



Transcript: Module 4 Lesson 1

When Children Struggle

Welcome to Framework and Formula for Writing Meaningful IEP's. This is module four and it's all about what to do, or really how to think about, when a child is struggling or their development has stalled. And in particular, we're on lesson one, which is about what we call, DNQ's, or does not qualify. This is about when a child is struggling but may not be eligible for Early Childhood Special Ed or Special Education. We address this kind of concern through what's called a [zig zag process](#) and we won't go into great detail because there are several supplemental resources and supports for module four, lesson one that go into great detail about the zig zag process.

But what we want to start off with before we kind talk about how it applies to IEP's, is think about the sort of contextual issues that IEP teams face usually before they're ever to the IEP process. But there's always this idea that we're moving towards an IEP, so it

even might be a question of does the child qualify or do they not? This is an evaluation question. It's still always, "But will an IEP serve this student?" We're really thinking about why is there a concern? Why is someone thinking that this child is struggling or their development has stalled? What's at the heart of the concern? Why or should we even make a referral? Is this something that we think is going to result in the student becoming eligible for Early Childhood Special Ed or Special Education services?

The need or the needs that the team sees, are these things that should or can be addressed by an IEP versus a viable 504 plan versus high quality instruction? And do we have the right data? To set the stage, what often happens is that there is a concern, someone wants to make a referral, there is a sense that the child might benefit from Early Childhood Special Ed. They feel that the needs can or will only be addressed if it's put on an IEP, and they have some data to suggest that there is some sort of gap in the child's performance, some sort of delay, a struggle. Some sort of stall if you will, in terms of the next milestone. But oftentimes, we might get through an evaluation and we might end up with high percentages of kids who do not qualify, meaning there are real concerns and there should have been a referral, but there's not

enough data or evidence to suggest this is a delay, a disability versus just that difference.

One thing that teams can really think about in terms of figuring out and/or supporting a student, whether they end up not qualifying or they're on an IEP, but you might not be sure that you want to put all of the needs plus the kitchen sink as IEP goals. How can we support the learner? How can we support a student, either one that again qualifies, and gets an IEP, or one that we worry, that it's either Special Ed or the highway and we're sending them back out to the highway. What could be some of our suggestions? So anywhere in between where we're kind of thinking about what are the supports? What are the instructional strategies that we can use to support the student? That's kind of the situation when we can most apply the zig zag process.

We can also think of it before we actually make the referral when there is a concern. So the idea about the zig zag is literally thinking of two columns. The left hand and the right hand represent what is earlier in development, easier for children and the right hand is what's later in development or harder for children. So, the zig zag came to be by thinking about moving in a zig zag fashion, from the left hand side to the right, back to the left, over to the right, back to the left, down to the left again, and then maybe over one more time to the right. The idea is that often times our expectations are heavy on the right hand side. So if you're looking at your screen or if you have a mental image of

two columns, the right hand side might be heavy in terms of the expectations, the demands, the outcome, the milestone.

So, whatever it is that we want the student to be learning, might have multiple components. It might be highly complex and abstract. It might have a very specific way that it should be demonstrated and it's often required in an unfamiliar setting with un-preferred materials or actions, and having to negotiate other human beings, peers, adults, family members. So anytime a child is struggling or their development has stalled, if we can just pull or zig zag a little over to the left, so take something that's multiple and make it single. Take something that's complex and make it simple. Certainly take something that's un-preferred and make it preferred, that might show that we can jump start development.

So this zig zag process is a way to think about at various decisions that we make, why is there a concern? Let's look at the zig zag, have our expectations been too heavy on the right hand side and we can just support and scaffold a learner by zig zagging over to the left. Should there be a referral made? Well, what if we did for a couple of days, just sort of zig zagged and we gave the support. Do we see an immediate response from the student or the child in being able to kind of jump start their development? When we're worried about whether or not they are eligible, if we can just say wow, everything that they struggle with is because it's

multiple and complicated and abstract and too specific, then it might not be something that's a disability, a delay, or disorder but something that would definitely just require some high quality instruction.

As you go through thinking about from the evaluation to what we write as an IEP worthy, to what is high quality instruction, no matter where we are in those decisions, when we see a student or a child struggling we can use the zig zag process to sort of help us reduce our DNQ's, our do not qualifies, because we won't make the referral in the first place. We'll address the concern through the zig zag. We'll prioritize what needs to be on the IEP. And we can really give some support to child care providers, to add Head Start classrooms, to universal general four year old programs, to kindergarten teachers, and to families, when and we feel like this is either Special Ed or the highway.

So when we've gone through and done due diligence that something is not IEP worthy and maybe even back up from there, the child does not qualify, the zig zag can be a way that we can give some support even when we are not going to write an IEP. In the next lesson, under module four, we'll talk a little bit about a phrase that I call *every child, being a triangle*. Some people think about it as tier two. It depends on sort of where you live but this is sort of what we call the *messy middle*. So, again these are children who are struggling or development has stalled, and what

can we do in that messy middle? Whether it's an IEP kind of thing that we address the need or something else. What do we really do when we think of every child being a triangle, and there's somebody stuck in the middle?