Systematic Instruction of Functional Skills for Students and Adults with Disabilities

Second Edition

Keith Storey,
Ph.D., BCBA-D

Craig Miner,
Ph.D.

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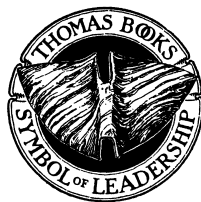# SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION OF FUNCTIONAL SKILLS FOR STUDENTS AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

By

KEITH STOREY, PH.D., BCBA-D

Educational Support Services
Oakland, California

and

CRAIG MINER, PH.D.

Southern Illinois University
Edwardsville, Illinois

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To Eva Moore. Teacher, mentor, and friend to two generations of Storey's. Her influence continues in the third generation.

K.S.

To my beautiful wife, Shari, for keeping me focused on what's important in every aspect of life.

C.M.

PREFACE

This book provides an overview of systematic instructional strategies and that is written in a format so that teachers and other service providers can immediately put the information to use. We have tried to write specifically regarding general systematic instruction components, such as task analysis, prompts, error correction, etc., as well as specifically for different instructional domains such as employment, community, and residential. This book is specifically focused upon systematic instruction for individuals with disabilities (school age and adults). It is generic across age groups as well as disability labels and should be of interest to those working in the schools as well as those in transition and adult service settings. We have tried to write for practitioners rather than other academics and have tried to use as little jargon and technical language as possible. We have purposefully kept references to a minimum though we have included some so that interested readers can use them for further education. In the chapters, we have deliberately included "older" references that we see as being both important and relevant today, as well as to provide an understanding of how this field of study has built upon "classic research" for establishing the basis of systematic instruction. In addition, we have included a reference section on the research that is focused on the chapter topic.

In this book, each chapter follows the sequence of:

- Key point questions
- Window to the world case studies
- Discussion questions
- School and community-based activity suggestions
- References cited in chapter
- Empirical research to support that the intervention is an evidence-based practice
- General references regarding topics in chapter

This book is focused on improving instructional practices for students and adults with disabilities. All too often the assumption is that students and

adults have reached their "potential" and they become stuck in a place or setting because of a lack of skills on their part due to the poor instruction that they have received. Practitioners may understand the importance of placing individuals in different settings (e.g., inclusive classrooms, supported employment sites) but not understand how to improve their skills once they are in that setting. This book is intended to give teachers and other service providers the instructional skills for improving the skills of the individuals that they are serving.

The rubber meets the road in how to teach. Though issues such as inclusion are certainly extremely important, how to teach individuals with disabilities is the foundation on which special education services are provided. The most unique feature of the text is that it is written specifically for practitioners in the field (teachers and adult service providers) as well as those in training rather than being written for other academics. An advantage of this book is that those preparing teachers and others can easily use it in methods courses as it covers instructional methodology that is seldom covered in detail in most texts.

College instructors are likely to choose our book based upon:

a. The consistent format throughout the book.
b. The "readability" of the book for students.
c. The comprehensive coverage of systematic instruction.
d. The direct applicability to applied settings.

In addition to college instructors, we believe that others providing instruction, supervision, and training to direct service providers will find this book useful.

K.S.
C.M.

CONTENTS

SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION OF FUNCTIONAL SKILLS OF STUDENTS AND ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

Chapter 1

COMMUNITY-REFERENCED
FUNCTIONAL CURRICULUM

Key Point Questions

1. What should you teach?
2. What are functional skills?
3. What are scope and sequence considerations?
4. What are lifestyle routines, functional skill sequences, and skill specific analyses?
5. What is the relationship between systematic instruction of functional skills and integration/inclusion?
6. What is the criterion of ultimate functioning?
7. What is age appropriateness?
8. What is the competence-deviance hypothesis?
9. What is partial participation?
10. What are simulation and in vivo instruction?
11. What is normalization?
12. What are quality of life outcomes?
13. What are Evidence Based Practices?

Window to the World Case Study One

Kristin is a twenty-five-year-old adult who has been diagnosed as having a Learning Disability and ADHD. Kristin barely graduated from high school, did not go to college, and has had many jobs over the years. Most of these jobs have not lasted long. She loses jobs because employers tell her what to do and assume that she understands how to do the tasks without any real instruction (e.g., do this filing). Because of her ADHD Kristin also has trouble remembering the se-

quence in which to do tasks (e.g., do the filing, then the mail, then check the stocking of supplies, then cover the phone for Yukari when she is on a break or at lunch).

Kristin has sometimes been homeless or living with her friends. She has received some social services but often has difficulty navigating their forms and bureaucracies and thus only sporadically receives actual supports.

Recently Kristin's friend Dawn has the two of them sign up for classes at their local community college. Dawn helped Kristin to accesses DSPS services. As part of these services, Kristin has started receiving On-The-Job supports with Job Coach, Michal, who has performed a thorough job analysis at the new job that Kristin has just started. Michal uses a variety of systematic instructional procedures such as task analysis, self-management strategies, general case instructional strategies, and positive reinforcement to teach and support Kristin. For the first time Kristin feels positive about how she is doing at work and her supervisor is pleased with her performance.

Window to the World Case Study Two

Marion is a seven-year-old second grader who has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Marion does very well academically and is the brightest student in his class intellectually. However, Marion doesn't always get along well with his peers. He often has difficulty understanding social conventions such as how close to stand (he will sometimes put his face up to the peer's face), what to talk about (he enjoys talking about physics which is of minimal interest to his peers), how to continue an interaction (he will respond to an initiation from a peer by bringing up a non-related topic such as physics), and how to terminate an interaction (he will often just walk away).

His inclusion specialist, Ms. Huber, recognizes that this is a very important point in time for Marion to develop positive relationships and social networks with his peers and that teaching Marion specific social skills will be critical. She decides upon a two-pronged strategy. First, she does a short social skills intervention with Marion right before school starts in the morning. This occurs for about five minutes and involves a brief discussion of why the skill they will work on (such as how close to stand to a peer) is important, each role playing the correct way (how close to stand) and then an incorrect way (standing too

close), feedback on the performance, and then reinforcement (praise from Ms. Huber and a text to Marion's parents so that they can deliver a tangible reinforce, such as reading or discussing something about physics, at home for his behavior).

The second method is a brief role playing each day in class about a difficult social interaction and how to handle it. This is for all the students in the class and thus Marion is not singled out (Marion is not the only one with social interaction difficulties). The students rotate through different situations and role play with Ms. Huber or the teacher, Ms. Ziegler, using the same format that Ms. Huber uses with Marion before school. This is a fun activity that all the students enjoy (the teachers make some of the situations a bit humorous) and the students all enjoy the role playing and benefit from it. Indeed, it has made their social interactions in class and in the school and at home more positive. For Marion, he has gained many positive social interaction skills and has developed friendships with many of his peers at school and now they often get together outside of school as well.

Key Point Question 1: What Should You Teach?

Independence, productivity, and integration are valued outcomes for all individuals with disabilities. The opportunity to live, be educated, and participate in normalized settings contributes to the development of skills that enhance community functioning and attainment of these outcomes. However, beyond opportunity, it is important to recognize the critical importance of effective instruction and the difference that it can make in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Without effective instruction, it is doubtful that individuals will develop their ultimate functioning potential for successful community living. Modifications (changes in the delivery, content, or instructional level of subject matter or tests) and accommodations (provide different ways for students to take in information or communicate their knowledge back to the teacher) are important, especially in inclusive educational settings. However, even with appropriate modifications and accommodations, learners need to acquire skills which will be useful in their immediate and future environments. As noted by Downing and Demchak (2002) all students can benefit from direct and systematic instruction and for some students, this type instruction is essential. No matter how many accommodations or modifications may be made,

without systematic or direct instruction of skills, some learners may be unable to acquire new skills and information. By systematic instruction we mean instructional procedures that involve antecedent and consequence manipulations, frequent assistance to the learner (e.g., cues), immediate correction procedures, and direct and ongoing measurement that are designed to increase specific skills (e.g., behaviors) for the learner. There are certainly many other instructional and academic issues that are important for learners with disabilities and there are a variety of instructional methodologies (Browder & Spooner, 2006; Wood, 2002) and we do not mean to marginalize or trivialize their importance. However, the focus of this book is on directly teaching functional skills through systematic instruction procedures. We would also like to emphasize here that systematic instruction is "evidence based" and there is an extensive empirical base for the effectiveness of these procedures for teaching new skills (Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber, & Kincaid, 2003; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

Independence, productivity, and integration are all based upon individuals having skills necessary to be competent in specific situations (e.g., shopping for groceries, interacting with co-workers, cooking meals, etc.). For many learners, such competence is not acquired incidentally. In other words, the emphasis of instruction must be to develop competence (Gold, 1980) to function in employment settings, residential environments, community living situations, and recreational/leisure activities. Thus, curriculum content and skill selection needs to be referenced to one (or more) of these domains.

Key Point Question 2: What are Functional Skills?

"What to teach?" is the initial question that needs to be addressed when making instructional decisions involving students and adults with disabilities. Although specific curriculum content decisions must be based on standards and benchmarks (such as Common Core Standards) as well as more individualized preferences and interests, the general goal of all instruction must be to enhance a person's capacity to functional successfully in the community. To that end, the curriculum should consist of skills that enable a person to function in employment, residential, community living, and recreational/leisure domains. Thus, any skill taught needs to be referenced to one (or more) of these domains and meet the test of being personally mean-

ingful and valuable to specific individuals. When skills are selected in this manner, their functionality or practical utility is virtually assured. This focus on teaching functional skills is sometimes lost in today's focus on inclusive education and access to the general curriculum. While we certainly support the strong emphasis on including students with disabilities in general education classrooms and teaching them the general academic curriculum, educators must not forget the importance of also teaching the kinds of practical skills that individuals need to function successfully in adult society.

Functional teaching activities are instructional programs that involve skills of immediate usefulness to individuals and employ teaching materials that are real rather than simulated (Wehman, Renzaglia, & Bates, 1985). In other words, the skills must be immediately useful (e.g., learning to greet peers appropriately) and useful in future and adult settings (e.g., learning to greet a job interviewer appropriately). In considering if a skill is functional or not you need to ask if that skill is necessary to function effectively in community settings (one of the four domains). For example, learning how to ride a bus to a job site is functional because the individual can immediately use the skill to get to work. Learning how to put pegs in a peg board (once you are over the age of 3) is non-functional because the individual is unlikely to need to use that skill in a community environment. Another way to analyze functionality is to ask if the person can't perform the skill does someone else have to do it for them. For instance, if someone cannot brush their teeth then someone else will have to brush their teeth for them. If someone cannot stack blocks it is not necessary that someone else stack the blocks for them. Table 1.1 provides further analysis of the context relevance in which skills should be taught.

Lewis (1997) provides examples of individuals being taught skills that are non-functional and age-inappropriate. These include:

- He can put 100 pegs in a board in less than 20 minutes, but, he can't put quarters in a vending machine.
- He can sort blocks by color; but, he can't sort clothes; whites from colors for washing.
- He can walk a balance beam frontwards, side-ways and back-wards; but, he can't walk up the steps or bleachers unassisted in the gym to go to a basketball game.