

“A case for teaching functional skills”

By Preston Lewis

(adapted by Anke Baillie)



My brother James! 18 years old with significant learning difficulties
Has been in school 12 years. Never been anywhere else other than Special School.
He has had years of IEPs and he has learned to do a lot of different things!

James can now do things he couldn't do before!
He can put 100 pegs in a peg board in less than 10 minutes with 95 percent accuracy,
but he can't put coins in a vending machine.
Upon command he can “touch” nose, shoulder, leg, foot, hair, ear.
He's still working on wrist, ankle, hips.
But, he can't blow his nose when needed.

He can now do a 12 piece Big Bird puzzle with 100 percent accuracy,
and colour an Easter Bunny and stay within the lines!
However, he prefers music, but he was never taught how to use a radio or iPod.

He can now fold paper in halves and even quarters,
but, he can't fold his clothes.
He can sort blocks by colour, up to 10 different colours,
but, he can't sort clothes, whites from colours, for washing.
He can roll Play Dough and make wonderful clay snakes,
but, he can't roll bread dough and cut out biscuits.

He can string beads in alternating colours and match it to a pattern,
but, he can't lace his shoes.
He can sing his ABC's and tell me the names of all the letters in the alphabet with 80 percent accuracy,
but, he can't tell the men's room from the ladies' room when we go to a restaurant.

He can be told it's cloudy/rainy and place a black felt cloud on the day of the week on an enlarged calendar (with assistance).
but, he still goes out in the rain without a raincoat or hat!

He can identify with 100 percent accuracy 100 different Peabody picture cards by pointing,
but, he can't order a hamburger by pointing to a picture or gesturing

He can walk a balance beam frontwards, sideways and backwards!
but, he can't walk up the steps in his home unassisted to go to his bedroom.

He can count to 100 by rote memory
but, he doesn't know how to pay the waitress for a £2.59 McDonald's BigMac!

He can put a cube in the box, under the box, beside the box and behind the box
but he can't find the rubbish bin in McDonald's and empty his tray into it

He can sit in a circle with appropriate behaviour and sing songs and play Duck, Duck, Goose.
but, nobody else in his neighbourhood his age seems to want to do that!

I guess he's just not ready yet!