

Why Do We Focus on Functional Skills

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For learners with limited skill repertoires, it is paramount that teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and behavior analysts focus on functional skills.

But, what constitutes a functional skill? Skills are functional if:

- [1] skills are required in other settings in which the learner will be expected to participate;
- [2] skills are taught in a context that is the same or a close approximation of the context in which the learner will be expected to respond;
- [3] in the absence of these skills, learners will require the assistance of other persons; and,
- [4] these skills result in increased access to preferred items, activities, places, and people.

Then, why should we focus on functional skills:

[as these points are being covered, think of a learner with a limited skill repertoire you are currently working with who needs functional skills]

- [1] learners with limited skill repertoires experience generalization less often; if the skill is taught in the context in which it will be expected to occur, generalization will not be required for the skill to be functional;
- [2] some skills seem to be functional, but aren't; e.g., rote counting prior to counting objects or reading prior to shopping in the grocery store; looking for what the learner **MUST** do in a given circumstance helps us find skills that **ARE** functional; e.g., counting objects from the beginning or adaptations of counting and matching printing words on a shopping list to items or packages in the grocery store; in a word, focusing on functional skills sometimes helps us find skills that **ARE** functional;
- [3] teaching functional skills often alert us to the value of fluency and encourage us to teach to that end, so that skills last a lifetime;
- [4] for our learners, functional skills are our legacy;
- [5] functional skills often result in meaningful and fulfilling lives; e.g., reading the time on a digital clock that is associated with getting ice cream; e.g., using three signs to request cookies, milk, mom — without a carrier phrase;
- [6] functional skills often require less effort to produce fulfilling outcomes (e.g., 'all by myself'); and,
- [7] functional skills prepare people for the rest of their lives.

Stories of functional skills will be interspersed with the above content.

Learning Objectives;

- [1] Participants will describe four components that define functional skills
- [2] Participants will provide three reasons for teaching functional skills
- [3] Participants will provide one circumstance that will motivate them to search for and teach a functional skill