


LEARNING MODULE #1

GATHERING ESSENTIAL INFORMATION
and ASSESSING STUDENTS

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Introduction

All school-aged children in British Columbia, regardless of their level of ability, are expected to attend school and receive an education. There is a fundamental belief that all children can learn and do learn. There is also recognition that students differ widely in the ways that they learn and the rate at which they learn. For teachers, then, there is a very strong likelihood that they will need to know how to educate and meet the needs of a very diverse range of learners.

Our understanding of children with significant disabilities has changed over the years; gone are the days in which the labels Moderate Intellectual Impairment or Dependent Handicapped said it all. Instead, each student is seen as an individual with unique learning strengths and needs. This first module is focused on gathering essential information about your student. It is specifically called *gathering information* because much student data often already exists. Some informal assessment resources to supplement current student information will also be included in this module.

In further modules you will be creating the student's actual plan (IEP), identifying strategies to support the implementation of the plan, and ways to measure, review, and revise the learning objectives. The information that you collect during this part of the course will be needed through-out the course.

The questions posed in this module are:

- What information already exists on the student?
- What are the long range goals for the student?
- What else do you need to find out?
- How do informal assessments help the student?
- What base-line data needs to be collected for the student?

- What are the student's strengths and needs?

Specific Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this module, students will be able to:

- Gather essential information about the student
- Identify the long range goals, and determine the steps that need to be taken to achieve these goals
- Determine what other information is needed, including determining the areas need to be further assessed and completing needed assessments
- Understand the importance of informal assessments
- Complete a baseline assessment for a learning objective that will be part of the IEP
- Summarize the results of the assessments using both anecdotal information and objective measures

This module will be posted in 2 sections to assist with downloading:

Part 1 includes the following topics:

1. Gathering Essential Information
 - 1.2 Establishing a Collaborative Student Support Team
 - 1.3 Sharing Assessment Results
2. Long Range Planning
 - 2.1 McGill Action Planning System (MAPS)
 - 2.2 P.A.T.H. Planning Alternatives to Tomorrow with Hope
 - 2.3 Pathways to the Student's Future

Part 2 includes:

3. Why Do We Need to Assess Students with Severe Multiple Disabilities?
 - 3.1 We Need To Describe the Student's Current Abilities and Achievement
 - 3.2 The Challenge of Formal Assessment
 - 3.3 Alternatives to Formal Assessment
4. Determining the Student's Strengths and Needs
 - 4.1 Use the Identified Needs (and Strengths) to Develop a Program for the Student
 - 4.2 What are the Student's Motivators and Preferences?

Recommended Readings

• **Text: Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms, 3rd Ed, June E. Downing, Paul H. Brooks Pub. Co. 2008**

Chapter 1: Educating Students with Diverse Strengths and Needs Together, Pages 1-15

Chapter 3: First Steps: Determining Individual Abilities and How Best to Support Students, Pages 49-55

Internet Readings

- Students with Intellectual Disabilities: A Resource Guide for Schools, British Columbia Ministry of Education, Queen's Printer. 1996. Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 (<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/sid/>)
- Common Sense Tools: MAPS and CIRCLES for Inclusive Education by Marsha Forrest and Jack Pearpoint (<http://www.inclusion.com/artcommonsensetools.html>)
- Use of the MAPS Process: <http://www.circleofinclusion.org/english/demo/lawrenceraintree/portfolio/index.html>
- Module 1 Special Education in British Columbia. Council of Administrators in Special Education (CASE) Professional Learning Series. (http://www.bc-case.org/modules/mod1_SPED.shtml)

References:

- Gross Motor Objectives
- Vision Skills
- ASSESSING SYMBOL USE FOR COMMUNICATION
- ASSESSMENT OF SYMBOL USE FOR COMMUNICATION
- Choice Making Measurement
- ChoiceMaking2objects
- Sample Assessment Summary
- Degree of Active Participation Measurement Form
- Data Collection Sample
- Pupil Check Sheet
- PATHWAYS TOTHE STUDENT
- Comprehension Data Collection
- Cognitive Stepping Stones
- Accuracy Measurement form
- STEPPING STONES TO DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS
- Spinner Data Collection
- Sample Pathways
- Yes/No Measurement
- Generalization Measurement
- Functional Academic Assessment
- Functional Hand Arm Skills
- Switch Use Measurement
- McGill Deaf-Blind MAPS
- Latency of Response Form
- Measuring Acceptance/Rejection
- Data Collection Sheet
- Frequency of Behaviour/Skill

Module #1

Part 1 of 2

Assessment

- 4 -

- Measuring Duration
- Facilitators Guidelines Pathways
- Toileting Measurement
- Throwing ball Data
- Student Motivators and Preferences
- Strengths and Needs Planning Sheet

1. Gathering Essential Information

There are a number of important sources for the information that you will need to gather on your focus student. These sources include file review, previous IEPs, the student's progress reports, informal interviews with staff including therapists and, of course, conversations with family.

Why is it important to gather this information? There are several reasons: to identify the student's current needs, to clarify student strengths, to set the direction for the student's program, to identify specific goals and skills, to measure progress, all of which will lead you back to reviewing and revising the student's program.

There are often challenges in clarifying what essential information exists for our students. Sometimes it seems that there are so many reports and so much paper to wade through that staff and family are overwhelmed by it. Sometimes it is difficult to keep current with the student information. For example, the child's health needs and medications may change frequently. Sometimes parent hopes and requests can change, often leaving staff unclear about what direction to set for the student. In other situations, staff struggle to separate fact from fiction; there may be much 'insider information' on a student that could be crucial or it could be quite erroneous. Either way getting the straight goods on a student can be difficult at times.

Probably what is most challenging is finding accurate, agreed upon information on the student's *current performance*. This is often based on informal assessments such as structured observations, checklists or inventories, baseline assessment, and is critical in setting the course for the student. Yet, it is frequently missing from student information.

Reading

June Downing. Including Students with Severe and Multiple Disabilities in Typical Classrooms, Ch 1, pp 1-15.

Points to Ponder


- What is your reaction to June Downing's chapter on rationale for inclusion?
- Have you had experiences in which people question the appropriateness of having students with severe disabilities included and involved in regular classrooms? What has been your reaction?

1.2. Establishing A Collaborative Student Support Team

Information from the Ministry of Education’s resource book, *Individual Education Planning for Students with Special Needs*, indicates there are a number of reasons to establish and maintain a team, including:

- developing a common understanding of the student's strengths, interests, and needs
- sharing information and observations of the student's behaviour and learning in a variety of settings
- understanding programming priorities for the student and reinforcing them across curriculum areas
- and planning in an effective and efficient manner.

Example:

Assessing Student's Choice Making	Skills As A Team ...
	<p>Invite your student's therapist in to re-assess the student's skills in discipline specific areas such as ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hand skills • switch skills • choice making skills • comprehension skills • gross motor skills <p>Here an SLP is observing the student making choices and determining which changes need to be made to this routine.</p>

The team usually includes:

- classroom teacher(s)
- case manager or special education teacher
- parents or legal guardians and if appropriate, the student
- teacher assistant(s)
- principal
- therapist(s) - Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech-Language Pathologist
- District Support Staff - This varies from district to district but it may

include members of district Low Incidence team, Behavioural Consultant, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Psychologist, etc.

The case manager or other team members should begin by completing or updating the student's File Review. The team then determines what other assessments are needed. Assessments are conducted and then summarized and results are shared with parents and with team members.

Case Managers should consult with other team members or district staff regarding further assessments. Communicate with the Speech and Language Pathologist, an Occupational Therapist, a Counselor or Behaviour Consultant, etc. if needed. These professionals may decide to conduct additional assessments in their specific areas or just update assessments that the student already has. They could also decide that the student does not require any further assessments.

The questions facing the team at this point include:

What are the student's current skills / abilities?

Do we have enough information to plan the student's program?

Do we know why the student is experiencing difficulty... with comprehension, with effectively making needs and wants known, with playing with others, with academic skills...?

What barriers exist to student achievement?

Do we know which strategies have already worked for the student?

What else do we need to find out?

Although there are dozens of areas that we could potentially assess, it is important that we limit our assessment time to those areas that are most critical for the student's progress. Important assessment areas would be those in which we have questions or concerns that have not been answered or skill areas that need updating to determine the student's progress.

For example:

Daniel's teacher is very concerned about what his program should be. Daniel is now in grade 5 and does not read. He has great reluctance to hold a pencil and do any written work. His speech is difficult to understand. He enjoys the

computer, but more for programs that have interesting sounds or music than for visual displays.

Previous Assessments

When Daniel was in grade 3, his Progress Report said that he knew all his colours and could recognize his name in print.

His Speech and Language Assessment of three years ago indicates that his language skills were well below average.

His Occupational Therapy Report 2 years ago says that he had lots of challenges with activities of daily living (doing/undoing buttons, opening and closing containers, using a pencil.)

His last Cognitive Assessment was completed 4 years ago. Daniel was described as having a severe intellectual impairment. His verbal abilities and non-verbal abilities were at about the same level.

What further assessments might this student need?

The school team has some information on Daniel although it is quite outdated. A few further assessments could update his skills list.

- Speech-Language Update
- Occupational Therapy Update
- Informal Assessment / Collaborative Assessment of Academic Skills
- Brigance Inventory of Early Development - Literacy, Numeracy, Fine Motor Skills, Personal Care, Life Skills
- Structured Observation in classroom – specifically focusing on Daniel’s level of independence and ability to participate meaningfully in classroom activities

Another example:

Josh’s team met to determine their assessment plan. They had completed a file review that revealed the following:

Josh has a diagnosis of **Cerebral Palsy** and a **Severe Intellectual Disability**

The educational psychologist described Josh as having overall moderate intellectual impairment. His verbal scores were slightly better than his non-verbal scores. He had lots of challenges with tasks that require attention to detail, visual analysis, motor coordination and numerical reasoning. His strengths were his flexibility and his interest in peers.

On the challenging side, Josh needed a lot of cueing to get through the day. Josh wanted to join in with peers but didn't seem to know what to do. His speech is quite difficult to understand

What questions did his team ask themselves?

What is Josh's overall level of functioning in classroom – what is his level of independence?

What are his academic skills? What is his comprehension?

What social skills does he have – including individual play skills, social play skills and group skills?

What assessments did the team conduct ?

Classroom Skills / Learning Skills / Independence

- Structured Observations of Josh

What kind of prompting does he receive for tasks, following directions, etc?

- Interview with parent and assistant

Literacy and Numeracy Skills Assessment

- Informal check-lists
- Brigance Inventory of Early Development

Social Skills Assessment – Collaborative Assessment

- Structured Interview with parent and assistant - Using an Inventory
- Observations of student in classroom and on playground

Josh's Strengths and Needs

Areas of Strength	Areas of Need Needs to Develop...
Flexible	Communication: articulation
Handles most changes and transitions well	Core Skills: Organization – attending, managing materials, completing tasks...
Few sensory issues	Social Skills: Group Skills – Improving Paying Attention to teacher, requesting help

Sight words	Social Skills: Social Play – development of social play at recess, lunch, etc
Understands same/different	Academic: Improving Listening Comprehension
Gravitates towards groups of boys on playground or in classroom during indoor recess	Academic Skills – Developing Functional Math Skills
	Increasing Josh’s Independence – very dependent upon cueing and prompting

With regards to functional beginning academic assessment and cognitive assessment for those students who are too low for standardized testing, it may be best to use...

- concrete objects when taking data on sorting, matching and numeracy skills
- familiar stories with simple bright pictures when asking questions, which involve who/what/where

Reference Section

Refer to the many sample data collection forms in your reference section.

1.3 Sharing Assessment Results

It is important that team members share assessment information with each other. The information from observations and both formal and informal assessments need to be reviewed with the collaborative team so that a shared understanding of the student is developed.

Points to Ponder

- What assessments do you currently use (or have used) to establish baseline skills for students?
- What baseline assessments are needed at this time in order to determine the IEP objective?
- Beyond academic assessments, what tools help you understand the student’s needs in the areas of social skills, behavioural skills, attention, focus, etc.
- Who completes these assessments, how is the classroom teacher and assistant involved in the assessments?

2. Long Range Planning

What is the purpose of education for students with significant disabilities? What do family members and educators see the student doing after s/he graduates from school? What is school preparing the student for?

If the student is seen as passive and completely dependent, not in need of friends, meaningful work, or recreational skills, then what is taught at school is not really that important. However, if the student is seen as a valued, contributing member of the community, with a variety of friends and interests, and perhaps with a job, then education becomes an important process in helping to develop the student's abilities to achieve their long term goals.

There are a number of tools available that help to develop a long range vision for the student's educational program. They help to define why the student is in school and the steps that need to be taken in order to make school as successful as possible for the student. The ones most frequently used in B.C. are as follow:

2.1 McGill Action Planning System (MAPS)

The long range educational plan for a student with significant special needs starts with discovering his or her special qualities and interests. As well, the hopes and aspirations of family members for this special student also need to be taken into consideration. One method of collecting this type of information is through the McGill Action Planning System, or MAPS. MAPS was originally developed by Marsha Forest and Judith Snow of the Canadian Association for Community Living. **The MAPS process focuses on the student's interests and abilities rather than deficits.**

MAPS uses a collaborative team approach to develop a long range plan of action for an individual with special needs. It is a process that best precedes an IEP in that it provides the school based team with important information that is useful when developing the IEP. A facilitator helps to guide the group addressing 8 key questions. There is also usually a second facilitator who creates a graphic record of the meeting through colourful representations of the group discussion. The process usually takes about 90 minutes. The focus individual may or may not be in attendance.

The key questions are:

1. **What is a MAP?**

The facilitator makes analogies to the student's life being a journey, with a map to provide direction.

2. *What is the student's history?*

Information about the student's medical, educational, and social history is summarized, along with key elements from the student's past.

3. *What is the dream for the student?*

Participants share what they dream of and believe possible for the student in the next 5 years, 10 years, and as an adult in terms of where the student will live, what they will do, who they will do it, etc.

4. *What is the nightmare?*

Participants share their fears for the student with the goal of recognizing their possibility and developing action plans to avoid their realization.

5. *Who is the student?*

Participants brain storm words that provide a portrait of the student.

6. *What are the student's strengths, gifts, and talents?*

The focus is on describing the student's positive attributes in all aspects of life.

7. *What are the student's needs and challenges?*

As part of this question, participants need to identify people and resources needed turn a dream into reality.

8. A) *What action plans are need to meet these needs and avoid these nightmares?*

The facilitator works with the group to determine who will do what, when, and where.

B) *What would an ideal day at school look like?*

A matrix can be constructed to depict what an ideal school day would look like, taking into account information collected in the group process.

2.2. P.A.T.H. (Planning Alternative Tomorrows of Hope)

This planning tool was created by Marsha Forrest and Jack Pearpoint. It starts in the future and works backwards to an outcome of first steps that are possible and positive. As with MAPS, it is a group process led by a trained facilitator. Ideally, the student selects who will be part of the group. The process can take several hours to complete, with the following outcomes achieved:

1. *Dream is identified*
2. *Goals are set to get to the dream*
3. *Identifying where the student is now, in relation to the goals*
4. *Identifying supports and resources need to help with the goals*

5. *Setting up a plan for the next months, and longer, with participants committing to take on actions.*

This tool is often used when planning transition to adulthood. It needs to be holistic, taking into account a wide variety of issues (e.g., health, relationships, housing, finances, etc.). The facilitator needs to be knowledgeable about government programs and agencies, community resources, grants, etc.

There is more information about P.A.T.H. in Module 6.

2.3 Pathways to the Student's Future

Pathways is an adapted version of MAPS, and the long range planning tool that is used in the Provincial Integration Support Program. A guide for how to complete a Pathways is included in the Reference section of this Module.

Reading

- Common Sense Tools: MAPS and CIRCLES for Inclusive Education by Marsha Forrest and Jack Pearpoint

(<http://www.inclusion.com/artcommonsensetools.html>)

- Use of the MAPS Process:

<http://www.circleofinclusion.org/english/demo/lawrenceraintree/portfolio/index.html>

Reference Section

- Facilitators Guidelines Pathways
- PATHWAYS TO THE STUDENT
- Sample Pathways
- McGill Deaf-Blind MAPS

Points to Ponder

Has any long-range planning been completed for your student?

If so, what were the most important aspects of the long-range plan vis-à-vis your involvement?

If not, do you feel that it is important to initiate a long-range plan for the student? Who would do this?