



Critical Components
for
SUCCESS
in the
Special Education Classroom

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put things in their mouths, then small manipulatives should be stored out of their reach. If you have students who may pull items off shelves onto themselves, the items could be stored on lower shelves or in cabinets. Fabric can be used to hide the contents of shelves, making it less tempting for students to disturb the materials.

Students who use wheelchairs often have other equipment they use such as standers, special chairs, or other positioning equipment. These will need to be stored during the day when not in use. Remember that the real estate in your classroom is valuable. The challenge is to keep this type of equipment nearby while not taking up space needed for direct student instruction. You also must comply with campus regulations and the fire code.

ORGANIZING STUDENT MATERIALS

Let's start by thinking about your students entering your classroom for the first time each day. Are they arriving with their backpacks, jackets, library books, school projects, and maybe lunches? Or, have they first been to a different classroom or a locker where they store these items? And, will yours be the last classroom they attend before dismissal time?

If a student starts his or her day in your classroom, you will need to have an organizational system in place for the items your students bring daily. Where will they put their backpacks? In some areas of the country, heavy winter coats and boots need a storage place. Lunch or snack items brought from home also need a place to be stored.

Any place students will be putting their personal belongings should be labeled with the students' names (and photograph if needed). This would include hooks or places on shelves. For some students, a label that has a name is sufficient. For your students who are learning to match objects to pictures, you will want to indicate visually what personal item will be stored in the space. For example, if the backpack is to hang on the hook, a picture or a photograph labeled *backpack* as well as the student's name and perhaps his or her photo would be placed over the hook.

One teacher faced a challenge as to where to have her students store their backpacks and take-home items. There were no built-in cabinets, and furniture was difficult to acquire in her school. She decided to purchase inexpensive laundry baskets, labeled them with her students' names, and placed them near the classroom door and transition area. While she wasn't pleased about the aesthetics of this arrangement, it did provide a consistent place for her students to store their items.

In some schools, lockers are used at the middle and upper grades. If general education students use lockers, then every effort should be made for your students to use them as well. If a student has not yet mastered

Visual Strategies

Objective: To explain what visual strategies are and to highlight the importance of using them to benefit your students.

THINKING TRAPS

“I wish my students would do what I say. They just don’t listen to me!”
 “He is not autistic, so I don’t have to use any visuals. I think he’s just being lazy!”
 “I have told her the same thing over and over, and she just doesn’t get it.”

Teachers often tell us of their frustrations in not being able to get their students to do what they ask them to do. One of our first questions to teachers is this: “What types of visuals are you using with your students?” Visual supports and strategies are researched-based approaches that can support and enhance communication, improve behavior, develop organizational skills, and increase independence—important tools in every teacher’s toolbox.

Note: In our work with teachers, in other printed materials about this subject, and in the research, we find that, most often, the words *visual strategies* and

COMPONENT 1
Physical Arrangement of the Classroom

COMPONENT 2
Organization of Materials

COMPONENT 3
Schedules

COMPONENT 4
Visual Strategies

COMPONENT 5
Behavioral Strategies

COMPONENT 6
Goals, Objectives, and Lesson Plans

COMPONENT 7
Instructional Strategies

COMPONENT 8
Communication Systems and Strategies

COMPONENT 9
Communication With Parents

COMPONENT 10
Related Services and Other School Staff

SUMMARY

Correcting misbehavior and teaching a replacement behavior is extremely important in developing and maintaining an environment where learning can take place. It is tempting to think this component of behavior is the most important component. However, by now, you know that we believe that all the components are of equal importance. The information in Component 5 will be of little use unless supported by the implementation of the other components. A behavior plan that has been thoughtfully crafted will have limited chance of changing a student's behavior unless that student's communication needs are being addressed, the room is arranged to meet specific concerns, visual strategies are being implemented, and parent concerns are addressed.

Real-Life Applications

Here are some real-life applications about changing students' behaviors, for reinforcing desired behaviors, and for collecting data in regard to tracking students' behaviors.

JEFFERY

Jeffery frequently grabs at people and for items that are not his. We first met Jeffery in "Real-Life Applications" in Component 1, where the teacher arranged the classroom to provide a specific place for him to sit when group instruction occurred. This antecedent strategy was put into place hopefully to make it more difficult for him to grab items and to decrease this behavior.

This behavior is one that Jeffery's teachers and parents wish to decrease, and it is important to know how often he does it before any other interventions are implemented. What should Jeffery's teachers be doing in regards to knowing how often the behavior is occurring?

Jeffery's teacher admits that it would have been great if she had taken data prior to changing his seating in order to compare if the move really helped reduce the number of times Jeffery grabbed items. The important thing now is for data to be collected before other interventions are implemented. This will be helpful in directing the staff as to what specific interventions are reducing the behavior.

JOSÉ AND KIMBERLY

For José and Kimberly, visual strategies were put into place in "Real-Life Applications" in Component 4 to address behaviors that were targeted as areas of concern. They are both students on the autism spectrum. Their

one-on-one instruction as well as group instruction time. While some students are working at individual work stations or with a paraprofessional, you have the opportunity to work with an individual student or with a small group of students. In this way, you provide the academic support the students need as well as opportunities for students to learn valuable skills, such as working independently or waiting quietly for their turn while the teacher talks to another student in the group.

Some teachers find that making a chart of all of their students' IEP objectives helpful in getting an overview of this big picture. Such a chart might look something like the one in Figure 7.5.

Figure 7.5 Group Students by IEP Objectives

Math Skills Analysis						
	John	Annie	Sid	Kathy	Chad	Will
Count to 10	x	x			x	
Order numbers 1 to 10	x	x			x	
Write numbers 1 to 10 in order		x		x	x	
Count to 20		x	x		x	
Order numbers 1 to 20			x			x
Write numbers 1 to 20 in random order			x	x		x

It is critical to know what is in each of your student's IEPs and the specific goals and objectives that are to be mastered by the student. This allows you to group students with similar needs and to write lesson plans that address similar objectives. You can work with similar materials and activities with these students while differentiating the instruction to meet their individual needs.

Differentiating instruction is important whether the group is two students or 10. Even when grouping your students, there will still be variability in their learning styles and IEP objectives. Special education is a responsive approach to students' learning needs and not a one-size-fits-all learning environment. Differences in grade levels and developmental levels provide a challenge whether you are teaching reading, math, or self-help skills.

Let's say that you are going to be teaching a lesson on the numbers 1 to 10 to a group of three students. One of these students, Sylvia, is working on number recognition, and the other two students, Max and Ryan, are working on reading the number words from *one* through *ten*.

Grouping students maximizes academic and social learning opportunities.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

We sometimes hear teachers complain that some of their parents just don't seem to care about what goes on at school. These parents are said to not answer notes from the teacher or return forms on time. It is true that some parents are more directly involved in their child's time at school than others. A parent's interest in what their child is doing at school may or may not be apparent to you. Consider that the parents of your students are likely concerned about the progress of their student. They are facing a lifetime of caring for their son or daughter and have legitimate concerns that you as their teacher likely don't share. It has been reported that parents of students with special needs harbor feelings of isolation and even embarrassment over having a student with special needs.

Another consideration regarding parental involvement at school is that, for some parents, school was not a positive experience when they themselves were students. They may be uncomfortable in school settings and feel somewhat inadequate and intimidated. Other parents may have been star students themselves and feel uncomfortable about how to deal with their student who has learning differences and difficulties.

There are also parents who teachers report as too involved in their child's time at school. Teachers describe these parents as ones who come to school nearly every day to eat lunch with their children, linger outside the classroom door well after the start of the school day, or insist on detailed reporting of their children's day.

The issue here is twofold: Your time is limited, and your students need to develop the ability to be independent from their parents. It is important for you as the teacher to respectfully establish boundaries. You might send home notes to all parents at the beginning of the school year regarding guidelines for arrival and dismissal procedures. For some parents, entrusting their child to you (or anyone other than themselves) each school day for eight hours is frightening. These parents need to be assured by you that you have their child's best interest at heart and that their safety is at the foundation of your program.

Listen carefully to the parents of your students. Whether the role of parent is being filled by the biological parents, grandparents, guardians, or adoptive or foster parents, these family members know the student better than anyone else. They know things about their student that most other people do not know. They are there at bedtime, on the weekends, and during holidays. Their knowledge, opinions, and ideas regarding the student can be eye opening and invaluable to you as the teacher. When parents report concerns, listen carefully to what they are saying. This can be difficult at times, but it is necessary. Somewhere in what they are saying is information that you need to know in order to better work with their student.