

These Are Goals? Really?

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

In Disability World, writing goals is a common occurrence: IEP teams write goals for students with disabilities in public school and IHP/ISP teams do the same for adults who “receive services.” But how good are the goals we write? Are they *relevant and meaningful* to the person who is supposed to achieve them? Are they easily understandable by all (especially to the person they’re written for)? In fact, does that person have any input into his or her own goals?

Patrice Hallock, Ph.D., is assistant professor of education at Utica College in New York. She and I have communicated in the past about goal-writing, and she recently shared some real-life IEP goals that her students analyzed and critiqued in their case studies. Following are some of these goals—verbatim—followed by my comments.

“Annual Goal: Michael will tell time using an analog clock. Objectives: Michael will tell time using an analog clock on the hour, quarter hour (:15), half hour (:30), and 3/4 hour (:45). Michael will know the difference between the hour and minute hands of an analog clock. He will also be able to describe what direction the hands move and understand the way the numbers are located on the clock face.” **MY COMMENTS:** My son, Benjamin, is graduating with honors from Community College this summer, and he cannot tell time using an analog clock. He does just fine with his digital watch!

“George will reduce or eliminate problem behavior. He will do this through the following criteria: Evaluation Criteria: 100% success, over 12 months. Procedure to Evaluate Goal: Daily Goal Log. Evaluation schedule: quarter. Primary Responsibility: Social worker.” **MY COMMENTS:** Who defines “problem behavior”? What, exactly, is George to do in order to accomplish this goal? Where? How? How does

George know what he’s supposed to do? And whose behavioral standard is he supposed to meet: the social worker’s, the teacher’s, the principal’s, and what if their standards are different?

“Develop and refine scissors skills, cutting out a 1 1/2 inch circle within 1/8 inch with 100% accuracy.” **MY COMMENTS:** This goal doesn’t even have the student’s name! Is this student planning on being a tailor? If not, how important is this skill in real life? My son doesn’t need to cut with scissors to go to college.

“Ann will hop forward on either foot for 10 feet without putting her foot down 2 out of 3 times.” **MY COMMENTS:** Is this student preparing for the One-Foot-Hop competition in the Olympics? Is this really an important skill?

These are just four goals from the 12 *pages* of goals Patrice shared with me; some are better, some are worse. Patrice noted: “This is truly grist for many mills! It gives us lots of opportunity to talk about purely academic goals (which are often inappropriate), goals which are based solely on evaluation protocols (which are severely inappropriate), and the many reasons why parents are often alienated from the whole process!”

Patrice’s class critiqued the goals they studied, and then rewrote them as activity-based goals. See my article, “Activity-Based Goals” which is based on the work (and used with permission) of the The Schools Project of the Specialized Training Program at the University of Oregon. (Also see my articles at www.disabilityisnatural.com, “Goals: Meaningful and Relevant or Garbage?” and “Go Beyond Goals: Think Outcomes.”) We can do better!