

Lesson 10 Transcript
Arranging the Environment
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So we're going to talk now about creating the environment. How do we prepare the environment and how do we prepare for instruction? So now we're at how do we decide where to teach these skills. Not just the regular classroom, but what environments do we have available for us. Here's instruction in a special place. We do do that with kids on the autism spectrum and kids with more severe disabilities. They have a special workplace that they go to do some of their assigned work. We have instruction in the back of the class. We have instruction in general ed. These slides aren't coming across really clear but you can try to pick out the kid with the disabilities. Instruction in general ed, another example. Instruction in small groups. Instruction in large groups. Instruction with your peers. We're going to talk about social learning tomorrow and how to involve those peers.

So in these environments, what does the student most need for environmental supports? It's all under the umbrella: predictability, structure, familiarity, and clarity. If those are in our environments and in place, it's going to be a lot easier more conducive environment for the learning process to occur. And yet I've had a lot of fun this year focusing on rearranging classrooms to provide the predictability, structure, familiarity, and clarity. Sometime as teachers, we're king of packrats and we pile things, and dump things over. We create chaotic things. So we've been going and helping redesign the classrooms. Now my husband thinks that's hilarious when I talk to him about it, because you should see my office. He goes, "Why don't you practice what you preach and clean out your office?" Ok that's a whole other story.

So we know that the kids that we work with have a need for organization. It says a lot in everything. When we have an organized child, here's the output, the behavior symptomatology of a child that's organized. We have: calm when alone, sustains purposeful attention, intermittently observes others' behaviors, initiates contact with others to interact, demonstrates communicative intents, and makes changes when directed. In contrast these are some symptoms of the disorganized child: extremely overactive or passive, distractible, engaging in those ritualized behaviors because it's not comfortable, lacks social observation skills, uses unconventional means to interact with others, engages in ritualized interactions, and challenging behaviors. So environments play a huge part in how it prompts our behaviors.

So by organization support in general we're talking about: clarifying expectations, increasing attention to relevant details, increase purposeful activity within the classroom, increase independence, increase ability to observe others because everything has its place, everyone's doing their thing, increase social interactions, enable the child to anticipate and make changes flexibly.

So how do we go about doing that? Our environments simply need to be organized. So that space tells us where to be. So how do we in our classrooms know, this is the space that I do my work. This is my work space. This is my group space. This is my reading space. This is our play space. The choices. What materials do I have available to use? The possessions. What's mine? What's shared? The expectations. What do I do? The social setting. Who do I do it with? The time. For how long? And for self, how to stay calm and focused.

So we all know that we put that together in the framework of a visual schedule that tells us what to do. We have task cards that show us what to do within that task. Areas in our room organized. This is where the task occurs. When I'm finished is when I'm done with the task and there's a visual that tells me. When I'm finished I put my materials away. When my materials are put away, I check my schedule and the whole routine starts again.

So organization of space. Organize your classroom so that each area has a distinct purpose for specific routines. Environmental engineering is essential. Reduce the stimulation and confusion. Avoid sensory overload. Accommodate those sensory needs. Organize space to define where to sit or stand and personal space of others. Organize consistent places for personal property, teacher property, and other children's property.

Here are some examples. This is out of a classroom in the Meridian School District. These examples are from an extended resource classroom, but we've successfully done that in the context of the regular classroom. There's a whole variety on the theme. The theme is organize your space. This is what tells the kids that they do for reading. And if you notice here on this little board, we have the big kids check in because there's a lot of in and out of the classroom. They spend a bit of percentage of time in the regular classroom and other environments. So who's in, who's here, who's gone. When they leave, they check out. A sensory activity area clearly marked and defined. A calming area for use. A listening area. A computer area. Here's an example of the visual schedule that tells this guy what to do. So he just follows it down in a horizontal fashion. When it's done, it goes in the done. I think we're all familiar with the basic essence of the systems. Over is his task card. So when it's time to work and he works in his work session, there's his task card. I do this, this, this, this. When I'm finished, I'm done. I put my materials away which are located right behind me. I go to the next task. The next task may take me to music, art, or PE. I check out of the classroom. I walk down the hall, etc. There's an example of individual workspace with all the materials that they're going to need for independence.

So then we get into organization of time. The visual schedule of daily activities, individual or group, portable or stationary. What is it that needs to happen for that particular kid? If picture don't work you can do that same thing with colors or shapes and match the area of the room. We just set up a whole system for a student not too long ago that is colors. So the red takes me to the red center with my activities. The blue takes me to the blue center with my activities. Don't be limited by just pictures. We have as many schedules as needed for specific routines. So again within that activity, I break it into component steps. I know exactly what to do, and I know when I'm done.

We taught this system to a little guy in Soda Springs about a year and a half ago whose challenging behaviors were pretty high up there on the mark and when we went through this whole organization system with him, he knew exactly how to run his system independently and was even correcting the adults in his environment. I got the phone call that said, "I don't think this system is going to work." And I said, "why not?" "Because he comes in and he rearranges his schedule. He takes things up." And I go, "Believe me, it's working. He knows exactly what he wants to avoid."

Organization of time. We use a lot of temporal supports to indicate duration of the activity. Again those mini schedules. Providing the specific amount of materials and you define the end of the task because the materials are all gone.

So when you do a puzzle, when is the puzzle done? When all the pieces are in the puzzle. You set cues for the end of a routine. A lot of classrooms will have little transition rhymes and jingles and whatnot to assist that. Using timers, countdown cards, hourglasses. I find that for a lot of our students, if the timer works, great. Use it. But often it doesn't work, because we say you have five minutes, but they don't really see the passage of time. Now it depends on the kid. I have some kids that say, "No that was only four minutes and 59 seconds. I have one more second." But you can use the countdown cards which is just the strip of the 5,4,3,2,1. When the numbers are gone, you're finished. They can see the passage of time. The red timer clocks, sometimes those work. Use them if they do. If they don't, it's probably because you have to watch the clock. They usually don't ding when it's done. So you just have to find out what works for your individual child. Supply a visual concrete timer to demonstrate what the material should look like when finished. So this is my model. Use token board or checklist to indicate how many times a response or test must be completed. You're going to tally. Then you're done. So you see there are multiple systems to use. But they're all communicating my space, my allocation of time. There's an example of a visual schedule, the task card up close. Where he's going to. Here are the who's here and who's gone. There's a countdown card.

So then organization of materials. Do you know how frustrating it is for everybody when...and you will see this all the time. I sit down to work. I don't have my materials. I don't know where they are. The teacher tries to find them. The teacher can't find them Not only is that infringing on instructional minutes, it creates a certain amount of chaos. So this organization system: Retrieve and return to the same location. Organize materials in the order in which they are being used. Use visual organizers such as templates and containers to organize their materials. Color coded folders, etc. Mike's going to show tomorrow morning and example of a color coded folder system that taught the child how to do his work independently in the classroom with very little assistance from the aid. Again when we look at dependency on that aid support, the more organized environments are, they are more programmed for independence. Finding my own stuff. There's an example of everybody has their own bin. Supports for making choices and choice boards. There is a reinforcement card. An I am working for card. When all the spaces are full, they get the reward. That's another task card. That's an outside play card. What I am going to do is go outside with the wagon for five minutes.

So then organization of group activities. We look at that as well. How many kids can't sustain their emotions within a group? We need the group rules: Listen to the group directions. Wait when directed. Look at the speaker. Share, take turns. Those are kind of prerequisite to being successful in the group. You can do things like use the same verbal group direction consistently to get everyone's attention. So start playing music, singing a song. Use a cue card or consistent nonverbal cue for weight. Use the same verbal or nonverbal routine to end a group activity. So again multiple options is a consistent theme. This is an example of a group activity chart where they are going to do music, calendar, whatever this is, writing, and then followed by snack.

Organization of community routines. Make sure that before we take our field trips, how many of your kids you think, "Field trip-oh my gosh." This is just a way to preplan and to organize those field trips for success. Do some rehearsals.

We were doing some rehearsals of going to the zoo with a little boy in a classroom not too long ago and he was just obsessed about going to zoo, going to the zoo. Yup you're going to see the bear. No, no bear, no bears. But as we worked through all the issues, then he had a successful field trip. If we had just taken him without that preplanning and organization, it could have been a disaster, would have been a disaster.

Inclusion opportunities. We also look at positive peer modeling, training those peers in the environment and using them for a lot of the prompting that goes on. We teach the peers to prompt specific responses within a lesson. So group activity. Imitate what John says next to you. Initiating and responding to greetings and goodbyes. Getting other's attention. Share by offering choices of materials. So again how do we imbed all those critical skills within the group activity?

When we look at preparing for instruction, how do we make all this happen? We can't afford to just be passing the regular ed teacher in the hallway and say, "How'd John do in math today," or, "How did music go?" There has to be some up front peer planning that looks at what are the instructional methods, the daily routines, the social relationships, and the evaluations and grading. So here's a planning worksheet. We highly recommend and encourage that you have a weekly planning meeting between regular ed and special ed to look at what are the upcoming activities and then what's going to happen within those activities for our student. So it's as simple as making out a plan of when the teacher is lecturing what are the required skills? They have to sit in their seat, listen, take notes, answer questions. OK. Then what are the supports we need for that student. In this case, he can sit near the front of the room, have a partner take notes, the copy of notes, use a communication device. So you prevent that, I'm in the classroom, I'm shooting from the hip, because I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I have a plan for what's going to happen, what needs to get done. Here's another example of a planning worksheet for daily routines taken off of the matrix. So during arrival and dismissal here are the required skills: Greetings, goodbyes, care for belongings, following the rules. Here the supports for the students: He's going to do greetings with his communication device, he's going to have a buddy or a partner to help him with following the rules, etc. These are all in your handout packets so you can look at them further to.

So the next thing in your overhead packet is this planning worksheet for social interactions. We're not going to have time to do this today, but you were starting to talk on the environmental discrepancy about during lunch in the cafeteria what are other kids doing. After you've done that, then your step would be, so what are the required skills for being successful in lunch at the cafeteria. Again don't be surprised by what you see other kids doing. And then what are the supports we need for the focus student. But it takes time and planning to do that. Here's just another example of a very quick match/miss-match analysis where we look at what are the facts about the student. What are the facts about the activity? Where are the discrepancies, and what do we need to do to make the match? If you look this, this is a student who is nonverbal, tactilely defensive, some self-stimulating (rocking and hand wringing when not engaged), uses a laptop computer, grasps material quickly, has a slow response time, learns auditorally, likes to read, fearful of testing, dislikes homework, intolerant of the misbehaviors of others, has temper tantrums when bored, frustrated, or stressed. So that's what you know about the student.

Now here's what you know about the activity or the class: Lecture format, has a lot of individual seatwork, extensive use of worksheets, daily homework assignments, the class a competitive goal structure, no projects or hands on activities, there are frequent tests and quizzes, there are frequent behavioral disruptions in class, the student in the class require repetition and extensive explanation of material, and there is a use of rapid firing questions. I looked at Janice and Janice is going, "Uh-oh, that's a problem." So isn't our typical decision to say well if that's the case, then we can't fit our student in to the classroom? But take just about 3-5 minutes (we're not going to do this for long). Look at facts of the student, facts of the activity, preplanning, what would you do to make that classroom work? Take just a few minutes to discuss with your group. You'll be surprised how many things you can come up with in a very short period of time.

Can I have your attention? I gave you about two minutes. So in two minutes, what are some of the things that started to come about how you would accommodate a classroom learning environment for the student characteristics? Somebody share. Put the worksheets on the computer, great. What else. Books on tape. Good. Just shout them out. What else? Homework on the computer. Read the test to him. Extend the activity. So think about that. In less than two minutes you started to come up with some really good ideas about how to bridge the gap which could have been so easy to just say, "Don't ever take him in there. It's not a good place." So just a quick little example of if you had a twenty minute once a week planning time, and you stay on task which is really hard. Look at how productive those meetings can be.

So as we move through there are just some examples of writing lesson plans. Now how good would it be if the classroom teacher and you as the special ed teacher or the paraprofessional goes into the classroom and you know exactly what the plan for Allison is and what the IEP objective addressed in there is? Now how good would that be? A lot more successful for kids. Here's another quick example of writing lesson plans. They're going to go over the quiz. The support: Point Alana's attention to question Mr. E. is going over. If text is digitized highlight each question as discussed. And you can do this in about a twenty minute planning meeting especially once you get to know the classroom, once you get to know the students. It really works well. Here's another example of a lesson plan. Again these are all in your packet. You can go through them more thoroughly. Because you have a homework assignment tonight. Another example. A final example. So you come out again with a script for performance. So here's your brainteaser. Whenever we look at this and I think that all of you sitting here can't negate the value of putting these pieces together and knowing exactly what you're going to teach, when you're going to teach it, how you're going to teach it and it's all clearly communicated. I mean it that not like the ultimate. But why doesn't it happen? Time. Right? I consistently have teachers say, that would be nice, but we have so many things to do that we just don't have time. My answer to that is when you take the time to do this, you're going to have more time because you won't be putting fires out, you won't be doing triage, you won't be trying to solve what didn't work. You'll have your system in place. So instead of not having time, the more realistic question is how could you not make time? Because how many of you have pretty high case loads, a lot of instructional aids to supervise. If it's all outlined what they need to do, there's less of this quick talk in the hall in passing, can't really mention it now.

Now I know it's easy for me to stand up here and say with all the tasks you have to do, you can free yourself some planning time. But your homework tonight is to ponder that and come back tomorrow with a couple ways that you may have found to do that.

You now one creative way we did in the state of Alaska was amazing. The district hired an art teacher because art was not within the curriculum that the elementary schools and so an art teacher would come in on sub pay, so it was like hiring a sub a couple days a week but would come in and do an art activity with the class for the regular education teacher to be released so that they have the time to do planning. Other creative ways. Sometimes you can meet during prep periods. Sometimes it can be meeting during lunch once a week. But I have never had a team who's committed to planning fail to be able to fit it in. It is finding it and prioritizing it, finding the time and doing it, so it becomes a part of your schedule. So I want you to come back tomorrow with some creative ideas of how you can work the planning sessions in your schools.