CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION AND ROUTINES FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

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AREAS WITHIN A CLASSROOM

One-on-One Instructional Area

• Student/classroom specific
• Reinforcement of prior skills
• Not all students require one-on-one teaching so not all classrooms need a space designated for one-on-one instruction. If the students in your classroom are capable of learning in small groups of 2/3 students or more, you may not need this area in your room. Keep in mind that the needs of the children are always changing so there may be a time when you need to incorporate one-on-one teaching into your day. At this point such an area will need to be created and designated for this instruction.

Small-Group Instruction

• Structure depends on the activity
• Students work together and/or work with teacher
• Small group areas can include art, games, or academics. Consider the distractibility of your students; you may want to have the students face away from the rest of the classroom to limit distractions. If you have students who have difficulty staying at the table, you may want to have the students sit between the table and the wall. Arranging student desks together is another way to great a small group and it may help foster a collaborative experience between children.

Independent Work

• Tasks are visually cued, clear, and organized (this may be calming for some students)
• Fewer cognitive demands: an area to practice acquired skills
• Fewer social demands: independently working and completing activities

Full-Group Activities

• Useful when students need to get together without a work surface
• Visual Boundaries

Transition Area

Transition strategies (hand signals, music, bell ringing, teacher directive, song). This area may include picture schedules, object schedules, written schedules, or a center/job rotation schedule.
My Time/Cool Down/Break Area

- This area should be used to help prevent problem behaviors, not as a consequence
- Time spent in this area should be voluntary and beneficial for the student
- Break from cognitive and social demands
- Exercise choice
- Engage in interests
- Sensory activities may be a part of this area

THINK ABOUT YOUR ACTIVITIES

Activities with **movement**, require **larger** spaces

Activities with **materials**, require storage

**Don’t** put the computer area near an instructional area

**Don’t** put a noise area near an instructional area

Activities that need **water**, should go near a **sink** (e.g., art, snack, science, sensory)

**All** areas need to be created in a way that the teacher and/or a paraprofessional can monitor the students at **all** times.

Adapted from Kabot & Reeve, 2010

GUIDELINES FOR DESIGN

- Make sure each area is functional for the activity that will be taking place.
- Be mindful of areas in the room that may be distracting; do not assign a quiet area next to a noisy area.
- Set clear boundaries.
- Create areas that can be monitored at all times.
GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR PHYSICAL ORGANIZATION

Following are some questions for teachers to consider when arranging their classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding Question</th>
<th>My Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there places identified for large group and small group instruction?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are break or leisure areas clearly defined and labeled?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are specific areas labeled so that a student can navigate independently?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the teacher have easy visual access to all areas?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are boundaries of the areas clear?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the student[s] need a separate location for independent work?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the student[s] need a separate location for independent work?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are a student's materials easily accessible and clearly marked?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there places for students to put finished work?</td>
<td>□ Yes □ No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from TEACCH
Chapel Hill TEACCH Center
http://www.teacch.com/structureteach.html
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defined Areas</th>
<th>Preschool</th>
<th>Elementary</th>
<th>Middle School</th>
<th>High School</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Large group area</td>
<td>Large group area</td>
<td>Individual student seats</td>
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<td>Small group area[s]</td>
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<td>Snack area</td>
<td>Literacy centers/stations</td>
<td>Direct teach area</td>
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<td>Math centers/stations</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Class library</td>
<td>Science centers/stations</td>
<td>Break area</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct teach area</td>
<td>Direct teach area</td>
<td>Other:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Independent work area</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Break area</td>
<td>Break area</td>
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<td>Visual Cues</td>
<td>Carpet/tape</td>
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<td>Finished locations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Place for completed work</td>
<td>Place for completed work</td>
<td>Place for completed work</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**Using Visual Cues**

- Where to sit
- Where to stand
- Where to line up
- Where to go next
- What to attend to
- Where to put things
- Which activities and choices are available

**Classroom Arrangement as Visual Cues**

*Use Color For:*

- Designating ownership
- Designating curricular expectations
- Organizing materials
- Designating areas of the room

*Use Tape For:*

- Designating where to sit, stand, or line up
- Designating where to walk
- Creating a personal space for each student
- Designating off-limits areas
USE DIVIDERS FOR:

• Designating areas of the room
• Masking seductive stimuli
• Providing obstacles to running
• Masking irritating stimuli

USE FURNITURE FOR:

• Communication instructional expectations
• Designating where to walk
• Blocking inappropriate behavior
• Facilitating appropriate behavior
• Increasing independence

Sheuermann & Webber, 2002 and Webber & Sheuermann, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CALENDARS</th>
<th>ROUTINES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big Picture</td>
<td>Steps</td>
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<td>Main Activities</td>
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<td>Vary based on student need</td>
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<td>Directly taught</td>
<td>Directly taught</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
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</table>

Examples of Routines:
CALENDARS AND ROUTINES OFFER
Consistency

Predictability

Anticipation

Practice

Structure

MY CLASSROOM ROUTINES:
CHOOSING ICONS

- Choose an icon the student will use during the activity/routine.
- Choose an icon that is meaningful for the student.
- Choose an icon that isn’t used in several different activities/routines.
- Think about the size of the icons.

COMMUNICATION

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STATIC</th>
<th>DYNAMIC</th>
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</table>
TIME FRAME

ANTICIPATION CALENDAR

• Child acts appropriately with an object in a familiar routine

• Anticipates the beginning of a routine based on signal cues (location, touch, movement, olfactory or sound)

• Child has no means to request or reject activities

• Child distinguishes between a few caregivers

• Present the object immediately before the activity
  o allow time for the student to explore object
  o use a few words to describe
  o do a brief action of the object movement

• Place the object in the finished container immediately after the activity
  say (or gesture) “finished”

ANTICIPATION CALENDAR DESIGN
**DAILY CALENDAR**

- Child has object permanence - knows where object is located even after an interruption
- Child acts appropriately on several objects in a familiar routine
- Child can be shown an object and then travel a short distance to the activity without withdrawing
- Child appears to understand the “future” and finished baskets

**DAILY CALENDAR DESIGN**

**WEEKLY, MULTI-WEEK, MONTHLY CALENDARS**

- Child anticipates events which occur on a bi-weekly or monthly basis
- Associates several activities with the days of the week when they are regularly scheduled
- Demonstrates understanding of the weekly calendar routine through participation
- Automatically moves left to right on a weekly calendar format
HELPFUL TIPS

- Attend workshops, webinars, or read books about using calendars
- Ask a colleague for help and to see their calendar in action
- Have a trial run of the calendar before your student uses it
- Give yourself plenty of time to plan, create, and institute a calendar system
- Remember that calendars can work in ANY setting
- Keep the calendar in a consistent place (all year)
- Make sure the calendar is accessible to the student
- The area where the calendar is located should be free of clutter and visual distractions

IMPLEMENTING THE CALENDAR

- Use the calendar DAILY
- Honor what the calendar says is going to happen
  - This is VERY important especially when you are first implementing a calendar
- Don’t stop using the calendar
  - Expand the use of the calendar when necessary

DATA COLLECTION TOOL
COMMUNICATION REVISITED

WE COMMUNICATE

• to request information, people, objects
• To share information
• To respond to questions/requests
• To engage socially

OUR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS

• Reduced information about topics
• Fewer topics to talk about (experiences)
• Difficulty talking about things out of context (here and now)
• May not follow a change in topic
• May want to talk about the same topic over and over
• Can be very withdrawn socially
• May not see or hear others interacting
• May have difficulty distinguishing one person from another
• Have difficulty finding a partner for conversations
• May require a more structured approach to learn turn taking, etc.
CALENDARS BUILD CONNECTIONS

CALENDARS BUILD VOCABULARY AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

CALENDARS GIVE STUDENTS CONTROL OVER THEIR DAY (CHOICE-MAKING)

CALENDARS ARE TIME PIECES

CALENDARS ARE VEHICLES FOR SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS
**RESOURCES**

- Texas Autism Resource Guide for Effective Teaching (TARGET)
  - www.txautism.net

- Region 13 Online courses
  - Classroom Organization: The Power of Structure for Individuals with Autism (FA1019640)
  - https://ecampus.esc13.net/transcript.html?year=all#url=/show_class_info.html%3Fclassid%3D19640

- National Professional Development Center
  - Evidence-Based Practice Briefs
  - http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/briefs

- Autism Internet Modules (AIM)
  - http://www.autismininternetmodules.org/

**REFERENCES**


TEACCH (Training and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children)