Welcome to the winter edition of the Autism Quarterly newsletter. As you are getting in to the second half of the school year and the weather is getting colder, you may be looking for educational yet fun ideas to use in your classroom. Here are some ideas to spruce up your classroom programming during the cold months:

**Consider working on social skills in the general education classroom.** This may be a great time to work on social skills when it is too cold to go outside. In the classroom, you may be able to work on social skills in a more structured way than on the playground. Using games that have specific rules will make the games more predictable thus allowing your students to achieve better during these activities.

**Students need to have movement breaks.** Cold weather often limits how much time and opportunity that this can occur. Consider building these breaks into your daily routine. For example, for spelling, using a game format such as using a football field on the chalkboard will allow students to get more involved in the activity. They could roll the dice to see how many spaces they get to move and then they could get up and move their team’s piece on the board.

**Have “rainy/snowy” day activities planned and ready to go.** Sometimes the weather changes quickly and students are unable to get their scheduled time outside. It may be helpful to have a bag or box of activities ready to be pulled out just in case. These can consist of educational activities such as flashcards for math or spelling. Special centers that are only pulled out at certain times of the year are sure to be a hit with your students. Perhaps students get to paint a special picture that has to do with their spelling words, write their words in sand or create their words using letter tiles.

Whatever you plan to do, try to make it as structured as possible. You and your students will appreciate work that is done in preparation.

**Have a wonderful winter!**

Carrie Radigan
Facilitator, Region 1 Autism Education Consortium

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**Engaging families**

It is important to work on relationships with your students' families on an ongoing basis. One thing to consider is to identify what your goals are for parent engagement. Do you want them to help out in the classroom? Do you want them to help you with making materials at home? Do you want them to help out with special classroom projects or trips? Once you identify these specific goals that you would like help with, then you are ready to approach your students’ families to ask for assistance. For instance, you could send home a sign-up sheet for all of the different activities and events that you have throughout the year. The more that parents feel welcomed, the more they will be actively involved in their children’s education. It is a win-win for all concerned.
Ellen Notbohm, author of *Ten Things Your Student With Autism Wishes You Knew*, explores a topic that may be of interest to many of you. The book addresses topics from a child’s perspective. Here is a brief summary of the ten issues:

1. “Learning is circular”: Teachers learn from students. Students learn from teachers. Teachers learn from teachers. Students learn from students. Students with autism may not have learning patterns that are typical of other students in the classroom. Therefore, it is important for teachers to learn from the student to help him achieve to his greatest success.

2. “We are a team”: A team shares a common goal and work together to establish the goal. They may not always play the same positions, but they should always have the common goal to help the student be successful.

3. “I think differently”: Students with autism may not learn the same way in which we learn. Try to look from the student’s perspective and help teach him in a way that he can best learn.

4. “Behavior is communication, yours, mine and ours”: Keep in mind that behavior happens for a reason. Don’t just try to get the student with autism to stop the behavior. Instead try to find the reason behind the behavior. He may be having sensory overload and really may want to learn but may find it difficult to do so.

5. “Glitched, garbled and bewildered”: This is about communicating clearly. If you can’t communicate clearly with your student or your student can’t communicate clearly with you then no learning can occur.

6. “Teach the whole me”: Try to focus on the positive aspects of your students—not just the deficit areas. Incorporate things such as speech and fine motor into the daily experiences—not just as separate entities. Teaching just the facts with no social or emotional connectivity may not be helping your student learn at all.

7. “Be curious”: Your student with autism probably did not grow up asking curious questions such as “how” and “why” like his typically developing peers. He may not intrinsically have curiosity to find out about the world. He may be more used to learning by rote. As his teacher, you need to teach him to be curious. Teach him to ask questions to learn about his environment. Also, as his teacher, be curious yourself. Don’t be afraid to ask questions of your colleagues to learn as much as you can about how to teach your student with autism.

8. “Can I trust you?”: Without trust learning cannot occur. Your student with autism needs to know that you respect his individual needs and that you want to do your best to help him learn. Building this trusting relationship will help him succeed in school.

9. “Believe”: Believe that your student with autism can learn and that you can teach him. Have high expectations and encourage him to achieve.

10. “Teach me ‘how to fish’”: Make learning relevant and functional for your student with autism. Help him become as independent as he can be to become a more independent adult.

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**A Shout Out Goes To!**

Many thanks go out to all of the presenters that spoke on November 4, 2008 at our first Autism Education Consortium professional staff development day held in Hanover, Virginia.

The Consortium would like to recognize all of the staff and invited guests who helped make this day a success for all who attended:

- Dr. Joe Cox, Superintendent, Colonial Heights Public Schools
- Dr. Judith Marco & Meredith Eads, Chesterfield County Public Schools
- Dr. Selena Joy & Brooke Botarri, Henrico County Public Schools
- Brookie Fowler-Smith, Meredith Singletary, & Petra Stockhaus, Hopewell Public Schools
- Dr. Kathy Matthews & John Tolson, The Faison School
- Linda Oggel, T/TAC at VCU
- Lisa Oxley, Powhatan Public Schools
- Tara Childs & Heather Weston, Hanover County Public Schools

Thanks to all of you!!!!
Upcoming Events

The Autism Education Consortium is pleased to support on-going professional staff development activities for participating school divisions. There may also be opportunities for staff outside of Region 1 member schools to take part in conferences and workshops.

The following are a couple of upcoming workshops:

Dr. Carol Schall will be presenting on ABA and data on January 28, 2009. The workshop will focus on how ABA can be incorporated into the classroom and how teachers can support their findings through data collection. This workshop will be held in Colonial Heights from 9:00-3:30. Specific venue is to be determined based on the number of registrations. There is no cost for this workshop.

On March 6, 2009, Linda Hodgdon will be presenting on Visual Supports and Strategies to help with communication and behavior. Ms. Hodgdon is coming to us from Michigan. This workshop is free to staff in Region 1 Schools. It will also be open to folks outside of Region 1 at a cost of $100.00. The workshop is scheduled from 8:30-4:00 at the Fulghum Center in Chesterfield County.

Resources

It is easy to find websites specific to autism. They are all over the internet. Here are some of the websites that will give you information that may be helpful to you as you continue to work with students with autism:

- www.doc.virginia.gov
- www.autismspeaks.org
- www.ttaconline.org
- www.vcu.edu/ttac.org
- www.varg.org
- www.autismva.org
- www.researchautism.org
- www.tonyatwood.com.au
- www.lindahodgdon.com
- www.paulakluth.com
- www.nationalautismcenter.org
- www.fpg.unc.edu/~autismpdc

Please contact Carrie Radigan at (804) 828-4501 or at radiganct@vcu.edu if you are interested in attending either of these wonderful workshops.

(Picture from November 14, 2008 Assessment training.)

Video Modeling

Video modeling is a popular technique that is receiving a lot of attention. Research shows that video modeling helps individuals with autism with perspective taking and generalization of skills. Video modeling is often used for teaching social skills. Here are some steps for using video modeling:

- Choose what you want to teach
- Video the student doing the skill
- Edit out prompting
- View the video with the student
- Role play and practice using the skill

You can make videos of your students actually doing the skills or use commercial products. Check out www.modelmekids.com. They have a series of videos that teach social skills elementary — high school.

Here are a few books to keep you busy during the cold winter months:

- “Visual Strategies for Improving Communication” by Linda Hodgdon
- “Ten Things You Student With Autism Wishes You Knew” by Ellen Nothbohm
- “Just Give Him The Whale” by Paula Kluth
The Autism Education Consortium established the Board of Directors in June of 2008. The consortium’s guiding principles are as follows:

1. Assist each participating School Division in the design and implementation of a comprehensive program of instruction and supports for children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

2. Focus will be on defining model services for students with ASD and supporting classrooms in which these model services are delivered.

3. Commitment to evidence-based practices that will result in documented outcomes for students with ASD.

4. Recognition that comprehensive educational programs for students with ASD will require that all professionals working with students with ASD will participate in on-going professional development activities.

Keep them out of the principal’s office!

Ever notice that sometimes our students with autism tend to get themselves into trouble by either saying or doing something in school that is not acceptable according to the school rules? Perhaps telling Ms. Jones that she did the problem incorrectly in a loud, abrupt manner was not a good idea. Or, it probably was not the best thing when Johnny left his seat in the middle of social studies and headed outside at precisely 1:45 when it was time for recess. When asked why he went outside, he replied that “it was time for recess”.

As we know, students with autism lack the social and communication skills that their typically developing peers possess. They also may not understand the repercussions of their behavior. That is not to say that their behavior should not be addressed or that there should not be consequences for their behavior. But, one important thing to consider is—why did the behavior occur? Finding out why the behavior occurred may help decrease the likelihood of it happening again. Which would, in turn, keep them out of the principal’s office.

Sometimes a trip to the office is needed, but try to keep it to a minimum while you put things in place to reduce the need for such an intervention. Often, students with autism are not even aware that they had done anything wrong. It is important to help them understand what it is that they had done and how they can handle the situation in the future.

These examples and many more like them may be reasons why students with autism are sent to the office to speak to the principal. What occurs in the principal’s office varies greatly according to the offense. It may also vary tremendously due to the principal’s style and their understanding of the disability.

For the examples given, Ms. Jones may have been incorrect with the answer that she gave, but it does not make it alright for the student to point that out. Perhaps, a social story that highlights acceptable behavior in this case would help the student learn the appropriate behavior should this scenario happen again in the future. In the second example, Johnny may benefit from using a schedule or having a warning from the teacher before the transition occurs or if they are running late for a transition.