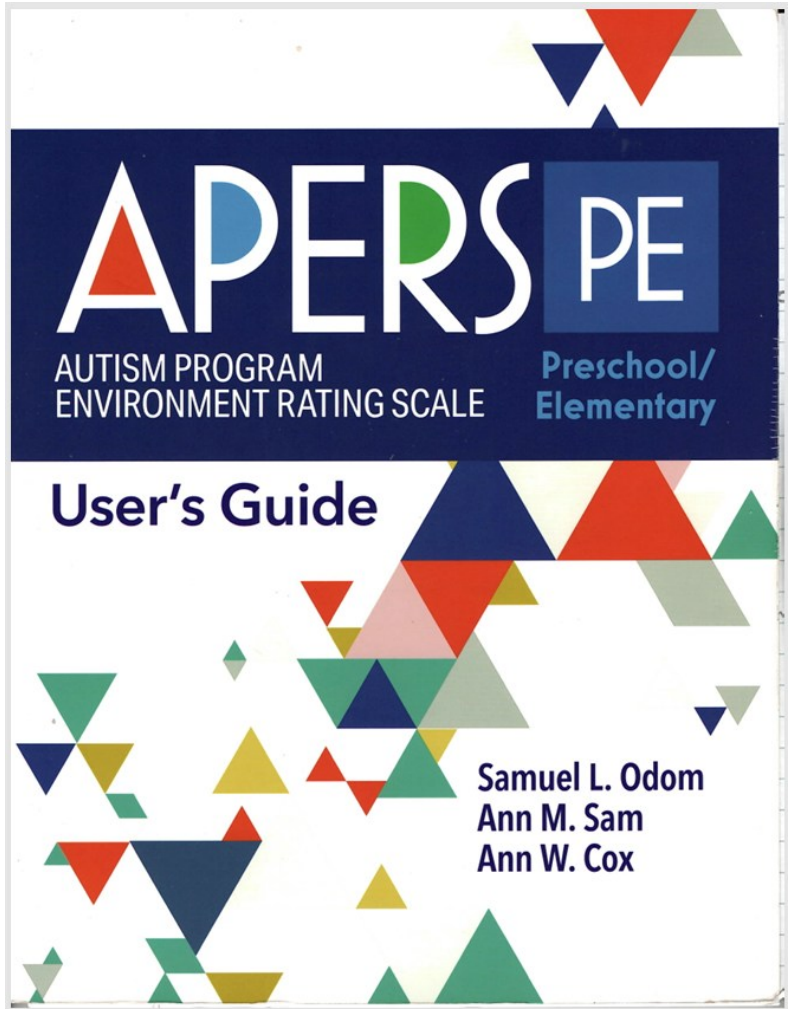
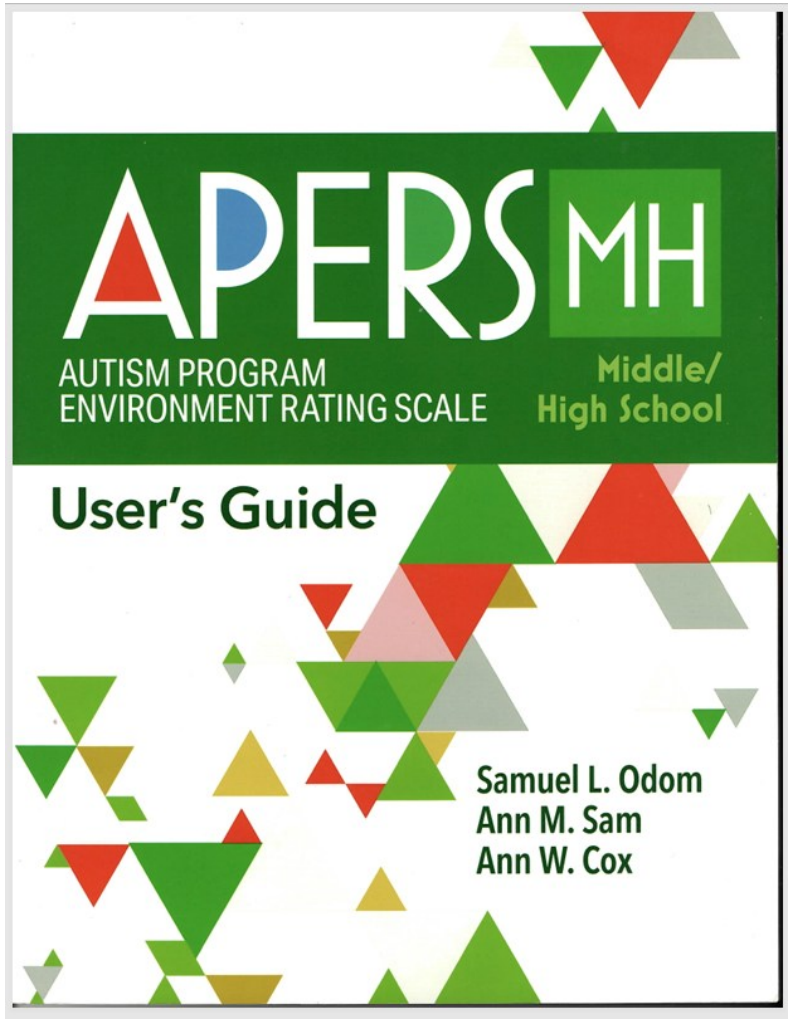
Evaluating School Programs for Students With Autism Based on the Autism Program Environment Rating Scale

Dr. Tim Morse

University of West Florida

APERS Preschool/Elementary (PE)
APERS Middle/High School (MH)





Presentation Overview

1. Awareness (Existence of the APERS)
2. Administration (An introduction only)
3. Admiration (Division TEACCH: **T**reatment and **E**ducation of **A**utistic and related **C**ommunication **H**andicapped **C**hildren)

About Me

1. Education
2. Employment
3. Family
4. Other

Public School Programming

1. Primary means for autistic individuals to receive services (Iovannone et al., 2003)
2. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
    a) 13 categories of disability
    b) Quality programming/High-quality instruction
    c) “Progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances” vs. Optimal outcome

Treatment Outcomes

1. “To meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, 2017, p. 15 as reported in The IRIS Center, 2019).” Progress can be measured in multiple ways, including a child’s progress on IEP goals, grade-level progress in the general education curriculum, and post-school success (Bailey et al., 2024).

2. A comparative analysis of treatment outcomes must start with how the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Endrew F.* highlights how the focus of clinical programming and school programming can differ significantly. While schools are not prohibited from striving to obtain the optimal outcome for a child with autism, which can be the focus of clinical programming, they are not obligated to work to achieve this outcome. This focus would not be realistic for underfunded public schools that must address the needs of students manifesting one or more of 13 disabilities.

3. Further, the IDEA’s purpose is to prepare children with disabilities for post-secondary education, employment, and independent living (20 U.S.C. § 1400(d)(1)(A)). No mention is made of changing a student’s developmental trajectory to refute his current diagnosis.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

1. An IEP is a written plan establishing the special education services the child with autism will receive.
    a) Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) with related goals
    b) Periodic progress reports
    c) Specially designed instruction
    d) Related services
    e) Accommodations and modifications

PLAAFP

1. Academic content comprises traditional subjects
2. Functional content involves skills or activities not considered academic or directly related to a child's academic achievement. Rather, functional content is associated with activities of daily living that include tasks such as dressing, preparing a meal, and toileting. Additionally, social and communication skills, orientation and mobility skills, executive functioning, and engagement in proper school social behaviors are considered functional content.
   a) General education classrooms emphasize academic content
   b) Full funding of the IDEA has impacted programming

Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS)

1. The APERS was designed to assess the quality of programs for children and youth with autism in community public school settings, which have been characterized as a child's/youth's "best hope" for the future.
2. APERS PE and APERS MH
3. The APERS-PE consists of 62 items organized into 10 domains. The APERS-MH consists of 69 items organized into 11 domains. Items within each domain are further grouped by dimensions (e.g., Safety and Organization of Learning Environments are dimensions within the Learning Environments domain).
4. Sources of information: Observation, Interviews, Record review

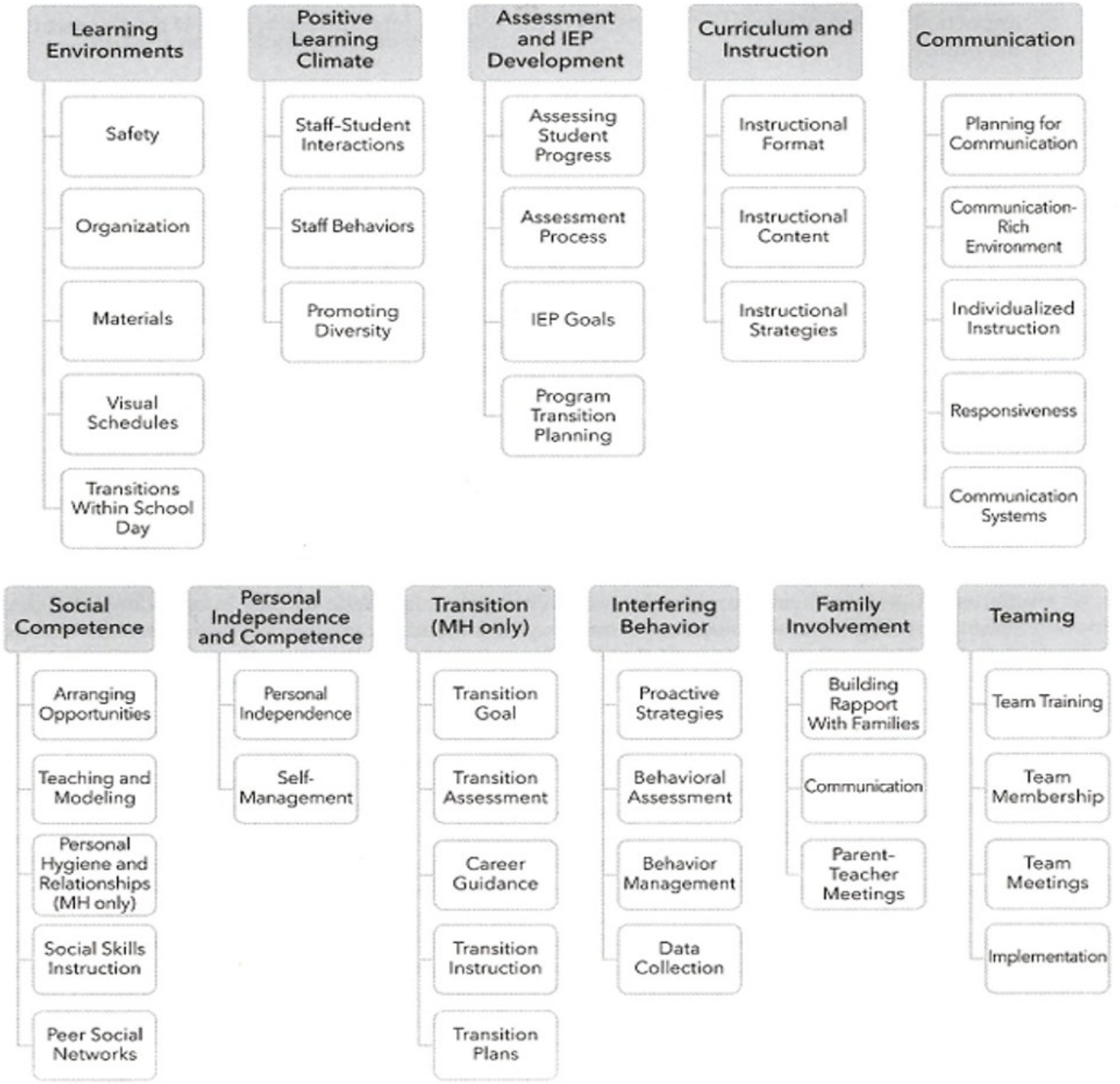
APERS Domains

1. Learning Environments
2. Positive School Climate
3. Assessment and IEP Development
4. Curriculum and Instruction
5. Communication

APERS Domains

6. Social Competencies
7. Personal Independence and Competence
8. Interfering Behavior
9. Family Involvement
10. Teaming
11. Transition (Middle and High School only)

APERS Domains and Dimensions



Learning Environment Item

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

APERS PE

Safety		Item #1 (O)		Score:	
1		3		5	
Team members do not provide instruction or supervision regarding the safe use of equipment and materials in specific areas and classes (e.g., electrical plugs uncovered, tripping hazards or unsafe items in reach of students such as wires, coffee mugs, sharp scissors, etc.).		No major environmental hazards are observed (e.g., electrical plugs are covered, sharp objects are stored safely, no tripping hazards or unsafe items available for students as described in 1). In general education settings, use your professional judgment to assess the need for covered outlets.		The environment is free of major environmental hazards (as described in 1) and minor hazards (e.g., cluttered materials on floor).	
Team members do not follow state and district guidelines to ensure supervision of the students and their safety indoors and outdoors (e.g., on playground, during PE).		There is a sufficient number of staff according to state and district guidelines to ensure supervision of the students and their safety indoors and outdoors (e.g., on playground, during PE).		Most team members anticipate and take action to prevent safety problems (e.g., cleaning up spills, monitoring student interaction in the hallway and restrooms, school-wide behavior support system, anti-bullying program).	
		One team member explains safety rules (e.g., keep hands on pencils, desk, or lap; walk in the classroom and hallways, etc.) to students.		Play areas in the classroom and outside play equipment are arranged and maintained to avoid potential safety problems (e.g., fences, no sharp edges, padding around outdoor climbing structures.)*	
Coding note: *Score N/A if not observed, use manual override to adjust score.					
Safety		**Item #2 (O)**		**Score:**	
1		3		5	
The classroom/setting inhibits team members from seeing and monitoring student(s) from most areas of the room (e.g., high barriers or shelves are present throughout the classroom/setting).		The classroom/setting design allows team members to see and monitor student(s) from most vantage points in the classroom/setting (no more than two areas in the classroom/setting where the staff is unable to see all students).		The classroom/setting design and the distribution of team members across the classroom/setting allow all students to be monitored at all times.	
Coding note: If the quality of the program falls between the 1 and 3 anchors, score a 2; or if the quality falls between the 3 and 5 anchors, score a 4.					

Learning Environment Classroom Picture



Learning Environment Restroom Picture



Learning Environment Hallway Picture



Scoring the APERS Items

1. Any indicator under 1 is observed and checked.
2. None of the indicators under 1 is checked, AND at least one indicator under 3 is checked.
3. None of the indicators under 1 is checked, AND all of the indicators under 3 are checked.
4. None of the indicators under 1 is checked, AND all of the indicators under 3 are checked, AND at least one indicator under 5 is checked.
5. None of the indicators under 1 is checked, AND all of the indicators under 3 are checked, AND all of the indicators under 5 are checked.

Learning Environment Item

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

APERS PE

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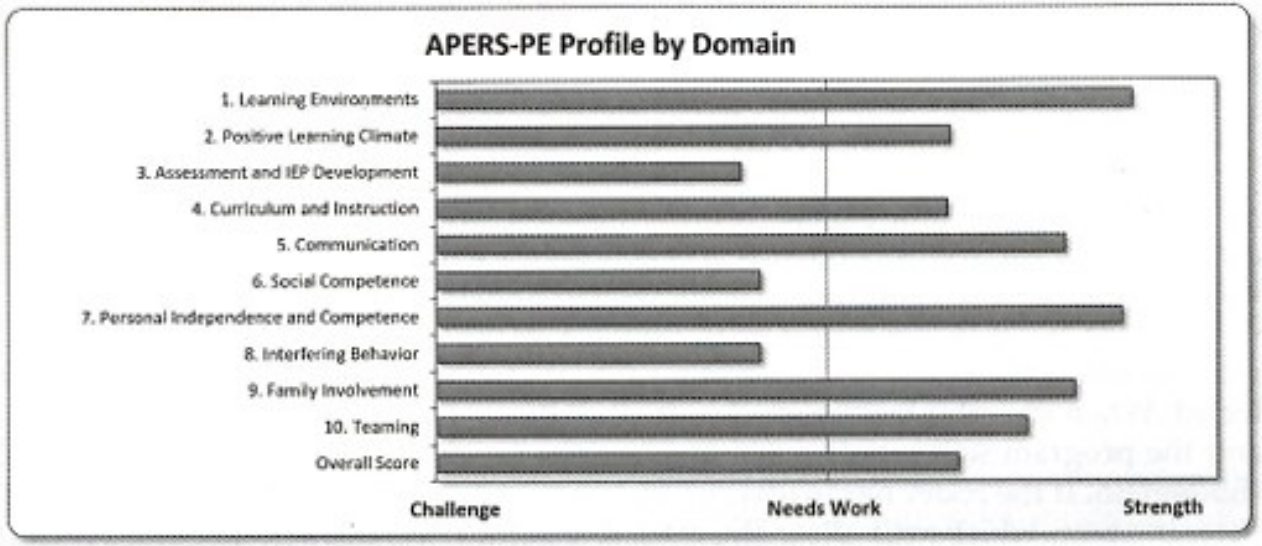
Coding note: If the quality of the program falls between the 1 and 3 anchors, score a 2; or if the quality falls between the 3 and 5 anchors, score a 4.					

Scoring Reports: Table and Graphics

Domain	Score
1. Learning Environments	4.6
2. Positive Learning Climate	3.6
3. Assessment and IEP Development	2.3
4. Curriculum and Instruction	Incomplete
5. Communication	4.2
6. Social Competence	2.6
7. Personal Independence and Competence	4.5
8. Interfering Behavior	2.6
9. Family Involvement	4.3
10. Teaming	Incomplete
Overall	Incomplete



Training for Administering the APERS

1. APERS training is provided through Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For more information, go to The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence & Practice (http://ncaep.fpg.unc.edu) or inquire through the Brookes Publishing website (https://brookespublishing.com).

2. For some users, it may not be possible to attend the training. In such cases, the new rater is to review the entire APERS assessment, reading each item to make sure that the information collected from the classroom(s) allows the rater to complete each rating.

3. A training aside from the one described above is for a new rater to conduct and score an APERS with an experienced trainer. The training should include at least one practice session and one session conducting an APERS with a person who has been previously trained to administer the assessment and to compare scoring after data has been collected and item ratings are complete.

C&I: Format and Content Item

ASSESSMENT AND IEP DEVELOPMENT

APERS PE

Item #20 (continued)

		Most team members make consistent efforts to involve families (e.g., soliciting ideas for goals, sharing draft goals, providing opportunities for feedback) in developing plans for transition when appropriate.		Assessment results are shared with students' next educational program.	

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Instructional Format		**Item #21 (O)**		**Score:**	
1		**3**		**5**	
All team members use only one instructional format (e.g., teacher-led, student-led, small group, large group, one-on-one).		One team member uses at least two instructional formats (e.g., teacher-led, student-led, small group, large group, one-on-one).		Most team members use a variety of instructional formats (e.g., teacher-led, student-led, small group, large group, one-on-one).	
Team members do not match most instructional formats with individual student needs.		One team member matches instructional formats to individual student needs most of the time.		Most team members match instructional formats to individual student needs most of the time.	
Team members do not match most instructional formats with instructional content.		One team member matches instructional formats to instructional content most of the time.		Most team members match instructional formats to instructional content most of the time.	
Instructional Content		**Item #22 (O/R/I)**		**Score:**	
1		**3**		**5**	
Team members do not plan and implement instruction that directly targets IEP goals.		During the course of the school day, one team member plans and implements instruction that directly targets IEP goals.		During the course of the school day, most team members plan and implement instruction that directly targets IEP goals.	
Team members do not consider student strengths and interests when designing instruction.		One team member plans at least two instructional activities to capitalize on students' strengths and interests.		Most team members implement instruction that is designed to capitalize on students' strengths and interests.	
Coding note: Be sure to review IEP goals first. During interview, ask where the instruction occurred.					

General LRE Requirement

1. Integration – Mainstreaming – Regular Education Initiative – Inclusion
2. Emphasis on participation in the activities frequented by peers without IEPs
3. General education classrooms emphasize a core academic curriculum
4. Accommodations and modifications are provided rather than intensive intervention that involves maximum active student responses (ASR)

Placement Misaligns to Instructional Needs

1. General education class placement emphasizes an academic curriculum focus
2. General education class placement results in a high pupil:teacher ratio
    1. Teaching to mastery (240 to 360 trials to name one superhero)
    2. Do teachers and students have opportunities to engage in meaningful communication and social skills instruction (e.g., recent 11th grade student who reported 0 OTR during a school day)
    3. Progress appropriate in light of one's circumstances
3. School programs involve multiple teachers per day

Teaming Item

Team Membership		Item #57 (R/I)		Score:	
1		3		5	
One team member makes decisions about students' instructional programs, without consultation with other team members or parents.		A multidisciplinary team, consisting of at least two practitioners (e.g., special education teacher, speech-language pathologist), makes decisions about students' instructional programs.		A multidisciplinary team that consists of all practitioners who provide services to students (e.g., teacher, speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, psychologist, general educator) makes decisions about students' instructional programs.	
Team members do not actively include (e.g., do not invite to meetings, do not ask for feedback) parents and students as equal members of the team.		Parents and students (if developmentally appropriate) are invited to become members of the team.			
		Team members actively include (e.g., invite to meetings, ask for feedback) parents and students as equal members of the team.			
Coding note: Confirm team membership from IEP records and Special Educator teacher interview and parent report.					
Team Membership		**Item #58 (R/I)**		**Score:**	
1		3		5	
Team members are uncertain of their roles and responsibilities.		Team members understand their own respective roles and responsibilities.		The roles and responsibilities of all team members are clearly defined and understood by all members of the team.	
Team members are uncertain about the instructional programs on which students are working.		Team members are familiar with instructional programs for students who are their primary responsibility (e.g., a paraprofessional only works closely with one student and is very familiar with his/her instructional program).		Most team members are knowledgeable about all students' instructional programs.	
Team members provide no monitoring of students' instructional programs.		One team member monitors students' instructional programs.		Most team members monitor all instructional programs for students for whom they have responsibility.	

APERS Teaming/School Team Models

1. The IDEA directs the plan to be written by a team and roughly stipulates its membership:
   a) the child's parents,
   b) at least one general education and special education teacher,
   c) a school administrator, and
   d) an evaluator who can explain the instructional implications of the results from the evaluation establishing the child's eligibility for special education services.
   e) If appropriate, the autistic child is to be included as a team member
2. Team members may possess widely differing levels of knowledge about autism, skills for treating it, and unique conceptual frameworks for autism interventions
3. Interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches

Practicing Teachers' Feedback

1. Overwhelming
2. Highly-rated areas can still be improved

Thank You for Attending!

Dr. Tim Morse

Associate Professor

University of West Florida

Email: tmorse@uwf.edu