which instructional opportunities are already present or can be reasonably incorporated during the regular school day (including extracurricular activities). The other kind appears in Appendix B, and includes activities for which instructional opportunities typically occur apart from school-before school, in the evenings, or on the weekends — and that are considered better suited to instruction during these nonschool hours. (However, these activities may be incorporated into an individualized education program [IEP] under certain circumstances, particularly when a parent makes a specific request. These circumstances are further discussed within each of the community living chapters of the Guide.)

Each of these considerations has helped us sift through the extensive listings of community living activities and arrive at a more manageable framework for educational decision making.

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