Making Adjustments to the Teaching/Learning Environment of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Modifying the curriculum and learning environment for a student with autism

Lucy’s Story
A snapshot of 10 weeks
Profile

- 7 years old
- 2nd year of formal schooling
- Diagnosed with Autism and associated motor and verbal dyspraxia at 2 years of age
- Non-verbal, no use of gesture
- Receptive language good with visual cues
- Obsessive and ritualistic behaviours
- Sensory sensitivities – sound, tactile
- Likes to hold and manipulate small objects
- Limited range of foods in diet
- Attends a support class in a mainstream school
Factors impacting on learning:

- Communication skills
- Need for routine
- Obsessive and repetitive behaviours
- Classroom structure and environment
- Frustration and anxiety
- Difficult to motivate engagement (other than in obsessive interests)
Goals of the Individualised Education Program (IEP)

- Engage in curriculum based work tasks
- Reduce repetitive and obsessive behaviours
- Increase concentration and attention span
- Establish structure and routine
- Improve emotional wellbeing
- Introduce technology to access curriculum
- Improve communication through the introduction of Picture Exchange Communication
- Increase motivation to engage in learning tasks and social interaction
Adaptations to the Environment

- Designated work area, eating area
- Minimal distraction
- Use of visuals (photos) for routine, structure and predictability
- Sequence for work tasks
- Touch screen
- Consistency of support staff
Programmed Tasks for Learning

- Motor skills
- Matching
- Sorting
- Reading
- Writing
- Maths
- Computer based learning
Initial tasks

Target Skills:
• Fine motor
• Eye-hand coordination
• Visual/spatial awareness
• On-task/work behaviour
• Attention span

• Tasks:
  1. Posting
  2. Stacking, Sorting
Initial tasks – Posting, Stacking, Sorting
Curriculum area: Literacy

Target Skills

• Pre-reading
• Pre-writing
• Matching
• Visual discrimination

Task: Animal Match
Matching tasks
Curriculum area: Literacy

Target Skills
• Spelling
• Letter recognition
• Matching

Task:
1. Sequencing letters of first name
2. Matching lower-case letters
Curriculum area: Literacy

Target Skills

- Reading
- Word comprehension
- Picture recognition

Task:
Matching a photo with a word label
Literacy – Photos with words
Curriculum area: Numeracy

Target Skills

• Counting
• Number sense
• Numeral recognition
• Making sets

Task:
Making sets of objects
Numeracy – counting, numeral recognition
Technology to Support Learning

- Cause and Effect
- Visual tracking
- Motor control
- Crossing the mid-line
- Recognising photos and attaching meaning
- Numeracy
  - Number recognition, counting, colours, patterns
- Literacy
  - Letter recognition, word recognition, sentence structure
Technology – Reading and Writing
Motivation to engage in tasks

Motivators:
• Walk outside
• Teletubby

Target skills:
Incentive
Waiting
Impulsivity control

Built into the daily work task routine and shown in a photo schedule
Motivation to engage in tasks - Teletubby
Observed progress

• Significant changes observed
  – Willingness to engage and interact
  – Initiates social contact with parents and familiar adults
  – Reduction in obsessive and ritualistic behaviour
  – Engagement in a structured learning routine
  – Demonstrated competence with learning tasks
  – Spontaneous use of PECS at school and home for requesting food and Teletubby
Where to from here?

- Ongoing evaluation of progress
- Ongoing development of the IEP
- Weekly meeting with learning support team
- Developing communication skills – PECS
A bright future…
And Lucy will shine!
Resources

• NSW Board of Studies Syllabus documents
• Kimberly A. Henry (2005). *How Do I Teach This Kid? Visual Work Tasks for Beginning Learners on the Autism Spectrum*
• Clicker 5 – Spectronics
• Priory Woods Special School
  [www.priorywoods.middlesbrough.sch.uk/](http://www.priorywoods.middlesbrough.sch.uk/)