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Autism E-News

Volume 2, Issue 5

May 2005

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The Fine Dance of Individualized Teaching and Learning (Part 2)

Program Choreography: The Fine Dance of Individualized Teaching and Learning (Part 2)

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Choreography is simply defined in that it is a system to establish where everyone in a program is, when they are doing what they need to do and how they move about in relationship to each other. As well, it defines why everyone does what they do when they do it. The overall strategy is to coordinate the physical environment with varied curriculum and individual student schedules with staff schedules so that resources of materials, space and people are evenly distributed.

There are basically eight steps for planning the master schedule, thus the choreography of an entire classroom.

1. Structure the physical environment, individual schedules and teaching methods, teach students to participate in as independent a way as possible and ensure that everyone is comfortable with the areas of the room, how the room operates and how they fit into the picture of the room. Of course this is a simplified statement of a very involved and pervasive classroom management and instructional approach. Please remember that this article does not provide the specifics on this part of your program, but assumes your expertise at it.
2. Collect individual schedules and develop a grid of the day. Divide the hours of programming into short blocks of time that most closely aligns with the instructional blocks and transition times of the building.
3. Fill in times students are out of the room for other “non-negotiable” activities
4. Fill in times that are “non-negotiable” for the classroom or class as a whole
5. Pencil in “negotiable” times with other people such as speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, community outings, etc.
6. Plug in group times when groupings are in the classroom and can be grouped to work on similar goals (while these will likely have to shift some, try to negotiate with your related service providers to encourage them to be flexible so you can protect some larger group work)
7. Plug in individual work times when students are working independently and balance activities referring to the key concepts of TEACCH, previously summarized.
8. Plan for staff choreography within the structure of your large schedule. Plug in staff to work with students according to their (staff) strengths, but allowing for some element of rotation so students work to generalize skills across adults and everyone has a more complete perspective on each student.

Included is a sample one-day schedule for a classroom with 7 students, one teacher and one assistant. At first glance, the schedule might seem overwhelming, as it also can be when put into practice in the classroom. (To see the sample, go to [Schedule_self_contained_class.pdf](#))

Another vexing issue for the classroom is how to balance the individual programming needs of one or two students who participate within the general classroom. This is a challenge that must be faced by teachers of students at all grades. The following are some suggestions for how to do this and an outline of procedures to use for effectively planning for inclusion that meets all the student’s needs. As well, there is a sample schedule for the general education classroom reflecting the individual adjustments for a student with autism being fully included, but not necessarily with additional staff support. (To see the sample, go to [Schedule_general_ed_class.pdf](#))

For students moving from a self-contained setting to the general classroom:

- Start with small, perhaps tiny blocks of time
- Replicate some aspects of the self-contained setting, for instance use the same schedules, a work station that looks exactly the same, and definitely similar vocabulary
- Consider having the student go from the self-contained room to the general education classroom for JUST his/her independent work time at first. This gives the student a chance to get used to the room while not having to deal with so much social interaction, which can be overwhelming and stressful. In this case, the student would walk in, go to the work station, complete work and immediately return to the self-contained classroom.
- Build a student's time in the general education classroom through small tasks, leaving those requiring more and more interaction until s/he is comfortable with the room and teacher.

For students in the general classroom needing to have more individualized planning:

- It is best to also take small steps. Change only one thing at a time if necessary. This, of course, depends on the student as some can handle several changes at once.
- If you make a change in every block of the day, try to do it at a consistent time of the block. For instance, make the change at the end of each block or at the beginning of each block rather than perhaps at the beginning of one, the end of one, and at varying times in the others.
- Try to make changes of a social nature after making and settling into other changes remembering that social interactions can be very challenging and quite stressful for students with a disability on the continuum.
- When you are making changes like adding an independent work time or movement in the room, first keep the focus on making the change and not on instruction. That is, use this time to help the student learn the new system by having their work be things they have mastered and are quite successful doing.
- Consider creating mini, simplified work systems and structure systems within the general classroom that replicate what we do in the self-contained rooms.
- Consult the schedule of the general education classroom for an organizer for how to integrate individual programming within a larger class.

As with any new approach or strategy, it is critical to give it time. Encourage everyone, including yourself, to give the new schedule at least two weeks unless there are glaring problems that cannot wait to be addressed. If there are, address them right away by making changes in the schedule, but do not abandon the schedule. When the times work, let the schedule rest for at least two weeks before making any decisions about how things are going. Even two weeks will not be enough unless everyone has learned the system and can move about independently. This is a fabulous organization tool and can offer many rewards in the

form of less boredom, increased student independence, more focused and appropriate work toward individual student goals. Teaching that meets all of these goals can be very rewarding and likewise, learning that does the same can be extremely reinforcing for your students!

Students feel successful, they recognize the validity of their work, they have less stress, tend to be more motivated and are more productive. For more information, search the TEACCH website at <http://www.TEACCH.com> or contact the author at fogusbe@jmu.edu.

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