

Teaching Students with

AUTISM



SUPPORTING BELONGING | PARTICIPATION | LEARNING



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Introduction



Introduction

When educators learn they will have a student with autism in class or will be serving on a student's IEP team, many thoughts may come to mind: How will I establish a relationship with a student who lives in his own world, unaware of the feelings or thoughts of others? What should I do if she persistently repeats certain words or gestures? If he doesn't speak, how will I know what he needs, wants or thinks? Will intellectual deficits get in the way of her learning the curriculum? How will other students react? Where will I find the extra time to give this student what he needs?

These common questions and concerns reflect the formal diagnostic criteria for autism, which include these behaviors:

- Marked impairments in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body posture and gestures to regulate social interaction
- Poor peer relationships
- Lack of interest in sharing enjoyment, interests or achievements with others
- Delay in or total lack of development of natural speech
- Stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language
- Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities
- Inflexible adherence to specific nonfunctional routines or rituals

Simply reading these descriptions can make educators apprehensive about working with students with autism, but the descriptions don't tell the whole story. This guide presents a new perspective of students with autism—one that acknowledges their strengths, unique interests, and commonalities with other students. This more accurate and optimistic view of the possibilities for learning and future adult lives is consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This 2004 landmark law describes

Inclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice.... Inclusion demands that we ask, what kind of world do we want to create?... What kinds of skills and commitment do people need to thrive in diverse society? By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for all of us.

—Mara Sapon-Shevin
professor of inclusive education
Syracuse University

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disability as “a natural part of the human experience [that] in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society,” and it affirms that “education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by...having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible.”

This new view aligns with the values of a pluralistic society that embraces all members and emphasizes that general education teachers—in collaboration with other school staff—can successfully teach students with autism. This positive viewpoint also matches the experiences of the experts—people with autism and their allies.

Assumptions that underlie this guide

This guide is based on three key assumptions. The first is that one student with autism does not represent all students with autism. In other words, educators should not assume all students with autism are the same just because they have the same label.

Second, educators want the best for all of their students. The National Education Association (NEA) code of ethics describes this commitment: “The educator strives to help each student realize his or her potential as a worthy and effective member of society. The educator therefore works to stimulate the spirit of inquiry, the acquisition of knowledge and understanding and the thoughtful formulation of worthy goals.”

The third assumption is that educators working with an increasingly diverse student body need ample support in the form of professional development, appropriate class sizes, up-to-date materials and technology, and time for planning and reflection as well as collaboration with others. These supports are essential when students with autism or other disabilities are part of a general education classroom.

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A few words about terminology

Some autistic adults advocate for the use of identity-first language—*autistic person*, for example—because they see autism as the central part of who they are. This guide, however, uses people-first language—*students with autism*, for example—to emphasize that autism is part of their identities and that they have more similarities than differences with classmates without disabilities. Not sure which term to use? Think of people-first language as the default, but do honor the preferences of individual people with autism.

The terms inclusion and inclusive education are used throughout this guide. Here's what we mean by inclusion: all students are valued members of age-appropriate general education classrooms who have reciprocal social relationships, actively participate in general education instruction, and receive the supports they need to learn general education content and other skills. The goal is to enable all students to be career and college ready at graduation.

Ryndak and Wehmeyer (2008/2009) made a case for inclusive education as a research based practice and concluded:

placement in age- and grade-appropriate general education contexts and having special and general educators team to provide supports and modifications for all students are first-order research-based practice, and that the benefits of proven methods of instruction are realized in the long run only when this first step is implemented in the life of a child.

Many studies have identified the benefits of inclusion for students with autism and other significant disabilities, including these:

- Higher expectations for student learning
(Jorgensen, McSheehan, and Sonnenmeier 2007)
- Heightened engagement, affective demeanor and participation in integrated social activities
(Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, and Goetz 1994)
- Improved communication and social skills
(Beukelman and Mirenda 2005; Fisher and Meyer 2002; McSheehan, Sonnenmeier and Jorgensen 2009; Soto, Muller, Hunt, and Goetz 2001)

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- More satisfying and diverse social relationships
(Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman, and Kinnish 1996)
- Optimal access to the general education curriculum
(Jorgensen, McSheehan, and Sonnenmeier 2010; Wehmeyer and Agran 2006)
- Improved academic outcomes
(Cole, Waldron, and Majd 2004; Ryndak, Alper, Ward, Storch, and Montgomery 2010; Ryndak, Morrison, and Sommerstein 1999)
- Improved adult outcomes in the areas of post-secondary education, employment, and independence
(White and Weiner 2004)
- Better quality Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
(Hunt and Farron-Davis 1992)
- Fewer absences from school and referrals for disruptive behavior
(Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, and Sampson-Saul 1998)
- Achievement of more IEP goals
(Brinker and Thorpe 1984)

Research also shows benefits of inclusion for students without disabilities, including improved attitudes towards diversity (Finke, McNaughton, and Drager 2009); unique opportunities for learning about prejudice and equity (Fisher, Sax, and Jorgensen 1998); and improved educational outcomes for all students when inclusion was the primary school reform (Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis 2010).

NEA strongly advocates for appropriate inclusion:

The National Education Association is committed to equal educational opportunity, the highest quality education and a safe learning environment for all students. The Association supports and encourages appropriate inclusion. Appropriate inclusion is characterized by practices and programs which provide for the following on a sustained basis.

- A full continuum of placement options and services within each option. Placement and services must be determined for each student by a team that includes all stakeholders and must be specified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

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- Appropriate professional development, as part of normal work activity, of all educators and support staff associated with such programs. Appropriate training must also be provided for administrators, parents, and other stakeholders.
- Adequate time, as part of the normal school day, to engage in coordinated and collaborative planning on behalf of all students.
- Class sizes that are responsive to student needs.
- Staff and technical assistance that is specifically appropriate to student and educator needs.

Another set of terms used in this guide relates to large scale assessments for accountability purposes under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (2001)—also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Most students participate in their state’s general assessment based on general education content and achievement standards. Some students with disabilities participate in that same assessment but with accommodations that do not change the construct being assessed or its rigor. Accommodations include supports such as receiving additional time to complete the test, taking the test in a different location, having the font of the assessment text enlarged, and having the nonreading portions of the test read aloud. Students with significant cognitive disabilities may be eligible to participate in an alternate assessment based on alternate achievement standards that are aligned with the general education grade level standards but reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. There is no limit to the number of students in a school who may participate in the alternate assessment, but only 1 percent of all students scoring proficient on an alternate assessment may be counted towards a school’s adequate yearly progress (AYP).

Another important term used in this guide is augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), which comes into play when children or adults cannot use speech to communicate effectively in all situations. It includes all forms of communication—other than oral speech—that are used to express thoughts, needs, wants and ideas. We all use AAC when we make facial expressions or gestures, use symbols or pictures, or write. There are two types

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of AAC systems: unaided and aided. Unaided AAC systems rely on students using only their bodies to convey messages, such as using gestures, body language, and/or sign language. Aided AAC systems require the use of tools or equipment, such as paper and pencil, communication books or boards, or devices that produce voice and/or written output. Electronic communication aids allow the person to use picture symbols, letters and/or words and phrases to create messages that are spoken via digital or synthesized computer voices. Best practices in AAC are based on the premise that all students communicate, and if they cannot communicate in ways commensurate with their nondisabled classmates, they can benefit from AAC. There are no cognitive, movement, or behavioral prerequisites to students learning to use AAC.

The purpose of this guide

This guide is not an all-encompassing blueprint for educating students with autism. Rather, it is a brief summary of how K-12 educators might think differently about students with autism, capitalize on their strengths, provide supports to address their challenges, and facilitate positive social relationships among students with and without autism. Each chapter summarizes important ideas and provides links to supplemental material.

The guide emphasizes the importance of educators and other school staff working in cohesive teams rather than general education teachers working in isolation. The roles of educators, related service providers (i.e., speech-language pathologist¹ [SLP], occupational therapist [OT]); families; and students themselves are described. Step-by-step templates are provided to guide the design of instruction that accommodates all students and develops individualized supports for students who need them. Information related to preschoolers and students ages 18-21 is included in several places in the guide.

¹In some states and for some students identified as having a speech-language disability, speech language pathologists may serve in the role of special educator.

Chapter 1

New Views of Students with Autism



New Views of Students with Autism

He's a biter.... She's a runner.... He is non-verbal.... She's off in her own world.... There's nothing really there, there.... He is difficult to be friends with because all he talks about are train schedules.

You may have heard one or more of these (or like) statements to describe students with autism, so it's important to note that language and descriptions have changed in the years since the term autism was first used in 1943. This chapter identifies some old ways of thinking about autism and offers a newer perspective that can help promote better educational and life outcomes for students with autism.

Traditional view 1: Autism is a serious neurological abnormality, and the optimal outcome is to be cured.

This view is embodied in the term autism spectrum disorders. Most research dollars spent on autism over the last 20 years have focused on finding causes and cures. Judy Endow, autistic speaker and blogger, Estee Klar, parent of a child with autism, and Ari Ne'eman, an autistic leader appointed by President Obama to the National Council on Disability, provide different perspectives.

Traditional view 2: Most people with autism have intellectual disabilities.

An often cited statistic is that 75 percent of people with autism have mental retardation (the more accepted term is intellectual disability). The tests typically used to substantiate this statistic—the Wechsler Intelligence Scales—rely heavily on language, social interaction, and cultural knowledge, areas that many people with autism find difficult. In 2006, Meredyth Goldberg Edelson, a professor of psychology at Willamette University in Oregon, reviewed 215 articles published over the past 71 years, all making or referring to a link between autism and intellectual disabilities. She found that 74 percent of the papers lacked their own research data to back up the assumption. Some 39 percent of the articles were based on no data at all, and even the more rigorous studies often used questionable measures

Autism is a normal way of being for a very small number of people.

—Judy Endow
autistic speaker and blogger

Words used to describe autistic people as 'hiccups' and a series of 'fouled up genes' perpetuate negative views about autism in our society. These views are not universal among autistic people or their families.... [Many people believe] that autism is a 'bad,' or a 'wrong' way to be human. Therefore, we are basing the research into the genetics of autism upon a premise of prejudice. I would encourage a dialogue that includes autistic people, autistic voices and knowledge of autistic pride and contribution to society, which has been rich and plentiful.

—Estee Klar
<http://taap.org>

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of intelligence. Despite the growing number of autism researchers and people with autism questioning these statistics, the field is still sharply divided on this question.

As educators we may not be qualified to evaluate the highly technical research in this area, but our beliefs about our students' intellectual abilities certainly influence the decisions we make every day in the classroom. A decision-making principle called "the least dangerous assumption," first coined by researcher Anne Donnellan (1984), is a useful way to think about this issue. According to Donnellan, "The criterion of the least dangerous assumption says that in the absence of conclusive data, we should make decisions based on assumptions that will have the least dangerous consequences to our students—in case we are wrong about those assumptions." So, for example, if we assume a student has an intellectual disability and point to poor performance in school or on an IQ test as proof, and then someday discover that assumption was wrong, has any harm been done? Conversely, if we assume that a student is competent, develop an educational program based on that assumption, and then someday discover that our assumption of competence was wrong, has any harm been done? Avoiding the most harmful consequences of incorrect assumptions requires a new perspective: we should presume all students' competence and work diligently to discover it.

The Autism Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) seeks to organize the community of Autistic adults and youth to have our voices heard in the national conversation about us. In addition, ASAN seeks to advance the idea of neurological diversity, putting forward the concept that the goal of autism advocacy should not be a world without Autistic people. Instead, it should be a world in which Autistic people enjoy the same access, rights and opportunities as all other citizens.

—Ari Ne'eman

<http://autisticadvocacy.org>

Traditional view 3: Most behaviors associated with autism are problematic.

The following behaviors are distressing for some parents and educators:

- Perseveration or doing the same thing over and over
- Gestures such as flapping the hands, flicking fingers in front of the eyes, or avoiding eye contact
- Behavior that harms the student or other students, staff, or family members
- Refusal to do tasks or running away
- Having an extremely narrow set of interests

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Sometimes school personnel see such behaviors as meaningless, stigmatizing, or defiant and try to eliminate them before attempting to understand if they serve a purpose. A different approach is to think about the behaviors from the student's perspective. Intensely focusing on a single topic might simply be a preference. Perseveration of one movement could be a form of self-comforting, or it could be due to apraxia—difficulties with translating thoughts and intentions into movement or speech. Some youth and adults with autism say that they flap their hands, flutter their fingers, or make other gestures to express excitement; regulate the amount of sensory stimuli they receive from the environment (noise, light, color, music, movement of people and objects); or reduce anxiety.

If students actually hurt themselves or others, those behaviors serve as warning signs that something is wrong. Students could be feeling sick, anxious, or lonely; frustrated by difficulty in communicating; or reacting to the sense they have no control over their lives.

Traditional view 4: Intense interests and fascinations are limiting.

Perhaps you have known children or adults with autism who have very intense interests in one subject. A student named Ghalib was fascinated with washing machines. He loved to read about them, draw pictures of them, take them apart, feel the vibration during the spin cycle, and he especially loved visiting the laundromat. Rather than try to extinguish this interest, his mother decided to help him become even more knowledgeable about his chosen subject. Why? She recognized her son was incredibly happy and more open to learning when he was doing something related to washing machines. She realized he could learn reading, writing, math, and even some science through this interest. While she was concerned he might not learn history or other important subjects, she felt her son would continue to grow and learn and thrive if he were allowed to pursue this interest. As Ghalib got older, his fascination with washing machines continued, but gradually he began to develop similar interests in other kinds of machines. Ghalib, who has been fully included in a general education class in his neighborhood

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school for the last 11 years, will be a senior next year. His mom is looking forward to helping him decide what he wants to do after graduation. While some assume he will become a mechanic, she thinks a career in the arts might be a good match for his creative nature as his washing machine drawings have already won prizes in regional art contests.

Researcher Paula Kluth, who writes about inclusive education and students with autism, says, "I have worked with students interested in Korea, vacuum cleaners, screwdrivers, dogs, stop signs, churches, weathervanes, triangles, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Scooby Doo*, and basketball. Any of these interests might be used as part of a classroom curriculum. A student who loves trains might be asked to write a story about riding on a caboose, encouraged to research different railroads on the Internet, or directed to do an independent research project on ground transportation in America."

<http://paulakluth.org>

Chapter 2

Welcome to Room 23: Creating an Inviting Classroom



Welcome to Room 23: Creating an Inviting Classroom

The first days and weeks of the school year are exciting for all students as they meet their new teachers, settle into the classroom routine, learn what's expected, and begin developing relationships with classmates. Educators want to make every child feel welcome, so here are some simple steps educators can use to ease the transition for a student with autism.

Start the year right

- Before the school year begins, invite the student and her parents to visit the classroom and tour the school. If possible, make desk assignments early, put the student's name on her desk, and point it out. If your classroom is set up in sections, talk about what happens in each. If appropriate, plan a short activity with your new student. Following the student's lead, you might decide to read a book, watch a video, or enjoy some artwork together. If you know that the student will be in several classrooms each day, arrange the visit so that she can practice going from one classroom to the next. Preschool educators can demonstrate what happens in the individual classroom centers, point out the location of the bathroom, and visit the playground. Educators who work with students ages 18-21 can help them become acclimated to a future job site or practice taking public transportation to get there.
- Ask the student's parents or previous IEP team members about visual supports. You might decide to use colored tape on the floor to outline the student's personal desk space or set up color-coded signs to designate different classroom work areas.
- Find out if there are tools or equipment that can help your student maintain her focus—things such as adaptive chairs, chew tools (to address the need for oral-motor stimulation), weighted blankets to help the student regulate her sensory system, etc.
- Make sure the student has the same symbols of belonging as other students. Give her a cubby or locker, and call her name during attendance.
- Find out if your student has a particular area of interest so you can find books, Web sites, or DVDs on those topics.

Welcome to Room 23: Creating an Inviting Classroom

Build a classroom community that values diversity

All students belong to communities: their families, neighborhoods, places of worship, clubs and sports groups, school and classroom. The classroom is an especially important community, and it should feel welcoming to all. Here are a few activities that acknowledge diversity and foster inclusiveness:

We all fit together puzzle

(adapted from Rachel Friedrich at Sub Hub)

<http://subhubonline.blogspot.com>

1. On a blank poster board, use a marker to outline puzzle shapes, making sure to create enough pieces for each person in the classroom. Cut out the puzzle pieces and hand one to each student.
2. Ask students to decorate them, write their names on them, and add some phrases to describe themselves. If there are nonwriters in the class, offer them pictures or graphics that illustrate different cultures, activities, and interests that they can attach to the puzzle pieces.
3. Fit all the pieces together and mount them on poster board.
4. Gather students to look at the completed puzzle and create a list of "how we are alike" and "how we are different."

Power line

(adapted from www.makingiteducator.com/2012/07/special-guest-post-new-monthly-feature.html)

This activity gets students talking and learning about one another as a whole group. Create a visual continuum from *dislike* → *love* using tape on the floor with hash marks and descriptive words, signs on the walls, or cartoon faces depicting points on the continuum. Call out a word and ask students to quietly walk to the place on the continuum that expresses their feelings about that word. Start

Welcome to Room 23: Creating an Inviting Classroom

with easy things like foods, sports, or songs. Once movement has stopped and the line is set, let a few students talk about where they are in line and why. Switch topics. Try favorite activities, books, or places to visit. See where students stand. As the year goes on and students become more comfortable with one another, change the continuum scale from *dislike* → *love to strongly agree* → *strongly disagree* and ask students to take a stand on questions like “Should the cafeteria allow students to buy soda?” or “Should a sports figure who has been accused of using performance enhancing drugs be stripped of his Olympic medals?”

Talking about disability

Educators often ask, “Do I—or how do I—talk about disability? I don’t want to make students feel uncomfortable, but I think it helps when students understand each others’ learning styles, strengths, and need for support. If I have a student with autism in my class, will *not* talking about autism just be the elephant in the room?”

There are different ways to approach this dilemma. Your own knowledge and comfort level, combined with student and family preferences, will help you decide. Here are some ideas to consider.

Know the law: There are laws to protect the privacy of your students and their families and you should be well informed about how those policies impact your role as an educator.

Ask about and honor student and parent preferences:

Some young people are reluctant to talk about their disability, some don’t see their challenges as greater than those of kids without disabilities, and others have mixed feelings. The next chapter discusses how you can empower your students to be proud of themselves, believe they can achieve their goals, and advocate for themselves—in social relationships, in school and into adult life.

Explore your own feelings about disability: We all bring our personal history and experiences with us into the classroom. If a member of your family had a disability, how you interacted

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with that person helped shape your thinking and feelings. Take time to reflect on your past and see how/if those experiences are playing out in your current interactions with students and families. If you have never had a relationship with a person with autism, it might be beneficial to seek out that opportunity.

Thomas Armstrong, the respected author and scholar who heads the American Institute for Learning and Human Development, has written two books for educators that portray autism and other brain-based differences as natural parts of human diversity. The first is *Neurodiversity: Discovering the Extraordinary Gifts of Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Brain Differences*; the second is *Neurodiversity in the Classroom: Strength-Based Strategies to Help Students with Special Needs Succeed in School and Life*. www.ascd.org/Publications/Books/Overview/Neurodiversity-in-the-Classroom.aspx

Learn from people with autism

People with autism have different perspectives on their disability. Some adults might wish they could snap their fingers and make it go away. Others take pride in their identities based on growing self-knowledge, self-advocacy, and a commitment to advocating for others. Temple Grandin is perhaps the most familiar public figure with autism. Her books provide a glimpse into how she thinks about the condition and the strategies she uses to live a full life as an autistic woman. www.templegrandin.com

Another person who expresses pride in her identity is Judy Endow, a writer, artist, and parent who offers workshops for educators to help them understand the perspective of an autistic person. Her Web site is a valuable resource: www.judyendow.com

The Autism Acceptance Project <http://taaproject.com>, the Autism Self Advocacy Network <http://autisticadvocacy.org>, and AUTCOM www.autcom.org/articles/CriteriaForInclusion.html are all run by people with autism for people with autism and their allies.

Welcome to Room 23: Creating an Inviting Classroom

There are several films that portray people with autism as multifaceted and competent. *Wretches and Jabberers* follows two men with autism on a trip to Sri Lanka, Japan, and Finland on a “global quest to change attitudes about disability and intelligence.”
www.wretchesandjabberers.org/about.php

We Thought You’d Never Ask: Voices of People with Autism is a short documentary of people with autism talking about how they see the world and themselves.
www.iodbookstore.org/products/We-Thought-You%27d-Never-Ask%3A-Voices-of-People-with-Autism-%28DVD%29.html

Inside the Edge: The Journey to Speech through Typing tells how Jamie Burke developed language and literacy skills. His family had high expectations, he was included in general education classes, and he found his voice by learning to type.
http://soe.syr.edu/centers_institutes/institute_communication_inclusion/About_the_ICI/Videos.aspx

Here are three books for opening the conversation about autism with students:

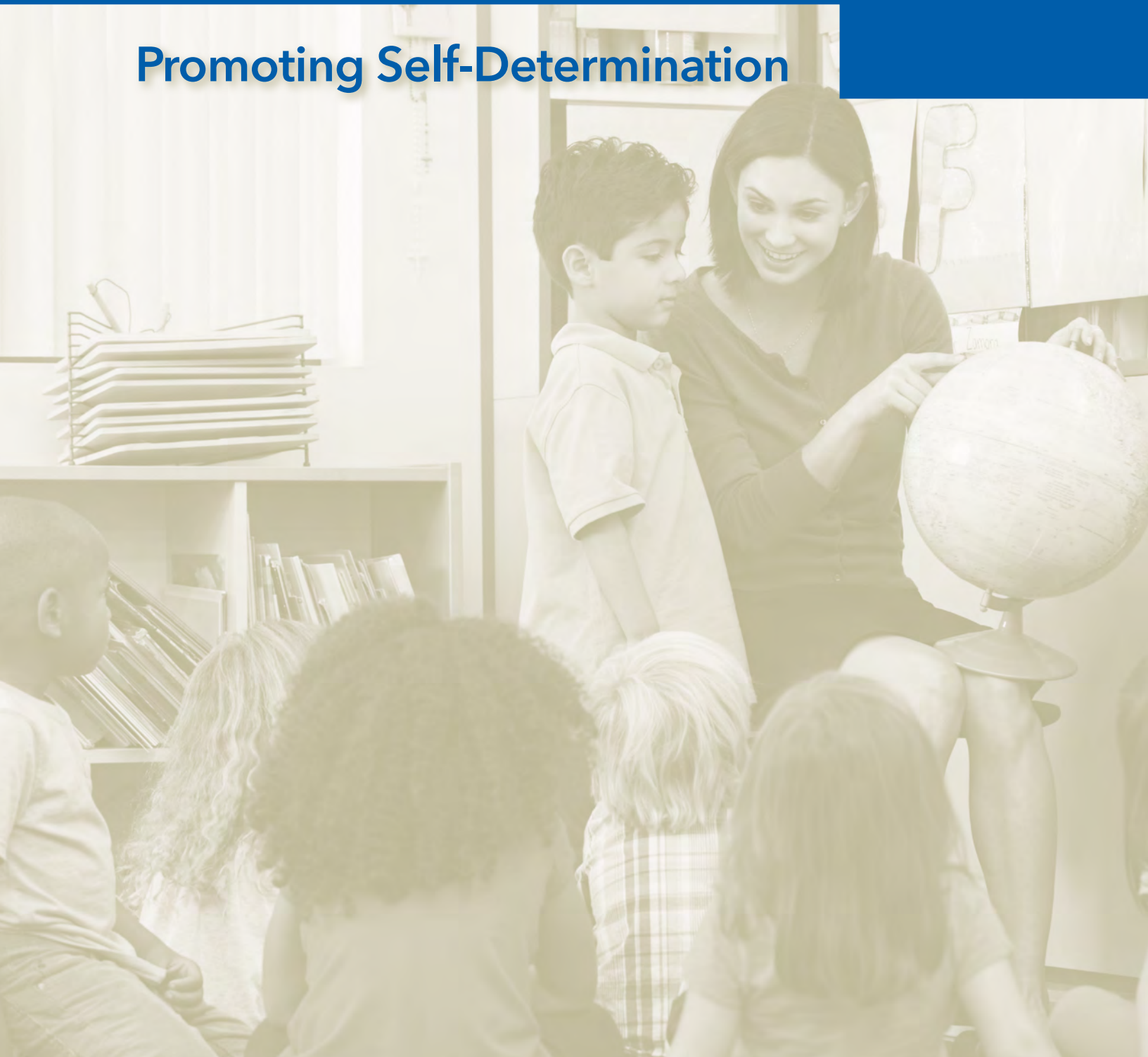
For young children: *Ian’s Walk: A Story about Autism*
www.amazon.com/Ians-Walk-Story-about-Autism/dp/0807534811

For middle school students: *How to Talk to an Autistic Kid*
www.amazon.com/How-Talk-Autistic-Daniel-Stefanski/dp/1575423650

For high school students: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
www.amazon.com/The-Curious-Incident-Dog-Night-Time/dp/1400032717

Chapter 3

Promoting Self-Determination



Promoting Self-Determination

Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities that enable people to have control in their lives. It means making choices, learning to solve problems, and taking responsibility for one's life. It is not necessarily the same thing as self-sufficiency or independence. Students with disabilities may need extra help to develop self-determination skills; it's important to build on their strengths and help them better understand their needs. Educators can help prepare students for adult life by providing opportunities for students to learn and practice the developmental components of self-determination:

- Learning to make choices
- Learning to make decisions
- Problem-solving, self-observation, self-evaluation, and reinforcement
- Self-instruction
- Believing oneself to be effective and expecting certain outcomes
- Awareness and knowledge of self
- Self-advocacy skills

Here are examples of how educators can help students acquire the dispositions and skills needed for self-determination.

- Offer students choices in learning materials, activities, books, extracurricular involvement, who to seek out for developing friendships, and even how they are provided with supports.
- Help students identify and solve problems and work toward their goals. The first step is for students to know and be able to communicate their interests. The second step is to teach them about goals and possible barriers to achieving them. The third step is to guide students in developing a goal along with a plan to achieve it. It's important that students evaluate their progress and determine next steps. Educators can work these skills into the curriculum by having students set learning goals for themselves for each unit of study. At the end of the unit, educators can

Promoting Self-Determination

encourage them to reflect on whether they met their goals, what they might have done more effectively, and what they will try to do better next time.

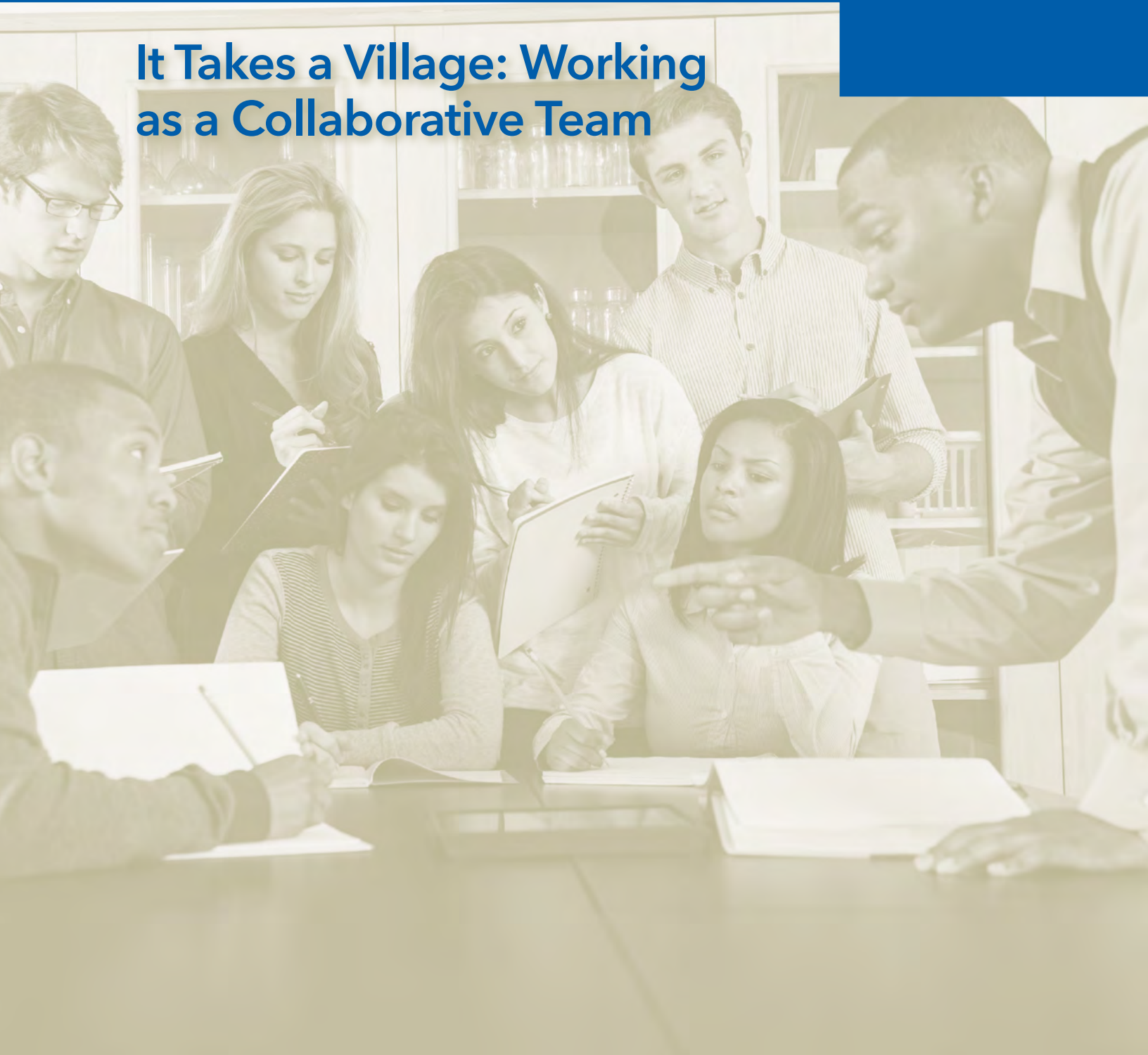
- Provide opportunities for students to take “safe” risks and to be resilient in the face of disappointment or failure.
- Empower students by helping them develop awareness of both their strengths and the things they find challenging. One way to identify talent areas and learning styles is to have all students complete multiple intelligences self-inventories to identify their talents and learning styles. www.bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/resources_frp/client_ftp/ks3/ict/multiple_int/questions/choose_lang.cfm

Perhaps the most important way to promote self-determination is to give students a voice, permission, and the skills to speak up for themselves. Every student with autism should know how to deal with bullying and with prejudice. Resources that are particularly useful in helping students with autism become self-determined include:

- *Healthy Mind-Sets for Super Kids*
www.jkp.com/catalogue/book/9781849053150
- *Freaks, Geeks, and Asperger's Syndrome*
www.amazon.com/Freaks-Geeks-Asperger-Syndrome-Adolescence/dp/1843100983/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1362790805&sr=1-1&keywords=geeks+freaks+and+aspergers
- *Asperger's: What Does It Mean to Me?*
www.amazon.com/Aspergers-What-Does-Mean-Me/dp/1885477597

Chapter 4

It Takes a Village: Working as a Collaborative Team



It Takes a Village: Working as a Collaborative Team

Working together effectively as a team is essential to educate successfully students with autism. Here are five key ideas that can help clarify roles and responsibilities, make team meetings productive, and improve learning outcomes for students with autism:

Key idea 1: The general educator is the primary teacher of the student with autism.

A recent observation of a student with autism in a fourth grade classroom illustrates the importance of this first key idea. When a small group of students without disabilities was asked, "Who is Phan's educator?" they all pointed to the special educator who came into the classroom for a short time each day rather than the general education teacher with whom Phan spent most of his day. When the students were asked "Who is Mr. Rendell?" (Phan's paraprofessional), they said, "He's Phan's dad!" General education teachers are vitally important in the lives of students with autism. They communicate to students that they are valued members of the classroom community. They are the experts at teaching the general education curriculum. They model attitudes and values that will stay with children their whole lives; qualities such as caring, cooperation, citizenship, love of learning, and respect for each person's unique gifts.

Key idea 2: Tap into the knowledge and insight of students and their families.

If you want to know what to get your niece for her birthday, whom do you ask? Of course you ask her! And if she can't tell you, you ask her parents or siblings, the people who know her best. The premise is the same here. Students with autism have lived with their disability for years, and their family members have years of experience living with and loving the student with autism. They appreciate being invited to be full partners on the IEP team.

During the IEP development process, you can involve the student by having him:

- Describe what he's good at and in which areas he needs help.
- List the subjects or issues that most interest him.

I work with a team of dedicated professionals that meets weekly to plan for our student with autism. We incorporate communication, sensory, motor, behavior, and specific educational goals into upcoming units of study. When new worksheets, AAC programing, or pre-teaching needs to occur we 'divide and conquer' so that the work doesn't always fall onto one person.

—Holly Prud'homme
1st/2nd grade teacher

We talked a lot about the value for Amro of being in our school and learning from others. However, we also discovered that students and adults learned much from him. We learned what it meant to be inclusive and how to find value in everyone.

—Jennifer Fischer-Mueller
10th grade science teacher

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- Talk about his preferred learning style.
- Discuss how he likes—and does not like—to receive help and support.
- Brainstorm what helps him feel comforted when he's feeling overwhelmed and anxious.
- Involve parents as you develop the IEP rather than simply asking them to sign a nearly finalized draft. Send them a copy of the grade-level academic standards and ask them to prioritize them to inform the annual goal-setting process.
- Invite parents and their child with autism to visit your classroom before the school year begins. Describe your daily routines and behavioral expectations.
- Assign the student a desk and ask her parents to send in personal items to make the student more comfortable during the first few weeks of the school year.
- Ask parents to point out possible triggers in the classroom, especially those related to noise, light, texture, and smell.
- Determine how you and your student's parents can best communicate.
- Share positive anecdotes and samples of their child's work.

As the year unfolds, more opportunities will arise for you to work in partnership with students and their parents. You can include students in discussions about how to support their pro-social behavior or how to meet a learning challenge. Involving them in this way helps build advocacy and self-determination skills. You can ask parents to let you know what the child did over the weekend. That information that could help start conversations at school or identify vocabulary and messages that should be programmed on a student's communication device. Encourage parents occasionally to

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share photos of the student's activities or ask about places they have visited. These nuggets of information can be used as story-starters or to help make connections between the classroom and students' real-life experiences.

Key idea 3: The primary role of all team members is to enable the student to fully participate in instruction led by the general education teacher.

When students with autism are educated primarily in self-contained classrooms or separate schools, general education teachers have little influence on those students' education. When a student with autism becomes a member of a general education classroom, that teacher's role, and that of other team members, changes dramatically. Here are a few examples.

General education teachers

- Welcome all students as members of their classroom.
- Use Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to design accessible curriculum and instruction for all students.
- Share responsibility for creating accessible materials for all students.
- Participate in regularly scheduled team meetings to plan instruction and supports.
- Collaborate with special educators to grade students with disabilities.
- Communicate to parents of students with autism the same information that they communicate to other parents, including dates of field trips, drama club auditions, or sports tryouts.

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Special education teachers

- Serve primarily as coeducators or inclusion facilitators.
- Facilitate the development of students' IEPs based on general education standards and the functional skills needed for full participation in school and transition to an inclusive life in the community.
- Facilitate regularly scheduled instructional planning meetings to design supports for students' full participation in general education instruction.
- Share responsibility for creating instructional materials for all students and adapted materials for some students.
- Support the team to follow the legal and regulatory provisions of special education law.

Speech-language pathologists

(when serving in the role of related service provider)

- Follow the guidelines of the profession regarding evidence-based practices for students with autism, particularly those who use AAC.
- Write IEP goals and objectives that prioritize skills needed for students to fully participate in general education instruction and establish and maintain reciprocal social relationships.
- Integrate their services within typical general education instructional routines and typical social activities.

In schools that have adopted a multi-tiered system of support for behavior and/or academics (such as Response to Intervention), all team members might provide instruction for students at all levels of the intervention model. Some students with autism might need level 2 or level 3 interventions, but all levels of intervention can be conducted in general education classrooms or other locations open to all students, not just those with disabilities.

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Key idea 4: Team meetings are more effective when they follow a well-defined agenda.

A weekly hour-long team meeting is optimal to plan for students with autism who face learning, communication, sensory, social, and behavioral challenges. To make the best use of everyone's time and encourage sharing of good ideas, develop a well-thought out agenda. To ensure your meetings achieve the best possible results:

- Establish a clear purpose and desired outcomes for meetings.
- Use a meeting space that facilitates collaboration without interruption.
- Create an agenda appropriate to the meeting purpose that includes time limits for each discussion item (a downloadable template is available in Jorgensen, McSheehan, and Sonnenmeier, 2010, 155-157).
- Identify the essential participants and ensure their presence.
- Rotate the process roles (e.g., facilitator, notetaker, timekeeper).

During these meetings, general educators should provide the following information.

- What learning standards will be addressed next week or in the next unit
- What vocabulary will be taught
- What materials and/or technology will be used
- What instructional strategies and groupings will be used
- What assessments will be given

With a broad instructional framework, the team can then plan for the individualized supports the student needs to fully participate and learn. A sample team meeting agenda is included in Appendix A.

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Finding time to meet is not always easy, particularly if the school's master schedule was not created with this planning time in mind. Regular meetings are more than a good idea; collaborative teaming has been shown to improve learning for students with autism and other disabilities, so be creative as you look for common planning time. Consider these ideas:

- Rotate a substitute educator throughout the building on the day that planning meetings take place.
- Hold meetings during recess and rotate the responsibility for recess duty (the SLP covers recess for week 1; the OT covers week 2; the general educator covers week 3, etc.).
- Build common planning time into related service providers' service hours.
- Hire substitutes or use trained volunteers to cover duties such as lunchroom and recess.
- Request that the assistant principal, reading specialist, or other certified staff members cover classes or duties during team meetings.
- Bring two classes together to watch a curriculum-related video or hear a guest speaker. That will free up one educator to participate in a planning meeting.
- Ask the special educator or inclusion facilitator at the high school to meet with general education teachers for 15 minutes each week to gather information about upcoming lessons and units. That teacher can then meet for a longer time with the rest of the student's team that includes specialized instructional support personnel (related service providers, reading specialists) and paraeducators to develop support plans and materials for the student.
- Develop a partnership with university programs (e.g., physical and health education, outdoor education, teacher education) and where permitted have experienced interns cover classes.

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Key idea 5: The delivery of special education and related services should take place primarily in the general education classroom, other inclusive activities, and other natural environments.

Consider the following IEP goals: “Timmy will improve the intelligibility of his speech by 50 percent during individual therapy sessions with the speech-language pathologist.” “Je’Nice will improve her writing speed to 50 letters per minute during individual therapy sessions with the occupational therapist.” “Brandon will describe three characteristics of a good friend during a social skills group facilitated by the special educator.”

These are not meaningful or functional goals, and they don’t easily transfer to real-life situations. Research shows that many students with autism do have difficulty transferring skills learned in a highly structured environment to their daily lives. But when supports and services are delivered primarily during typical activities and instruction, student outcomes improve.

For example, Timmy did not use natural speech to communicate and had goals on his IEP related to improving his use of an AAC device. Instead of taking Timmy out of the classroom to work on this goal, the SLP came into a reader’s workshop lesson and offered support to Timmy so he could recite his lines using his communication device. Timmy’s classroom teacher, special education case manager, specialized instructional support personnel (SISP), and his classmates all observed her support method, so when the SLP gradually moved further away from him, Timmy’s classmates knew how to prompt him to say his lines, something they all did for one another.

Another example: In talking with classmates, Tamara had difficulty acknowledging another person’s point of view. What might have been seen as rude behavior—she was monopolizing the conversation—came out of the fact she simply hadn’t learned the skill or importance of taking another person’s perspective. Instead of taking Tamara out of the classroom, the special educator spent

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one class period a week in Tamara's advisory group facilitating small group discussions about current news events. She modeled how to inquire about a classmate's opinion, how to listen attentively without interrupting, and how to ask clarifying and probing questions. Each student in the group was videotaped practicing these skills, and everyone provided constructive feedback during a review of the tapes. It became a learning opportunity for all students in using effective dialogue and debate skills.

Working with preschool and students in transition

This guide was developed primarily for educators and students in K-12th grades, but the core principles and practices work for younger and older students as well. Developmentally appropriate preschools use many different modes of instruction and participation: centers, art, dramatic play, and music. Educators can make these activities universally accessible following UDL guidelines, but the most important task is to ensure that preschoolers with autism have an effective means of communication. For children who do not use natural speech to communicate, AAC not only promotes their full participation and the development of early literacy skills, but it may actually encourage speech development.

Using UDL principles for post-secondary education, work, and community experiences for students ages 18 to 21 follows the same principles as for K-12 students. A student learning work skills by interning at a fitness club, for example, might need to have front desk materials rewritten at a lower reading level, time built into the schedule for sensory breaks, guidance given on how to greet members and maintain their privacy in the locker room, and a task card describing the steps in doing the laundry. A helpful resource for accessible community-based learning is available from the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center. (NSTTAC).

http://nstattac.org/sites/default/files/Universal_Design_for_Learning_and_Secondary_Transition101.FINAL2.pdf

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Virginia Commonwealth University researcher and faculty member Colleen Thoma and colleagues authored a user-friendly book on UDL and transition.

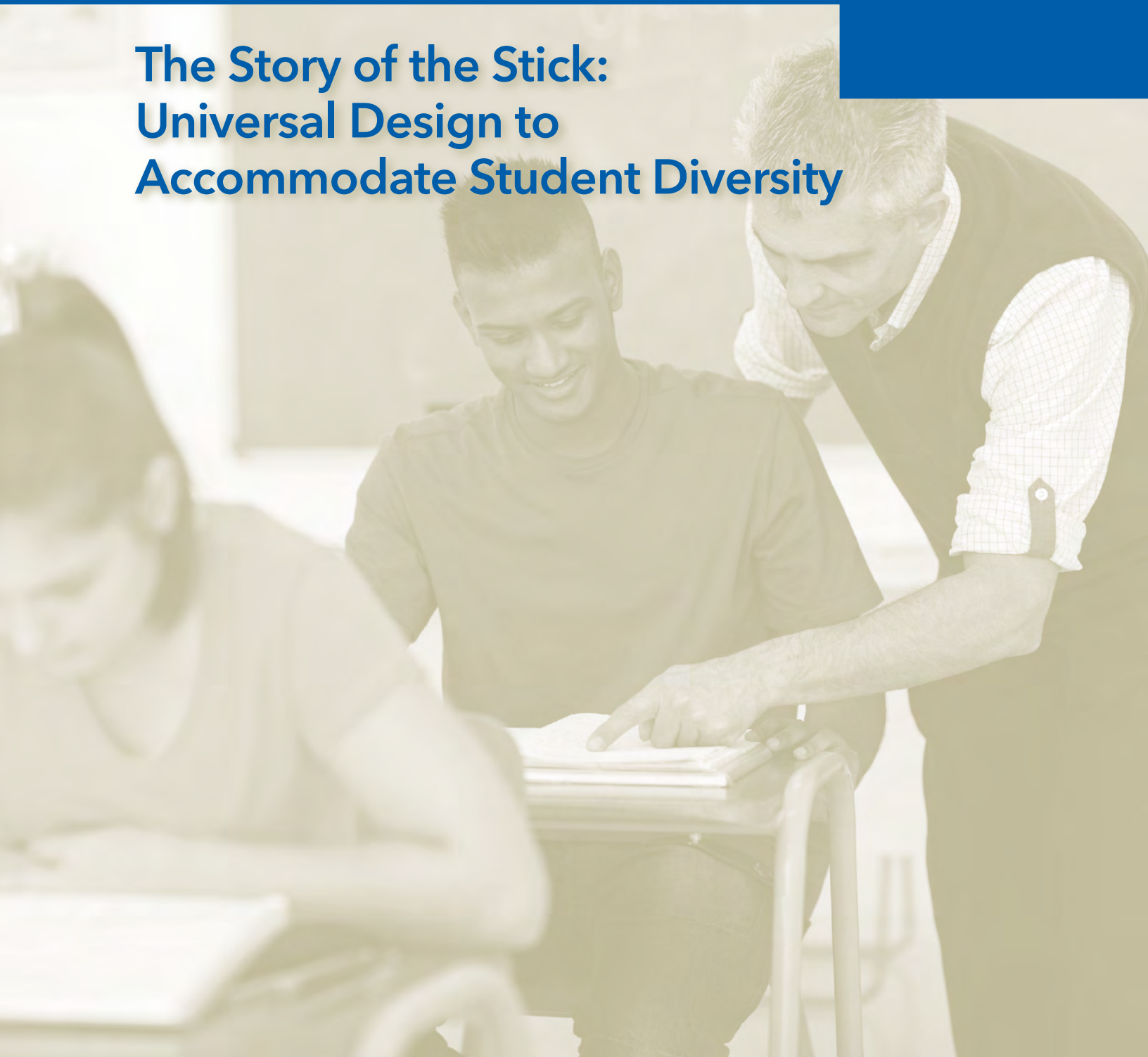
<http://products.brookespublishing.com/Universal-Design-for-Transition-P310.aspx>

Wrap up

Collaborative teaming is essential for teaching students with autism who are members of a general education classroom, and part of the team's responsibility is to identify specific supports for the team in the IEP. For example: "Timmy's team will receive one hour per week of common planning time" and "Timmy's team will receive one hour per month of professional development and consultation on using AAC and assistive technology for reading and writing." When completing the part of the IEP that specifies what services the student will receive and where, it's important that special educators and related service providers factor in time with the student as well as consultation and meeting time with other team members.

Chapter 5

The Story of the Stick: Universal Design to Accommodate Student Diversity



The Story of the Stick: Universal Design to Accommodate Student Diversity

High school science teacher Dan Bisaccio created a unit on environmental science designed to engage all students, including two students with autism. Rather than begin the unit the usual way—"Let's take out our textbooks, turn to Chapter 10, and read the headings"—he led a "grabber," an activity designed to get students excited about the unit.

First, he organized students into groups of 10 and gave each group a partially decomposed tree branch about an inch in diameter and four feet in length. This is what he told his students:

For the next several weeks, we are going to try to answer the question, "Are the New Hampshire forests healthy?" You are probably wondering what this stick has to do with that question. Can anyone think of a situation in science where we study a small thing in order to understand a larger thing? [Three students were called on to respond and gave examples such as "We study atoms to understand matter," "We study cells in order to understand the workings of the human body," and "We study individual planets in order to understand the universe."] We are going to study these sticks to try to understand something about the forests that they came from. For the next few minutes, I would like you to work in your small groups to describe the stick. You should elect someone to record your observations. We'll be sharing them in about seven minutes. The only rule of this activity is that everyone in your group must participate. Any questions? Go!

The students' quickly got into the activity. Their descriptions included words and phrases such as furrowed, part of a whole, patterned, dead, splintered, made of wood, decayed, barkless, soft, and smells musty.

I believe a classroom teacher's job is to differentiate every day to meet the incredibly diverse needs of each and every student in the class, and if you are unwilling to do this then you are in the wrong profession. I know that it is not an easy task or one that can be done quickly. But I also know that with hard work, teamwork, and a positive classroom community it is certainly possible and that the benefits are undeniable.

—Holly Prud'homme
1st/2nd grade teacher

The Story of the Stick: Universal Design to Accommodate Student Diversity

Then Bisaccio asked the students to tell the “story of the stick,” and gave them 10 minutes to work in their small groups. The presentations were lively and varied. In one group, the story was narrated by one student with the other group members taking on the human and nonhuman roles.

One hundred years ago, a Native American girl was walking through the forest when she noticed a fallen tree on the forest floor. She broke off a limb and used it for a walking stick. Before returning to her village, she threw the stick into the river, where it floated to the other side. When the river dried up, bugs made the stick their home and gradually ate through the center, making furrows and tracks along its length.

After each group’s presentation, Bisaccio explained that their stories represented hypotheses or possible explanations for the characteristics that they observed. He wrapped up the first lesson by telling students that the next day they would develop three hypothesis testing ideas and write systematic procedures for each. Students could choose to work alone, in pairs, or in groups of three or four, and they could choose which hypothesis testing plan to follow.

The unit Bisaccio developed unfolded to include field observations in a nearby wooded area; a guest presentation from a New Hampshire forester; reading from a textbook; looking up information on the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands Web site www.nhdf.org/forest-health; and an experiment involving a pristine piece of wood, some bugs, and a terrarium.

The “Story of the Stick” activity effectively involved every student. Those with no prior knowledge of environmental issues could contribute important observations. Students who saw the world from a linguistic perspective and students whose talents were mathematical or logical also had valuable observations. The fact that the activity was fun motivated everyone to participate, and students

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saw right away that everyone's diverse talents and perspectives were important. At the end of the unit, the students again worked together on a performance demonstration that answered the essential question, "Are the New Hampshire forests healthy?" They also took a multiple-choice test and wrote three short-answer responses to questions corresponding to the New Hampshire science standards on which the unit was based.

UDL principles

This unit exemplifies Universal Design for Learning (UDL), that is "a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials and assessments that work for everyone—not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs" (CAST 2013). There are three UDL principles that are based on neuroscience research:

1. UDL supports access to knowledge (recognition networks) by:

- Providing multiple examples
- Highlighting critical features
- Providing multiple media and formats
- Supporting background context

This UDL principle addresses how students gather facts and categorize what they see, hear and read. Identifying letters, words, or an author's style are recognition tasks. For students with autism who have difficulty reading grade-level text for meaning, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that schools provide accessible materials to them at the same time that materials are provided to students without disabilities. These students may receive text written at their reading and comprehension level enhanced with visual features such as a larger font, colored background, more white space between words line, pictures or graphics, and so forth.

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Eun Jung, a student with autism in Bisaccio's class, was skilled at decoding but had difficulty with comprehension. Her educational program was based on general education content and achievement standards, and she participated in her state's general accountability assessment with accommodations. While most other students could get meaning from words-only text, Eun Jung needed to have comprehension supports to enhance her understanding. A text document was adapted for Eun Jung from the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands Web site. Here are the steps that were taken to make this text accessible for her (and for any other student who had difficulty with comprehension):

1. Convert the PDF file to Microsoft Word.
2. Enable the text-to-speech function in Microsoft Word so she could listen to the text read aloud as she read silently.
3. Use color coding to highlight critical features of the text.
4. Use a larger font and more white space between lines.
5. Embed comprehension supports such as word definitions and pictures.

An excerpt from the final adapted document is presented in Appendix B and examples of other kinds of high tech solutions for text accessibility are presented in Chapter 7.

2. UDL supports instruction and demonstration of learning (strategic networks) by:

- Providing flexible models of skilled performance
- Providing opportunities to practice with supports
- Providing multiple media and formats
- Offering flexible opportunities for demonstrating skill

This UDL principle relates to how our students plan and perform tasks and how they organize and express ideas. Writing an essay or solving a math problem are strategic tasks.

The Story of the Stick: Universal Design to Accommodate Student Diversity

Scott was another student with autism in a different section of Bisaccio's environmental science course. His educational program too was based on general education content and achievement standards. Scott used an iPad with Proloquo2Go communication software that spoke words, phrases, and sentences when Scott pressed certain buttons on the tablet. Scott worked in a group of three students who decided to do an experiment to investigate the impact of insect infestation on a tree. Scott used his iPad to take photos of all the steps in the experiment. He imported these photos into a PowerPoint slide show and worked with his group mates to write captions for each slide. At the end of his group's presentation, Scott answered questions using his iPad. A student with autism is shown using the same communication device and software on this Web site: www.assistiveware.com/its-all-there-ruby-proloquo2go-using-new-rosie-voice.

3. UDL supports motivation (affective networks) by:

- Offering choices of content and tools
- Offering adjustable levels of challenge
- Offering choices of rewards
- Offering choices of learning context

This UDL principle addresses how to engage students and keep them motivated, and it sheds light on how to challenge, excite, or interest them. In the "Story of the Stick" unit, Bisaccio provided numerous opportunities for students to make choices about their learning, including whether to work alone or collaboratively, which hypothesis to test, the format for the final exhibition, and the option of earning an honors designation for the unit by incorporating into their inquiry one of the statistical analysis methods they were learning in their probability and statistics class.

Giving students a choice of learning context is another element of this UDL principle. Some students prefer learning in a group, others in pairs, and still others by themselves. This variability in learning preference applies to all students, including those with autism.

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While it's impossible to honor every student's preference in every lesson, varying the degree of student-to-student interaction helps ensure that all students' needs are met some of the time.

Cooperative learning groups have not only proven effective for boosting achievement of some students with autism, but they also offer unique opportunities for learning social skills and developing relationships with classmates based on common experiences and interests (Dugan, Kamps, and Leonard 1995; Kamps, Barbetta, Leonard, and Delquadri 1994).

Rebecca was a rising fourth grader with autism who had severe anxiety. She typically expressed her discomfort by putting her head down on her desk, leaving the classroom, or clutching her stomach. Her third grade team had interpreted the behaviors to mean that she was overwhelmed with both the instructional rigor and the noise in the general education classroom, so she was pulled out of that room for most of her core academic instruction. Her fourth grade teacher, however, wanted to keep Rebecca in the classroom as much as possible, so she used cooperative learning groups and differentiated instruction. The teacher invested several weeks at the beginning of the year developing whole-class and within-group cohesion and identity, and she emphasized the communication and cooperation skills that students were expected to use.

One of several cooperative learning structures that worked well for Rebecca was "Fan N Pick." In this approach, groups made up of four students were each given a dozen 4" x 6" laminated index cards with questions related to the New Hampshire history unit. Student 1 held the cards face down and fanned them like a deck of cards. Student 2 picked a card at random and read it aloud. Student 3 answered the question, and student 4 had the choice to give a different answer or expand upon the previous one. Rebecca thrived in this activity. She felt like a valued member of a small, tightly knit group, rather than just one student out of a class of 30. The room was noisy during the activity, so her group sat in beanbag chairs behind a moveable wall divider. The beanbag chair provided just the right amount of security and helped ease her anxiety. The predictability of the routine also matched Rebecca's learning style.

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Students understood the goal was for each group to answer 10 out of 12 questions correctly, so Rebecca didn't feel overwhelmed by the need to be right. By the end of the year, she had been in a group with every student in the classroom, and as a result, everyone learned much about their own and other students' learning styles.

Using UDL principles to plan inclusive units of study

When students with autism are enrolled in a general education classroom, it makes sense to plan for that student's participation and learning by designing a unit of study based on UDL principles. There are several advantages to this approach.

- Units can be grounded in essential questions or enduring understandings that help students make personal connections to the curriculum.
- Common Core State Standards are organized by themes that lend themselves to unit-based organization of the curriculum.
- Text books are often organized by units.
- Creating unit plans early allows time to locate or prepare accessible materials or other supports needed by certain students.

The design template depicted in Appendix C: Part I guides educators and specialized instructional school personnel to develop the following UDL unit components:

- Essential questions/enduring understandings
- Standards
- Key vocabulary
- A kickoff activity like "The Story of the Stick"
- Lessons that vary the instructional format and specify each team member's role
- Materials that present information in varied formats (text, graphics, videos, real objects) from diverse sources (textbooks, Web sites, reference books, original source documents)

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- Assessments that provide different ways for students to show what they know

After educators have designed a unit using UDL principles, they can use one of several available tools to analyze that unit for barriers to student success that might exist for an individual student or for the whole class. www.cast.org/teachingeverystudent/content/mentors/barriers_mentor/barriers_mentor.cfm

Peggy Silva, a ninth grade English teacher, worked on an interdisciplinary team to plan UDL units grounded in essential questions and culminating in student performance exhibitions. She reflected on the participation of students with disabilities in one particular unit based on the Billy Joel song, "We Didn't Start the Fire."

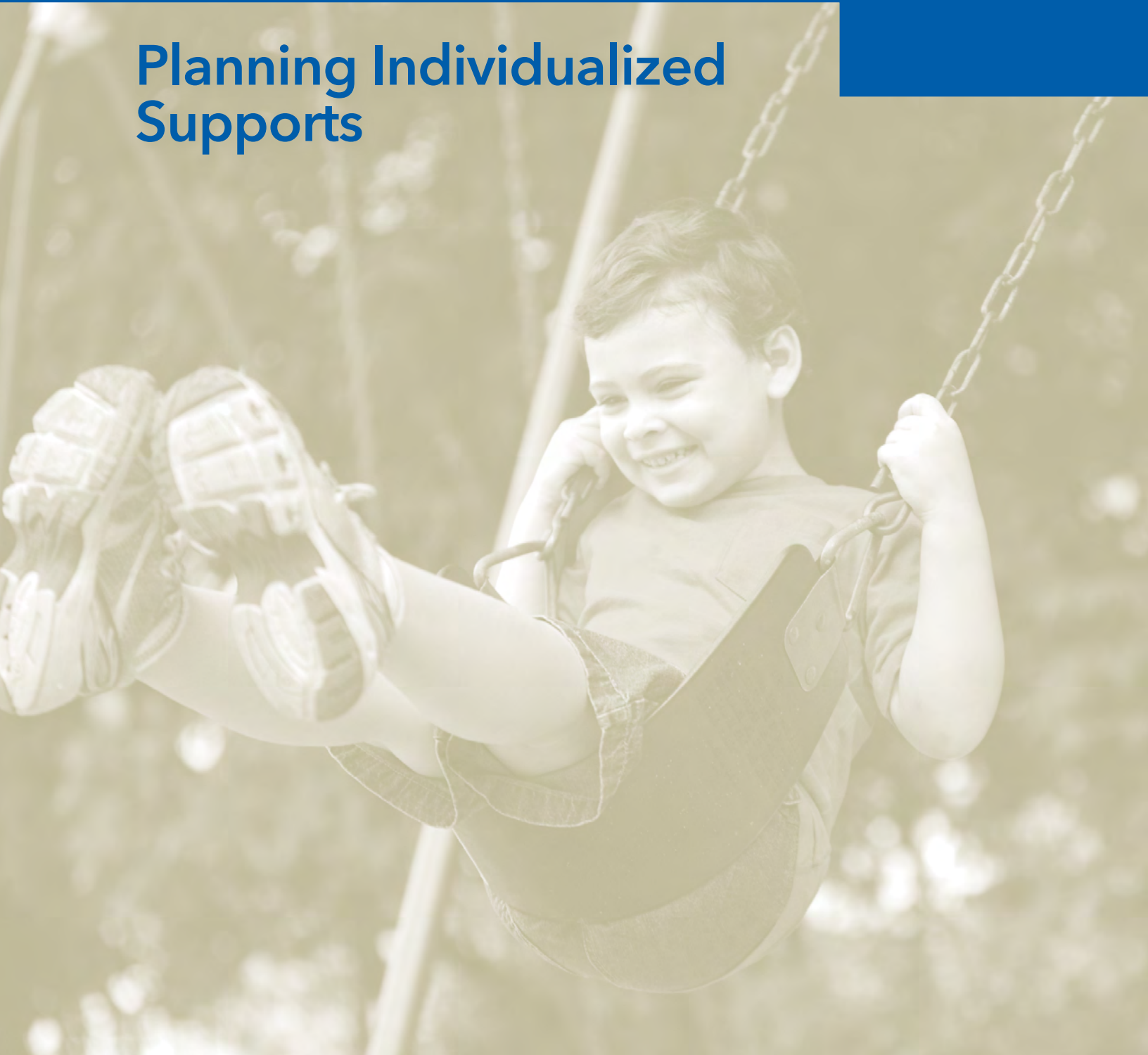
We learned again that the old terminology doesn't work. We need to develop a new language to describe students. Learning disabled, special ed kids, gifted kids, most able, least able, most challenged; these terms do not fit our everyday experience when we design [a] curriculum based on real-world solutions to real-world problems. Although 20 [percent] of our [student] population is labeled as learning disabled, visitors to our classroom cannot identify those students "most labeled." We acknowledge the need for special services; each of our 89 students requires special attention at some point including learning to: work with others, demonstrate learning using technology, write with clarity or to comprehend reading, become better organized, or to present work creatively. Our students represent great diversity of skill, ability, and interest; but the balance shifts according to the nature of the tasks. Every time we grapple with essential questions that require active student participation, we hear students testify that they have learned more in one week than they could have learned in a month in a lecture-oriented classroom.

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Many students with autism will be able to participate and learn when instruction and assessment have been planned using the UDL principles described above. Some students, however, need individualized supports beyond those embedded within UDL. Chapter 6 describes how to plan these supports and Chapter 7 presents specific examples of supports.

Chapter 6

Planning Individualized Supports



Planning Individualized Supports

Tomas was a bilingual kindergarten student with autism who used echolalic speech (he repeated the last word or few words he heard). He was legally blind, had fine and gross motor movement difficulties, along with sensitivities to noise and light. His kindergarten teacher was eager to have him in her class but wondered how he would participate in the 90-minute literacy block if he were unable to speak and became anxious when the noise level in the classroom rose, as it frequently did in that class. His team had one hour of common planning time each week, so they discussed the supports Tomas would need to participate in a variety of instructional routines including the literacy block that included direct instruction in phonics, guided reading, writing, and buddy reading.

Planning for participation in typical instructional routines

Many teams believe that effective inclusion requires them to plan for every single lesson taught in the general education classroom. That's simply not realistic given the number of students needing intensive supports and the number of classes and lessons. Instead, educators should be planning for instructional routines to make the supports-planning process more efficient. Most educators use a small, predictable number of routines in a week or semester, so once a plan for each instructional routine has been developed, similar adaptations and supports can be used across subject areas or units of instruction. Some common routines include:

- Educator lectures, students take notes
- Educator facilitates large group discussion (whether at the kindergarten calendar or in the high school honors seminar), students provide information and make comments
- Educator provides instruction in small groups; students participate by reading, doing math, asking questions, making comments and answering questions
- Students complete worksheets or do other independent work at their desks

Planning Individualized Supports

- Students manipulate laboratory or other tools and equipment
- Students work in pairs or cooperative learning groups
- Students do online research

Anchoring the planning process in what students without disabilities are doing

When students with autism and other significant disabilities were first included in general education classes in the mid-1980s, the instructional planning process typically began by asking “Where are the opportunities throughout the day in the general education classroom for John to work on his IEP goals?” (Giangreco, Cloninger, and Iverson 1993). Educators found opportunities in science for students to work on categorization, opportunities in language arts to work on life skills vocabulary, and opportunities in math to work on money and time skills. Although this approach meant students with disabilities frequently shared space with students without disabilities, there were unintended consequences. In many instances, students were physically present in a general education class as they worked on a similar academic skill, but they were not truly engaged with their classmates.

The inclusive instructional planning process should begin with what is expected of students without disabilities. That perspective helps to assure that students with disabilities will be connected to the general education curriculum, to general education instruction and to their classmates without disabilities.

Planning for Tomas’ participation in buddy reading

Tomas’ team met to plan instructional supports that would allow him to participate in buddy reading, a routine that occurred every day of the year. They used a structured planning process and template, and a completed example is in Appendix C: Part II.

First, the kindergarten teacher described the observable behaviors that students without disabilities exhibited during buddy reading

Planning Individualized Supports

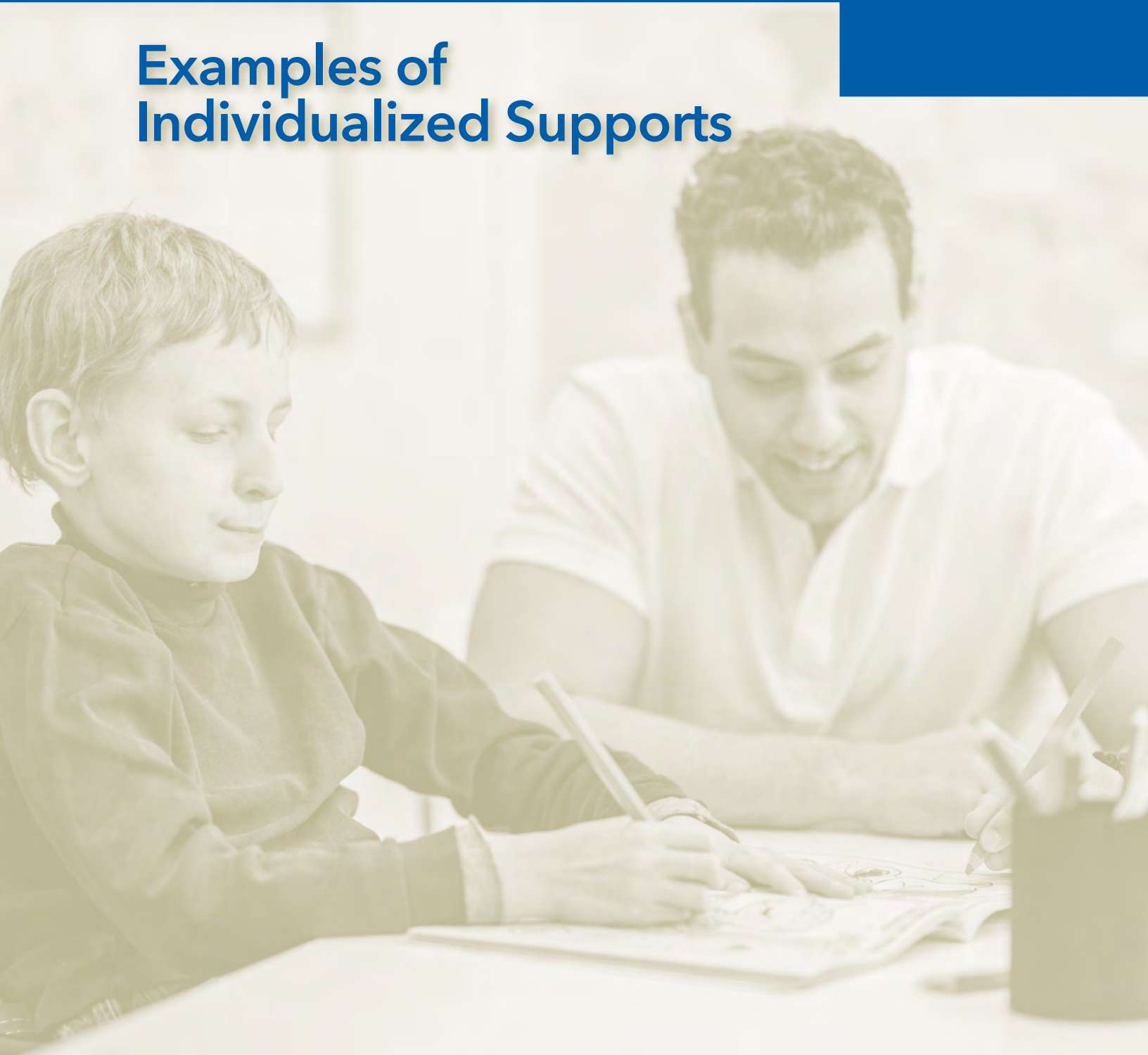
time, including selecting a book from the book bins, turning pages, reading aloud to a buddy, asking and answering questions, and offering opinions. These behaviors were entered in column two. Next, the team discussed whether Tomas could participate in the same way as his classmates without disabilities or if he would need an alternate way to participate. In column three, the team noted that Tomas would need an alternate way to participate in all the steps of this activity. It is important to note that the term “alternate way” does not mean an alternate activity; it means a different way to participate in the same learning activity. In column four, the team noted the specific supports Tomas would need to participate. He and his buddy would need to sit together in a big beanbag chair, and Tomas would need a short walk-around break midway through the activity. He would need a task card on his iPad to support his following the self-selected reading routine, an ebook on his iPad with embedded comprehension supports, and his AAC device programmed with vocabulary and messages related to the book’s contents. Finally, team member listed in column five who would be responsible for creating these supports.

Planning for Tomas’ participation in a unit of study

After Tomas’ team members identified the supports he would need to participate in a variety of instructional routines (they planned this over the first several weeks of the school year), they addressed upcoming units of study. The first columns in Appendix C: Part III record Tomas’ individualized learning goals within the unit; the enduring understandings he’ll acquire, along with key vocabulary, content and skills, IEP objectives, and the supports he’ll need (which are derived from the previously completed Routines-Based Planning Forms). The other columns in Appendix C: Part III provide space for the team to assess Tomas’ performance during the unit and the fidelity with which supports were provided by the team. When the fidelity of supports—that is, how accurately and consistently they were provided—approached 100 percent, the team was confident that Tomas’ performance was an accurate representation of his learning. When the fidelity of supports was below 75 percent or if Tomas did not meet acceptable performance targets, the team revised their original support plan and continued the plan-teach-assess-revise process.

Chapter 7

Examples of Individualized Supports



Examples of Individualized Supports

Tomas is representative of those students with autism who need a variety of supports to participate in general education instruction that is aligned with general education content standards and to acquire functional skills for post-secondary education, employment, and community living.

Content learning and concept development materials and tools

Guiding Principle: All students need access to knowledge and information in formats that match their learning strengths, needs, and current reading and comprehension skills.

Accessible books and other print materials

The Center for Applied Special Technology has free resources for making and sharing books that have been created to accommodate students' learning styles and access challenges. The Web site has links to more than 3,500 adapted books available through public libraries as well as hundreds of books that have been created by educators. <http://bookbuilder.cast.org>

Several Apple iPad applications allow parents, educators, and students to make their own books, customized for the interests and accessibility needs of each student. These include Book Creator for iPad, e-Book Magic, Story Patch, and many others. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/book-creator-for-iPad/id442378070?mt=8>

BoardmakerShare www.boardmakershare.com is a Web site community where you can find and share activities on hundreds of topics that use text and Picture Communication Symbols™ (PCS) for students who use AAC to enhance receptive or expressive understanding and communication.

Concept and knowledge development tools

This article provides a comprehensive overview of graphic organizers with links to other Web sites to find specific tools: http://aim.cast.org/learn/historyarchive/backgroundpapers/graphic_organizers.

Examples of Individualized Supports

Using visual thinking methodologies, Kidspiration for K-5 learners and Inspiration for grades 6 and above provide a cross-curricular visual workspace that combines pictures, text, numbers, and spoken words to develop vocabulary, word recognition, reading for comprehension, writing, and critical thinking skills (www.inspiration.com/Kidspiration). These graphic organizers and tools work the way students think and learn and the way educators teach. As students make visual connections, they build fundamental skills in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.

If you do not have the resources to use digital graphic organizers, you can create paper organizers that are available for free at Microsoft Office. <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/results.aspx?qu=graphic+organizers&ex=1&origin=TC101887895>

Reading and writing tools

Although there are hundreds of reading and writing software programs, these three are based on UDL principles, align with Common Core State Standards, and provide examples of lessons in multiple subject areas. These programs are relatively expensive but have incredible versatility for students who are at all stages of literacy development.

Read & Write Gold is a text reading and writing program developed to assist children and adults with reading and writing disabilities. This software is one of the most multifaceted programs on the market designed to improve reading comprehension, help struggling readers process and comprehend large amounts of text, help users conduct research, and enable struggling writers to produce quality written documents. It also includes additional tools to help students with classwork and tools to teach reading and writing skills. www.texthelp.com/North-America/Our-products/Readwrite

Kurzweil 3000 is an assistive technology, text-to-speech learning tool that supports the concept of UDL with a suite of powerful reading, writing, test-taking, and study skill tools that makes curriculum accessible to all students. It is particularly appropriate for students

Examples of Individualized Supports

who require reading intervention and who struggle with reading comprehension.

www.kurzweilededu.com/kurzweil-3000-v13-windows.html

Classroom Suite is a software intervention tool based on the principles of UDL that combines two educational paradigms—systematic, explicit instruction, and a flexible creativity tool. Educators have control over specific learning objectives, allowing differentiated instruction for individuals or groups to help students in grades preK-five achieve mastery in reading, writing, and mathematics.

www.intellitools.com/classroom-suite.html

Tools for learning academics from other content areas

Software tools are available to support learning in other content areas such as math, science, social studies, health and wellness, and the arts. Thinkfinity is the Verizon Foundation's free online professional learning community, providing access to more than 60,000 educators and experts in curriculum enhancement, along with thousands of award-winning digital resources for K-12, all aligned to state standards and the Common Core. This well-organized and visually appealing Web site provides links to hundreds of other sites and is a good place to start your search.

www.thinkfinity.org/community/thinkfinity-resources

Visual supports and task organizers

Most of us use some form of task organizer such as shopping or to-do lists, Google or Outlook calendars, student agenda books, and educators' lesson plans. Visual supports and task organizers may help some students with autism because they make abstract concepts concrete and capitalize on visual learning strengths.

Visual Supports for People with Autism may improve academic performance, behavior, interaction with others and self-help skills. In a friendly, conversational style, this guide presents an abundance of examples, illustrated by dozens of photos, including activity schedules, calendars, charts, checklists, color coding, flip books, graphic organizers, mnemonics, nametags, photo boards, Power

Examples of Individualized Supports

Cards, scripts, Social Stories, to-do lists and video modeling.

www.nationalautismresources.com/visual-supports-for-people-with-autism-.html

Picture Scheduler for the iPad, iPod, or iPhone creates visual tasks with reminder alarms, audio, video, or picture cues.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/picture-scheduler/id315050461?mt=8>

Communication

Guiding Principle: All students communicate. If students do not communicate in ways that are commensurate with their same age classmates who don't have disabilities, they need AAC systems and supports.

Many myths persist regarding students with autism and communication skills. One is that people who do not use natural speech have intellectual disabilities. But just think about Stephen Hawking, the brilliant British theoretical physicist who uses AAC for communication. It has been said that if Professor Hawking wheeled into a disability support center without his communication device, he would be assigned to the basket-weaving group. Without his communication device he would be unable to show his brilliance.

Another myth is that there are cognitive or other prerequisites to providing students with AAC systems and supports to communicate ideas, needs, wants, feelings, and information. To counter these myths and promote the communication rights of all people with disabilities, the American Speech-Language Association developed practice policy documents that include guidelines for SLPs who work with students who do not effectively use natural speech, checklists for teams, and articles about restrictive eligibility requirements.

www.asha.org/slp/clinical/aac

It is beyond the scope of this guide to list all communication resources (particularly with regard to AAC), but the suggestions below provide guidance on how to enhance students'

Examples of Individualized Supports

communication skills, learning, and relationships. Notice the link between communication and behavior. Many educators have found that providing communication supports can prevent problem behavior from ever occurring.

General guidelines for successful communicative interactions

- Introduce yourself!
- Ask the student how he communicates, particularly if he is an AAC user. Ask how he indicates “yes” and “no.”
- Honor the student’s AAC device as his true voice. If you would not place tape over the mouth of a verbal student, it isn’t appropriate to take a student’s device away as a punishment or allow access to it as a reward.
- If a student uses an AAC device, give him sufficient time to ask or answer a question or make a comment. Try asking a question and then saying, “Joshua, why don’t you take a minute to think about your answer and I’ll come back to you.” Go on to another student and then return to Joshua for his answer.
- Speak directly to the student even if she is accompanied by specialized instructional support personnel.
- Talk to the student about the same things you would talk about to a similar age student without a disability.
- Monitor the pitch and tone of your voice, keeping them age appropriate and adjusting them to make the student more comfortable.
- Don’t force eye contact that may be uncomfortable and anxiety producing for some students. Let the student guide you with regard to looking her in the eye and requiring it back from her.
- If you don’t understand what a student is trying to communicate, just be honest and say “Jack, I’m not sure I’m getting what you are saying. Let’s see if we can try another way to understand one another.”

Examples of Individualized Supports

Specific strategies for receptive communication

- Preteach new concepts and content vocabulary prior to group instruction.
- Model procedures, expectations, thinking strategies, and directions.
- Post permanent visual reminders of the lesson's essential questions and concepts.
- Identify auditory signals that alert students to important information or indicate when and where students should focus their attention.
- Pair verbal instructions with visual cues.
- Provide visual supports for lectures on overheads or whiteboards.
- Identify verbally and visually when transitions will occur.

One strategy, called Aided Language Stimulation, is a powerful tool to promote both receptive understanding and expressive communication. www.iidc.indiana.edu/?pagelId=511

Christine Reinart, a New Hampshire Special Education Teacher of the Year, created an aided language board to support a student with autism. The board is reproduced in Appendix D, and Christine's reflection on its use follows.

I used an aided language story board with Natalie, a student with autism, to support her receptive understanding and communication during a unit on Romeo and Juliet that was taught using the West Side Story movie. Although we are currently working with a specialist to acquire a speech-generating communication device for Natalie, I wanted to try using a paper aided-language board in the interim. This was the first time I had tried color coding of the picture symbols.

Examples of Individualized Supports

For the first lesson we used the aided language board and I modeled pointing out the characters' names as they were mentioned by the teacher in the reading. Natalie needed to identify these characters by picture for homework and her father indicated that she had identified all but one of the minor characters independently as he named them.

Heartened by Natalie's interest, we worked on the story actions (green row) in the next class. Once again, I pointed out the actions as they occurred in the context of the story. For the comprehension activity that day, while other students wrote a plot summary, Natalie completed CLOZE sentences, indicating which action belonged in the sentence by using the language board.

For her final essay at the end of the unit, Natalie chose to write about Maria and Tony and built sentences using the language board symbols describing their dancing, embraces, separation, and running away. I think the color coding helped distinguish the jumble of language into a visual shape that gave more meaning to the story for Natalie, a strong visual learner.

Specific strategies for expressive communication

- Assure that students have a way to communicate all day and in all settings about age-appropriate academic and social topics. Imagine if your communication device only allowed you to say "I'm hungry," "I have to go to the bathroom," "I need a break," and "Help." Research clearly shows that people labeled with significant intellectual disabilities can learn to use symbolic language when provided with high-quality AAC systems and supports.
- Provide to the SLP a list of content-related and social vocabulary so she has time to program that vocabulary into the student's AAC device before he needs to use it.

Examples of Individualized Supports

- With permission from the student and help from the SLP, teach all other students in the class how to program the AAC device and strategies for being a good communication partner.

Social competence

Guiding Principle: Social competence is more likely to develop when students feel a strong sense of unconditional belonging and are in close relationships with others.

Much attention is given to the social skill deficits ascribed to students with autism but much less to the issues of loneliness and lack of friends. Norman Kunc, a disability advocate, writer, and speaker with cerebral palsy, said that one contributor to this imbalance is that the fields of psychology and education have “dissected and inverted Maslow’s hierarchy of needs so that belonging has been transformed from an unconditional need and right of all people into something that must be earned” (1992). He argues that until students with disabilities, including those with autism, are welcomed into inclusive classrooms and schools with appropriate supports, their achievement—including the development of social competence—will be stunted. Once a solid foundation of belonging is in place, students with autism can benefit from targeted strategies that focus on the development of social competence. The three strategies below are easily implemented by all educators.

Understanding someone else’s point of view

Understanding another’s point of view tells our friends that we care about what they are feeling and thinking. Sarah Willeman wrote a digital story book, *Lily and Paxton and the Missing Flower*, to introduce young children to the idea that it isn’t always easy to know what your friends are thinking. <http://bookbuilder.cast.org/view.php?op=model&book=11234&page=1>

If you have a student who assumes that her friends know all about what happened to her over the weekend and begins to tell an anecdote using verbal shorthand, you might say, “Caroline, I have

Examples of Individualized Supports

no idea who George is, what movie you saw, or how you ended up in the emergency room. Give us the back story!”

The unwritten rules of social interaction

If students with autism don’t know the rules—the rules for communication, for dating, for games—they cannot be expected to do well in those endeavors. An affordable book for students ages 7 to 14 is *Social Rules for Kids-The Top 100 Social Rules Kids Need to Succeed* by Susan Diamond. www.amazon.com/Social-Rules-Kids-The-Kids-Succeed/dp/1934575844/ref=pd_sim_sbs_b_7

Yvonne Domings wrote a digital social story called *Jake Likes to Play Games* to help a student learn about good sportsmanship. It is available through CAST’s BookBuilder. <http://bookbuilder.cast.org/view.php?op=model&book=11495&page=1>

You can learn more about writing social stories or narratives by participating in an online Autism Internet Module called *Social Narratives* that is one of many offered by the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence Disabilities (OCALI). Once you register on the site, all of the modules are available at no cost. www.autisminternetmodules.org

Opportunity to provide service to others

Young people with autism are frequently on the receiving end of help, making reciprocal social relationships difficult. Involve students with autism in providing help to others. Some students might tutor younger children in an area of intense interest or prodigious skill. Other students might join an organization like Boy or Girl Scouts and get involved in community service activities. Many high schools require service learning, and students with autism can show that they have something to offer to others while also making important community connections that will serve them well after they graduate from high school. If your school sends students to Imagination Destination (formerly Odyssey of the Mind) or other academic competitions, you might consider whether one of your students with autism would want to join.

Examples of Individualized Supports

Sensory and movement

Guiding Principle: Some people with autism sense the world and their bodies in the world differently.

When students without disabilities walk into a busy high school, they are usually able to make their bodies do what their brains ask of them. They can walk to a locker and hang up their jacket, empty their backpack, have a conversation with their classmates as they are walking down the crowded hallway, and even make it to class before the bell rings.

When some students with autism walk into school, they may be unable to do any of these activities because they are bombarded with sights, smells, lights, air currents, changes in flooring, noises, vibrations, hundreds of faces, stairs and more. It's no wonder that they often begin their day anxious, distracted, or frustrated. Students with autism may have difficulty in one or more of the following sensory and movement areas:

- Sensitivity or insensitivity to sensory information
- Attention and focus
- Regulation of activity level
- Transitions between activities
- Oral motor skills like talking, chewing, or using a straw
- Recognition of one's own and other's personal space
- Difficulty with motor movements and motor planning (in other words, getting their bodies to do what their brains are asking of them)
 - Problems with balance, walking, running, starting or stopping, and getting stuck in one position
 - Problems with fine motor skills such as accurate pointing, grasping and releasing, which make writing with a pencil or pen difficult
 - Problems with control of their mouths and with the production of speech

Examples of Individualized Supports

When students with autism have communication difficulties combined with any of these sensory and movement challenges, their intelligence is often underestimated. If students are unable to speak or independently type, they are assumed to have nothing to say. According to Wertz (2012),

This creates a problematic cycle. Because they cannot show their intellectual capability, they are considered to have low intelligence and are seldom taught at a level that is commensurate with their intellectual ability. Over time, they are given fewer opportunities to learn, less intellectually challenging material, and fewer chances to practice new skills than their peers. As time passes, they are likely to fall further and further behind, seeming to confirm prior assumptions about low cognitive ability.

The following suggestions reflect supports for assisting students with sensory regulation and movement difficulties.

Physical layout and characteristics of the classroom

- Provide specialized seating that supports correct sitting posture but allows for movement without leaving the chair.
- Put tennis balls on the feet of the desks and chairs to decrease the constant squeal and shuffle.
- Provide a quiet reading corner with a beanbag chair that can be used as a respite from overstimulation. Don't be surprised if the student wants to sit on the floor with the bean bag chair on top of him. Sometimes that's more soothing than sitting on top of it.

Accommodations for sensory sensitivities

- Offer choices of relaxing activities for unstructured time, or after assignments have been completed.
- Allow chew tools or water bottles at the desk. Satisfying oral motor cravings can assist with focus.

Examples of Individualized Supports

- When a student is overwhelmed, dramatically lower your verbal directions.
- Allow the student to use headphones to lower stimulation from the surrounding environment.
- Students with sensory difficulties should never be denied sensory breaks, recess, or physical education as a form of punishment as they serve critically important functions.

Movement activities that promote task engagement and focus

- Work with your OT to create a variety of sensory activities and tools that can be used by all students including those with autism. One OT created three treasure chests for a first grade classroom: the blue one had calming activities and tools, the red one had alerting activities and tools, and the green one had activities designed to help children with body awareness. Students could choose from one of the chests mid-morning, after recess, and after lunch. The OT taught the children strategies for recognizing what kind of activity they needed in response to their “body or brain feelings.” Each activity took about two minutes to complete. The educator noticed that when the children used these resources, they took less time to transition from one classroom activity to the next, and they were more alert and productive in the afternoon. The student with autism had a movement break scheduled every hour.
- Provide a rocking chair.

Accommodations for writing difficulties

- Encourage keyboard use for writing assignments. Some students with autism have a difficult time coordinating the thinking, movement, and composition tasks associated with writing. If you take away the physical demands of writing with a pencil, students may enjoy writing more and be better able to express creative thoughts as well as demonstrate their knowledge.
- Incorporate technology into instruction, assessments, and projects. Assessments should provide for a diversity of possible products and formats to demonstrate knowledge and mastery.

Examples of Individualized Supports

Strategies for problems with other fine and gross motor tasks

- Reduce the motor demands of academic tasks by assessing children with multiple-choice tests or short-answer responses.
- Some students with autism do better when they are in physical contact with another person. This can be simply a touch on the shoulder or a physical assist to get the movement started. When using physical prompts to guide students through a movement, be sure to slowly reduce the amount of support you are providing as soon as possible.
- Provide the student with frequent breaks when academic demands have been heavy.
- Involve students in fun and inclusive movement activities such as karate, dance lessons, yoga, gymnastics, or other physical pursuits that promote the development of balance, strength, flexibility, and endurance; or activities that incorporate movement and emotions together like drama club, cheerleading, or a local theatre group.

Emotional competence

Guiding Principle: Difficulty in expressing emotion does not mean the absence of feeling.

Psychologist Carolyn Saarni (1999) suggested that learning and the development of emotional competence go hand in hand. After synthesizing the research in the area of children's emotional development and adding her own clinical observations, she proposed a taxonomy of emotional competence skills. Rather than viewing this list as a development hierarchy, she says that each of these skills develops interactively with the others, but that the maturity with which they are expressed grows as children get older if they have strong attachments and caring relationships with others.

1. Awareness of one's own emotions
2. Ability to discern and understand others' emotions
3. Ability to use vocabulary of emotion and expression

Examples of Individualized Supports

4. Capacity for empathic involvement
5. Ability to differentiate internal subjective emotional experiences from external emotional expression
6. Capacity for adaptive coping with aversive emotions and distressing circumstances
7. Awareness of emotional communication within relationships
8. Emotional self-efficacy in accord with one's moral sense

Some people believe that people with autism have a narrower or less complex emotional life than people without autism. Others speculate that they may feel just like people without autism but their differences in language and movement inhibit the expression of emotions. Regardless of which view is more valid, it is certainly an overgeneralization to say that all people with autism are alike with respect to their emotional repertoires and skills. Donna Williams, an autistic Australian social philosopher, artist, and speaker, revealed the depths of her emotions in her groundbreaking books: *Nobody, Nowhere* and *Somebody, Somewhere*. Strong emotions and creativity are evident in Judy Endow's poetry, Larry Bissonnette's art, Drew Goldsmith's videos, Jamie Burke's essays, and Amanda Baggs' YouTube channel. These individuals certainly have artistic gifts but they also have emotional competence.

Broadly speaking, educators can nurture students' development of emotional competence by providing a welcoming classroom, giving permission to express emotion in constructive ways, and working to ensure that every student has at least one trusted adult and one good friend in his school community. Three strategies for supporting the emotional competence of students with autism follow.

Look beneath the surface

Some students with autism may not show the same facial expressions or have the language to describe their feelings, so it's important to read other signs of what students might be feeling. These signs include changes in body posture, voice tone or volume,

Examples of Individualized Supports

an increase in what appear to be self-stimulatory movements (hand flapping), or changes in the topics about which students are talking or writing. None of these behaviors is necessarily indicative of negative emotions but if you notice them, check in with students and support them to express how they are feeling.

Ensure that students have a way to communicate complex emotions

Whether a student uses natural speech to communicate or a method of AAC, they need access to vocabulary to describe their emotions. Just having happy, mad, and sad on an AAC device will not suffice; by the time students communicate that they are mad or sad, they may already have expressed these emotions in problematic ways. Students who have autism need a way to express the same emotions as their classmates without disabilities. If students are still working on recognizing and communicating their emotional states, using an emotional thermometer may help.

Provide opportunities for students to talk and write about their feelings and those of others

Talk to students about their feelings and help them make connections between what their body language is saying and what they are expressing through speech or AAC. If you are reading a novel such as *The Outsiders* and notice that your student with autism is turning away from the group, has become very quiet, and is starting to bounce his leg, recognize this as a teachable moment. You could say, "Joel, I'm wondering what you are feeling and thinking right now." [Give Joel some time to think and respond.] "Ponyboy might have felt very guilty that his brother got hurt protecting him. What do you think? Sometimes people feel guilty if they think they caused something bad to happen when they could have prevented it."

Another strategy is exposing students to the narratives of people with autism through reading, viewing videos, or talking in person. This strategy not only gives students a window into the interior lives of others, but it also provides a model for how they can develop their own personal narrative.

Examples of Individualized Supports

Behavior

Guiding Principle: All behavior has meaning.

Determine if behavior is a problem

When should we intervene to stop or change a student's behavior? We can probably all agree that these behaviors are a problem and deserve immediate attention:

- Causing physical harm to oneself or someone else
- Putting oneself or someone else in harm's way
- Hurting animals
- Destroying property
- Consistently refusing to comply with reasonable requests or fair rules
- Interfering with the student's learning or that of others

In most situations, people with autism do not intend to cause harm but rather are showing symptoms of one or more serious underlying causes. People with autism who hit their heads or clutch at their stomachs, for example, could have undiagnosed migraine headaches or gastrointestinal disorders. Acting without regard to safety or not following rules may reflect a lack of understanding. Refusing or running away may be a legitimate attempt to escape an unpleasant or abusive environment (that would not be acceptable to a person without a disability). Students who hurt animals or destroy property willfully clearly are in need of immediate intervention and treatment. When children without autism do these things, we first investigate whether they themselves are being or have been mistreated. When students exhibit behaviors that get in the way of learning, the first step is to consider whether the instruction and supports described in this guide and other evidence-based practices are being implemented consistently and accurately.

There is less agreement that the following behaviors are a problem, particularly when we ask people with autism:

Examples of Individualized Supports

- Short attention span
- Intense interest in one object or pursuit, almost to the exclusion of anything else
- Repetitive behaviors such as flapping hands or flicking fingers in front of the eyes
- High levels of activity and the need to move
- The desire to spend lots of time alone
- Odd or eccentric behavior that doesn't fit the cultural or social norm

It is important for educators and other educational team members to carefully consider whether a student's behavior falls into the first category or the second. If we look carefully at the behaviors in the second category, and think about a person without autism doing them, they may take on a different meaning. A short attention span might mean that someone is intensely curious and needs to be challenged with more rigorous academics. We all know people with intensive interests in one area—sports fans and video gamers, for example. Tapping a pencil or texting during dinner may be considered annoying or rude, but it's not dangerous. The desire to spend lots of time alone describes many people in society, including writers, philosophers, and some people in religious life.

When students with autism are thought to be acting odd or eccentric, educators have to make a judgment about whether these behaviors represent a problem or are just an expression of individuality. People with autism have both the right to self-determination as well as a responsibility not to interfere with the rights of others. If a student's behavior truly does have the potential for harm, then certainly the educator has an obligation to bring it to the attention of the school IEP team, request a functional behavior assessment, or ask for a mental health consultation.

Examples of Individualized Supports

General suggestions for supporting pro-social behavior

Perhaps the most important thing that an educator can do to encourage pro-social behavior (absent any harmful behavior) is to show a welcoming attitude and create a classroom in which all students have that right balance of freedom and responsibility. Strategies for teaching students individual and collective responsibility include:

Establish fair and consistent classroom rules. When educators involve students in establishing classroom rules, many students with autism thrive on their predictability, the structure, and the notion of fairness.

Provide multi-sensory reminders of rules and procedures. Create picture-enhanced posters, checklists, and task cards that depict the classroom rules and procedures. During the first few weeks of school, provide frequent reminders and practice. Depending on school or district policies, educators might decide to videotape students during several routines—arrival time, performing lab experiments, changing for physical education class—and review them with the student with autism. Create a table or chart that shows what behaviors are appropriate during which activities. Write a social story about the difference between recess or lunch behavior and silent reading or test-taking behavior.

Pay particular attention to transitions. If we think about the learning, sensory, movement, and communication characteristics of some students with autism, it is easy to understand why transitions may be difficult. Identify verbally and visually when transitions will occur. Some students benefit from a picture schedule accompanied by a verbal signal (e.g., “In a few minutes, we’ll be moving on to math.”). Try putting the student with autism in charge of keeping track of time and giving the five-minute warning. Program a wrist watch, iPod, or AAC device to automatically give auditory and written reminders when transitions are about to occur. Many of us rely on features in our calendar and scheduling software to tell us what we need to do now, how long we have to do it, and what is coming up next.

Chapter 8

Bringing It All Together



Bringing It All Together

The purpose of this guide is to offer strategies for including students with autism in general education classrooms. The core assumptions are to presume competence, view autism as a natural part of human diversity, collaborate with a team, use universally designed instruction, and provide individualized supports for students who need them. So what do you do now?

Reading more about teaching students with autism in a general education class might be a good place to start. The references and resources listed in the next section provide rich information as well as practical strategies.

If you have never had a student with autism in your class, you could talk with your principal about students who are coming up through the grades. Discuss how you might approach one student's parents and other members of his team about being in your class next year. Even before you read a student's cumulative file or IEP, get to know him by eating lunch or reading a book together, or making a home visit. Meeting with the student's team, including his parents, is a great way to share your vision for the student's membership in your class. You can emphasize the importance of scheduling common planning time and professional development (if needed) before the next school year begins. Offering a new student with autism a tour of your classroom over the summer will help build familiarity with you and his new learning environment.

If you have a student with autism in your class now, what do you think is going well? Celebrate it by sending a note to his parents and to other team members. That small gesture will make a real difference in this student's life. Are there things that could be improved? If you need more time for collaborative planning, share some of the finding-time-to-meet strategies (noted earlier in this guide) with your principal. If your student does not have a way to communicate about everything that goes on in your class, request an augmentative communication and assistive technology assessment. If you need help designing accessible instructional materials, invite your team members to watch a webinar with you or attend a professional development workshop on UDL or inclusive education.

If things are not going well, consult with a colleague or outside expert who has expertise in autism and inclusive education. The resource list at the end of the guide may help you find such a person. You deserve the support you need to become the educator who says to her colleagues, "You're going to love this kid!"

Resources and References



Creating Dialogue around Students with Autism

A reflective process, dialogue guide sessions are interactive discussions that examine assumptions held by those in differing roles, roles that cause us to approach the topic from differing perspectives. The goal is to support those involved to seek common ground and build consensus on the issue at hand.

There are numerous benefits of engaging in structured dialogue. By using the available materials, it is easier to include others in the discussion. Carefully structured questions engage all and honor the variety of perspectives on the issue. As each contributes collaboration becomes a natural outgrowth.

Each chapter's dialogue guide provides a set of questions developed by NEA members to help facilitators engage the group. Facilitators can promote discussion by: asking participants to expand on their statements, drawing attention to the materials as appropriate, then periodically clarifying, summarizing, and gathering feedback, making sure that all participants have the opportunity to speak.

Dialogue guides have three components.

1. The topical brief is a short article or summary of policy or research available now to the field. In this case, a chapter in the book.
2. Reaction questions acknowledge differing perspectives and support the group in seeking common ground.
3. Application questions support the group in coming to agreement on implications and planning for the future.

For more in-depth information on facilitating a group dialogue see *Dialogue Guide: Facilitator's Handbook* at http://ideapartnership.org/documents/DG_handbook/facilitator.pdf.

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Introduction p. 4

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. In your experience or situation, why is addressing students with autism important?
2. From your experience, please give an example that demonstrates one of the three assumptions undergirding this book.
 - a. All students with autism are unique
 - b. Educators strive to maximize each student's potential
 - c. Educators need support to support students
3. Why is the use of people-first language important?
4. Do all in your school/district have the same definition/ understanding of inclusion? If not, how does that impact service delivery?
5. In what ways do you see students with autism participating in large scale assessments in your school/district?
6. Share examples of use of alternative or augmentative communication within your school/district.

Application Questions

1. How might the school/district ensure teachers, related service personnel, and families have access to resources related to students with autism? Inclusion? Assessments? Outcomes?

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Chapter 1: New Views of Students with Autism. p. 11

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. Are any of these traditional views articulated in your environment? If so, which appears to be most prevalent and why?
2. In your opinion, how have traditional views limited the ability to provide appropriate instruction for students with autism?
3. In what ways do the more recent views support improving educational opportunities for students with autism?

Application Questions

1. What strategies could be employed to build understanding of more recent views of students with autism?
2. When we recognize the uniqueness (strengths and needs) of individual students with autism, how might that impact the approach to instructional planning for more successful outcomes?

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Chapter 2: Welcome to Room 23: Creating an Inviting Classroom. p. 16

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. Under the strategies listed as “Start the year right,” which is most feasible, and why?
2. Can the same strategy(ies) work in successive years? Why or why not?
3. Share another strategy or activity you have used in the classroom to build respect for diversity.
4. In your opinion, how might increasing your knowledge and comfort level regarding disability(ies) enhance your ability to work with students with autism? With all students?
5. Choose one of the listed resources and project what you might learn from reading the text or viewing the video.

Application Questions

1. What plan(s) can we put in place to gather more beginning-of-year strategies to address diversity among students in our classrooms? To promote self-awareness? To support acquisition of self-advocacy skills?
2. Do you know the regulations in your state regarding student/family privacy? If not, where can you go to find out?
3. What steps can we take to ensure resources are available for staff to increase their own awareness of autism?

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Chapter 3: Promoting Self-Determination. p. 22

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. Why is it important to promote self-determination for students with autism?
2. Among the developmental components of self-determination, what do you think is of primary importance and why?
3. Among the listed strategies which would you utilize first? Why?

Application Questions

1. How can we ensure that all staff have access to information and strategies regarding self-determination?
2. What structures can we put in place to measure acquisition and demonstration of self-determination skills?

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Chapter 4: It Takes a Village: Working as a Collaborative Team. p. 25

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. Why is a team approach essential to educating students with autism?
2. Referencing Key Ideas 1 through 3, think of one more role (talent/data piece) for each member of the team—general education teacher, parent, student, special education teacher, speech-language pathologist.
3. From your experience compare what you consider a “good” meeting and a “bad” meeting. What are the characteristics of each?
4. What advantages for the student do you see when employing activities in authentic and natural environments, as opposed to highly structured (pull-out, clinical, therapy) environments?
5. Please give an example of who would be on a collaborative team for a preschool child. For a post-secondary youth.

Application Questions

1. What procedures can we put in place to ensure appropriate representation and equal participation of all collaborative team members?
2. What resources are needed to facilitate and support regularly scheduled team meetings? How will we secure those resources?
3. What are the professional development needs of faculty and staff to provide services in the most natural environments for students? What processes are needed to deliver necessary professional development?
4. Do you know what types of collaborative activities are in place for preschool/post-secondary students? If not, where can you go to obtain that information?
5. What activities can we put in place to facilitate and support successful transition from preschool to kindergarten for students with autism? From secondary to post-secondary?

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Chapter 5: The Story of the Stick: Universal Design to Accommodate Student Diversity. p. 35

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development to provide equal opportunities for learning. From your perspective, how is the use of these principles important for educating students with autism?
2. Give an example of when you have provided a UDL support for a student or group of students.

Application Questions

1. What can you do right now to learn more about UDL?
2. What process can we put in place to ensure all teachers develop a knowledge and understanding of UDL to benefit all students?

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Chapter 6: Planning Individualized Supports. p. 45

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. Describe a part of your classroom routine that supports, or with a slight accommodation could support, a student with autism.
2. Think of a part of your classroom routine that may require more specialized planning for a student with autism. What accommodations could you employ to ensure the student is connected to the general education curriculum?

Application Questions

1. To expand on the examples outlined in this guide, what process can you employ to support your own learning about options for individualized supports?
2. What resources are needed to enhance your instructional practices? What procedures can be employed to obtain these resources—individually, as a school, as a district?

TOPIC BRIEF

Teaching Students with Autism: Supporting, Belonging, Participation, and Learning.

Chapter 7: Examples of Individualized Supports. p. 49

National Education Association

September 2014

Full document: <http://www.nea.org/specialed>

Reaction Questions

1. Give an example of current use of any of the suggested tools or supports from this chapter in your classroom/school/district.

Application Questions

1. How can we share these resources more broadly with colleagues and families?

Resources

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Appendixes



Appendixes

Appendix A: Instructional Planning Meeting Agenda

Student: _____

Date: _____

Facilitator: _____ Notetaker: _____ Timekeeper: _____

In attendance: _____

1. Set Agenda (2 minutes)
2. "Good News" Story (5 minutes)
3. Announcements (5 minutes)
4. Results of Last Week's Instructional Planning (10 minutes)
 - a. How did the student do last week? Look at work samples.
 - b. Did we deliver supports accurately and consistently?
 - c. What would we do differently next time to enhance the student's participation and learning?

5. Instructional Planning (30 minutes)

The team plans the supports the student needs during instructional routines and units (Chapter 6 describes both of these planning processes). When team members become more confident about the student's support needs, they can plan for multiple classes during the next week of school.

Subject/ Lesson	Topics/Themes	Instructional Activities & Materials	Supports to Prepare	Assessments
ELA				
Math				
Social Studies				
Science				

Appendixes

6. To Do's: (3 minutes)

What	Who	When

7. Evaluate the Meeting (How well did the team collaborate during the meeting?) (3 minutes)

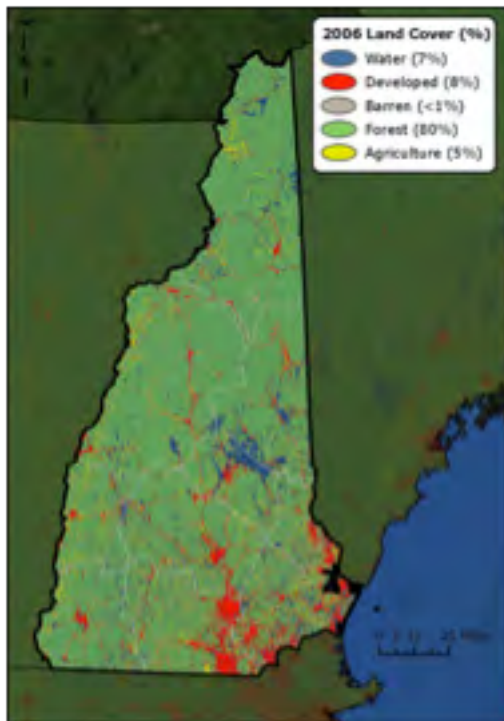
What worked? What didn't? Ah-ha's?

8. Next Meeting Date/Time (2 minutes)

Appendixes

Appendix B: Sample Adapted Text

Approximately three-quarters (75 percent) of the forest land in New Hampshire is privately owned. Only 16 percent is in federal ownership, which includes the White Mountain National Forest.



IMPORTANT FACTS TO REMEMBER!

1. 75 percent of NH forest land is privately owned.
2. 16 percent of NH forest land is owned by the U.S. government.
3. 9 percent of NH forest land is owned by the New Hampshire government.

Inventory = a

The latest New Hampshire forest inventory estimates that there are approximately 4.8 million acres in the State that are forested.

Appendix C: UDL Planning Template for Inclusive Classrooms

Part I: Creating a Universally Designed Unit that Accommodates Student Diversity	
Subject/s	
Grade	
Unit Title	
Standards	
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	
Essential Question(s)/Enduring Understandings	
1. 2. 3.	
Vocabulary	
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	
Unit Kickoff Activity	
<p>Describe how you will engage your students on day one of the unit. How will you activate their prior knowledge? How might you frame the unit with an essential question that connects to students' lives? What activity will you do that taps into students' multiple intelligences and doesn't focus on their learning challenges?</p>	

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Cultural Competence Considerations

- Language - make all materials available in students' primary language
- Gender Roles - check materials for stereotyped gender roles (e.g., photos of women cleaning and cooking or of men mowing lawns and fixing cars)
- Racial Stereotypes - check materials for equity across racial groups (e.g., people of color in leadership positions); hold high expectations for all students
- American/Western Cultural Icons - don't assume all students have the same memories of recent American history events or that all students are familiar with Sesame Street.
- Religious Traditions - don't assign students to watch a certain TV documentary aired on Friday evenings when Jews may be celebrating the Sabbath
- Socio-Economic Diversity - don't assume that all students have computers in their homes or have access to materials to do hands-on projects
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems - integrate traditional knowledge with academic standards
- Diverse Family Configurations - don't assume mother, father, and two biological children is the norm

Appendixes

UDL Guidelines - ©CAST 2011 www.cast.org

The links in this document will take you to the CAST Web site where you can find definitions of each UDL indicator and other UDL resources.

I. Provide Multiple Means of Representation	
1. Provide options for perception	1.1 Offer ways of customizing the display of information
	1.2 Offer alternatives for auditory information
	1.3 Offer alternatives for visual information
2. Provide options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols	2.1 Clarify vocabulary and symbols
	2.2 Clarify syntax and structure
	2.3 Support decoding of text, mathematical notation and symbols
	2.4 Promote understanding across language
	2.5 Illustrate through multiple media
3. Provide options for comprehension	3.1 Activate or supply background knowledge
	3.2 Highlight patterns, critical features, big ideas and relationships
	3.3 Guide information processing, visualization and manipulation
	3.4 Maximize transfer and generalization
II. Provide Multiple Means for Action and Expression	
4. Provide options for physical action	4.1 Vary the methods for response and navigation
	4.2 Optimize access to tools and assistive technologies
5. Provide options for expression and communication	5.1 Use multiple media for communication
	5.2 Use multiple tools for construction and composition
	5.3 Build fluencies with graduated levels of support for practice and performance
6. Provide options for executive functions	6.1 Guide appropriate goal setting
	6.2 Support planning and strategy development
	6.3 Facilitate managing information and resources
	6.4 Enhance capacity for monitoring progress
III. Provide Multiple Means for Engagement	
7. Provide options for recruiting interest	7.1 Optimize individual choice and autonomy
	7.2 Optimize relevance, value and authenticity
	7.3 Minimize threats and distractions
8. Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence	8.1 Heighten salience of goals and objectives
	8.2 Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge
	8.3 Foster collaboration and community
	8.4 Increase mastery-oriented feedback
9. Provide options for self-regulation	9.1 Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation
	9.2 Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies
	9.3 Develop self-assessment and reflection

Appendixes

Unit Assessments	
Pre-Assessment/ Baseline	
Formative Assessments	
Post- Assessments	

Lesson Outlines and Staff Responsibilities					
Lesson # _____ Topic: _____ Date: _____					
TASK	GENERAL EDUCATOR	SPECIAL EDUCATOR	TITLE I	SLP	CO-TEACHING MODEL ¹
Do Now Activity					
Posted Objectives Learning Goals					
Class Agenda					
Activators					
Direct Instruction					
Guided Practice					
Stations or Small Groups					
Independent Practice					
Formative Assessment					
Summarizer					

¹Team teaching, one teach/one observe, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, one teach/one assist

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Resources for Unit (e.g., videos, books, Web sites, handouts, presentations, technology applications)
Physical Resources and Materials (texts, hands-on manipulatives, maps, charts, diagrams, multimedia, etc.)
Technology-Based Resources (Internet sites and software)

Part II: Routines-Based Support Plan				
Instructions: The team should create a student-specific support plan for each instructional routine that is used on a regular basis such as: educator lectures while students take notes, educator facilitates whole class discussion, educator provides guided instruction in small groups, cooperative learning activities, individual seatwork, oral presentations, etc.				
Example: Tomas' Routines-Based Support Plan for Buddy Reading				
Column #1	Column #2	Column #3	Column #4	Column #5
All students are participating in ____ (instructional routine).	Students without disabilities do ____ to participate.	Will Tomas use the same or an alternate form of the column #2 "do?" in order to participate?	What supports will it take for Tomas to do the behavior described in column #3?	What planning and preparation is needed by the team so that the supports are provided accurately and consistently?
All students are participating daily in 20 minutes of buddy reading.	<p>Listen to and follow educator directions</p> <p>Look through book bins</p> <p>Select a book and return to desk</p> <p>Take turns reading to buddy and then listening as buddy reads</p> <p>Buddies ask one another questions about their book</p> <p>Buddies make comments about whether they liked the book</p>	Tomas needs an alternate way to participate in each step of this routine	<p>A beanbag chair for Tomas and his buddy</p> <p>Social story/task card on iPad</p> <p>2 minute movement break half way through buddy reading period</p> <p>e-Books on iPad</p> <p>Text to speech feature that reads book aloud and highlights each word as it is read</p> <p>e-Book contains supports such as word definitions, graphics, photos, and links to videos</p> <p>Buddy needs to be shown how to ask Tomas questions that he has answers to on his AAC device</p> <p>AAC device programmed with comments, questions, and answers to comprehension questions</p>	<p>Provide "treasure chest" of movement activities for Tomas and his buddy to use during their break-OT</p> <p>Create social story/task card using Book Creator for iPad—special education educator</p> <p>Locate and/or create adapted books and load onto iPad—special education educator</p> <p>Program AAC device with comments and questions related to the story-SLP</p>

Appendixes

Part III: Individualized Unit Plan

Unit name:

Class:

Dates of Unit:

Educator:

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE FORM DURING PLANNING: The team should discuss and record in Column 1 of Questions 1-5 the most important learning objectives for the student in this unit. In Column 1 of Question 7 the team records the supports necessary for the student to participate and learn. In Column 2 of Question 7, the team indicates who will prepare each support.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THE FORM AFTER THE UNIT IS OVER: After the unit is completed, the team revisits the form and records in Columns 2-4 of Questions 1-5 the team's qualitative assessment of the student's performance. In the 3rd and 4th sections of Question 7, the fidelity with which supports were provided is rated. Low fidelity ratings means that the team will have low confidence that the student's performance is an accurate representation of the student's capabilities and the quality of supports needs to be improved. The number of learning objectives and supports can be individualized to each student. The team leader types into a digital version of the form and saves it with a file name specifying the subject area, the unit name, the student's initials, and a date. Example: History_Civil War_JR_010113

1. What alternate achievement standards—aligned with grade-level general education content standards—will the student pursue?

- a.
- b.
- c.

2. What are the enduring understandings/big ideas the student will master?

Enduring Understandings	No Progress	Some Progress	Mastered	Exceeded

3. What prioritized vocabulary will the student learn?

Vocabulary	No Progress	Some Progress	Mastered	Exceeded

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Part III: Individualized Unit Plan (continued)

4. What prioritized knowledge or content will the student acquire?

Knowledge	No Progress	Some Progress	Mastered	Exceeded

5. What IEP objectives will be targeted during this unit?

IEP Objectives	No Progress	Some Progress	Mastered	Exceeded

6. What formative and summative assessments will be used?

Assessment Type	Does the Student Need Accommodations?	Does the Student Need Modifications?

7. What supports will be necessary for the student to participate and learn?

With what fidelity (consistency and accuracy) were the planned supports actually provided?

Supports	Who will plan or prepare	Consistency (how often provided)				Accuracy (how correctly provided)			
		Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always

KEY: Rarely = 0-25%

Sometimes = 25-50%

Usually = 50-75%

Always = approaching 100%

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Appendix D: Aided Language Board

Maria 	Tony 	Anita 	Riff 	Bernardo 	Chino 
Dancing 	Fighting 	Running Away 	Hugging 	Shooting 	Crying 
in love 	angry 	frightened 	overjoyed 	very sad 	
Street Gangs 	Puerto Rican 	Whites 	School Dance 	Streets at Night 	Doc's Candy Store 
Boy meets Girl 	Boy tries to stop Fight 	Boys begs for forgiveness 	Girl forgives Boy 		
Boy with Gun 		Boy with Gun 		Girls Crying 	

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1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-3290