

Integrating Portfolio with Day-to-Day Instruction

In late August, Mr. Holt returns to school after summer break. Once he's set up his classroom (leaning centers here, computer there . . .), he turns his attention to the TCAP-Alt PA, the portfolio assessment he has to complete for each of his students. He has ten in his class, all of whom have been classified as significantly cognitively impaired. All of them have been determined eligible for the portfolio assessment by their IEP teams. He knows from past experience that assembling the students' portfolios is a lot less stressful if he gets started early and records data regularly. And he won't wait until the last minute to get signatures, either. Last year, he put it off until later in the year, and the General Ed Math teacher won the lottery and moved to Aruba before he could get her to sign. He's not the type to make the same mistake twice.

Looking at his class list, he realizes with satisfaction that he has only two new students. The rest, he had last year. He downloads the most recent (2011) version of the Alternate Performance Indicators (APIs), logs onto EasyIEP and begins to choose APIs for each student, based on goals the IEP indicates he's already planned to work on. His youngest, Zach, is eight, so he chooses Zach's APIs from the grade level cluster 3-5. His oldest, Adam, is eleven, so he chooses Adam's API's from the grade level cluster 6-8.

Zach is a very low-functioning student, and there are many self-help skills in his IEP that are not appropriate for TCAP-Alt PA, but since Mr. Holt only has to choose three APIs per Content Area/subject, he is able to quickly choose twelve appropriate APIs for Zach. He considers choosing "communicate wants and needs." Zach can already indicate what he wants with vocalizations and reaching gestures, but Mr. Holt wants to teach Zach to use a picture board to communicate his wants and needs. In order to use it, Zach needs to learn that pictures represent objects. Since that is a more academic—and more versatile—skill, Mr. Holt decides that identifying symbols would be a better choice. He settles on these APIs:

R.1.2 Identify/label people, symbols, and objects – This will help Zach learn to use his new communication board.

W.1.2 Correctly manipulate a variety of media tools to make marks – He'd considered using W.1.1 ("Use writing tools to make marks on paper"), but decided that since he uses many different materials (e.g., markers on whiteboard, chalk on chalkboard, finger in salt tray, stylus in clay) to reinforce writing skills, W.1.2 is more appropriate. The other writing APIs are too advanced for Zach.

EL.1.1 Use classroom resources to support the writing process (e.g., word walls, picture dictionaries, technology, student-generated word books) – He could have chosen EL.1.2 ("Write from left to right and top to bottom") and taught prerequisite skills, such as following the dot of a laser pointer from left to right and up and down, and that is a skill he will work on in the classroom, but considering Zach's functional level, Mr. Holt can think of many more varied and relevant activities for EL.1.1. The other APIs are too advanced for Zach.

A.1.1 Indicate awareness of and react to color, size, and shape – None of the Numbers and Operations APIs fit well with the skills he plans to teach Zach. While Zach will be exposed to the idea of counting and one-to-one correspondence throughout the year, reacting to colors, sizes, and shapes seems like a more appropriate portfolio goal for him.

M.1.1 Identify which is larger/smaller, longer/shorter, taller/shorter, heavier/lighter, or which holds more or less when given two similar objects – Mr. Holt considered M.1.2 (“Indicate awareness of and react to temperature”), but while he will expose Zach to objects of various temperatures throughout the year, Mr. Holt wants to challenge his students. He feels that simply responding to temperature is too basic a skill. Instead, he is already imagining having Zach pick up a brick and a balloon, then comparing the two, or having him pour the same amount of rice into two containers to see which will overflow.

G.2.1 Recognize and show terms of relative position and direction in a variety of situations (e.g, over, under, left, right, above, below, forward, backward, between, before, after) – Mr. Holt can teach these concepts in a variety of ways, including manipulating concrete objects or even helping Zach move into various positions and in various directions.

Mr. Holt uses the same process to choose three Science APIs and three Social Studies APIs. Then he exits Zach’s EasyIEP file and opens Adam’s to begin the same process. Adam is a higher-functioning student, so it is a little harder to choose, since more of the APIs are appropriate. Mr. Holt has already planned stimulating activities for teaching many more goals than he needs for the portfolio assessment. He chooses the twelve he thinks will be easiest to graph and offer choices for.

He continues this process for each student, making sure to choose APIs from the correct grade level column of the document. He has to wait to choose for the two newest students until the IEP meetings have been held and the students determined eligible for the portfolio assessment, but as soon as they are approved, he begins their portfolios as well.

Once the APIs have been chosen, Mr. Holt prints out the portfolio front matter and graphs he will need (with the correct student information typed in at the top). He makes sure to use the most recent forms (from 2010). Then he gets out a temporary binder for each student and puts each student’s forms in his or her binder. He will keep the forms there until he receives the state-approved binders in December, when he will transfer each student portfolio to a state-approved binder for shipping.

As the year progresses, he records student performance in a tablet and transfers the raw data onto the TCAP-Alt PA graphs every few weeks. When he has completed an activity he thinks will be an especially good example of his instruction toward a chosen API, he completes evidence sheets, prints them out, and inserts them in front of their corresponding graphs.

One afternoon, while five of his students work in learning centers, he gathers the other five, including Zach and Adam, at a table and reads them a counting book called *Apple Pie Sunday*. It is about a woman who carries a basket to the orchard to pick apples for a pie. She puts the apples into the basket one by one. Then when she gets home, she takes them out one by one, peels them one by one, slices them one by one, and puts the sliced apples into the pie one by one. As he reads, Mr. Holt encourages the students to count aloud with him. He also asks the students questions about what is happening on each page of the book. For those, like Adam, whose portfolio API is R.1.14—“Ask and respond correctly to many types of questions (e.g., who, what, when, where, and why)” — he asks five questions and records the percentage of correct answers in the tablet he always keeps handy. For Zach, whose Reading API is R.1.2—“Identify/label people, symbols, and objects”—he asks five simple questions related to identifying objects pictured in the book.

Next, Mr. Holt brings out a basket with five apples in it. Sam, Jesse, and Alison (who are working on an API about counting objects) each get a turn counting the five apples and them into the basket. Mr. Holt gives verbal and touch prompts as needed. When it's Zach's turn, Mr. Holt encourages Zach to reach for an apple and touch and hold it. He addresses A.1.1 by talking about the color, size, and shape of the apple, then addresses M.1.1 by giving Zach two apples to compare (“Which one is bigger?” “Which one is heavier?”). Mr. Holt uses verbal cues and touch or physical prompts to help Zach choose correctly.

Since Adam is beginning to learn simple addition and subtraction—NO.1.8 “Use concrete objects to develop strategies for addition or subtraction of whole numbers to 50”—when it's his turn, Mr. Holt verbally asks him some simple word problems (e.g., “If the woman has five apples, and her goat eats three of them, how many will be left?”) and helps Adam solve the problems using the apples as counters. Adam solves five simple word problems.

Mr. Holt makes sure each child has five chances to practice his or her Numbers and Operations API and records their performances in his tablet. After each student has gotten a chance to count the apples, Mr. Holt shows the group a photo of an apple tree heavy with apples. He initiates a discussion about where apples come from and how the apple tree grows, introducing new pictures to illustrate each point. He lets the students take turns putting three pictures (seed, sapling, and apple tree) in sequential order. Then he gives each child an apple and discusses the look and feel of the fruit. Mr. Holt slices the apples and shows the children the seeds. The group discusses how the seed can become an apple tree if planted. Each student, except Zach, points to the seeds when asked. Mr. Holt uses verbal and touch prompts to help Zach find the seeds in his apple, then encourages him to explore how the apple looks, feels, smells, and tastes. Then the students are allowed to eat their apples. Mr. Holt records each student's performance in his tablet. For Adam, whose Life Science API is LS.5A-B.5—“Recognize all living things come from other living things and change as they mature”—Mr. Holt records the number of tries it takes Adam to place the pictures depicting the growth of an apple tree in the correct sequence (to show how the apple tree changes from seed to grown tree).

For Zach, whose Life Science API is LS.2A.4—“Demonstrate use of the senses to explore the environment”—Mr. Holt notes what percentage of a three-minute block of time Zach spends exploring his apple.

Because who to work with, when to work, where to work, and what materials to use have been determined by the nature of the activities he’s chosen, he offers each student a choice of rewards once the session is over. He offers the option of a gold star sticker or an inked stamp on the back of the hand. Two students choose the stamp, and two choose the sticker. Zach is unable to verbalize his choice, but he shows more interest in the shiny sticker, so Mr. Holt considers this Zach’s choice and puts the sticker on Zach’s wheelchair tray where he can see it.

At the end of the day, Mr. Holt goes to the State website, completes the evidence sheets on which he will document that day’s session, and prints them out. For Zach, he prints his evidence sheets for R.1.2, M.1.1, A.1.1, and LS.2A.4. For Adam, he prints out evidence sheets for R.1.14, NO.1.8, and LS.2A-B.5. He also fills out sheets for Sam, Jesse, and Alison. He describes each activity in detail, making sure to include the materials used and a description of how the student performed the activity. For example, he describes Zach’s Reading activity like this: “The teacher read the counting book, *Apple Pie Sunday*, to Zach. During the story, the teacher verbally asked Zach to identify five objects pictured in the book and gave verbal and physical prompts to help Zach answer correctly.” When he writes Adam’s Math activity, he says, “After listening to the counting book, *Apple Pie Sunday*, read aloud by the teacher, Adam was verbally given five addition and subtraction problems, which he solved using apples as counters.”

With the evidence sheets completed, Mr. Holt transfers the raw data from his tablet to the students’ graphs. He files the tablet pages for future reference in case he is audited by the State. Then he leaves for the day, satisfied with the progress he’s made and the job he’s done.