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Strategies to Enhance Play in Children with ASD

Although cultural and historical perspectives differ, play is viewed today as an essential aspect and primary focus of childhood. Play requires active participation of the player; this occurs when the activity is neither too hard or anxiety provoking, nor too easy or boring. Bundy (1991) defines play as “a transaction between an individual and the environment, that is intrinsically motivated, internally controlled, and free of many of the constraint of objective reality”.

The play behaviour of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) include stereotypical features, lack of symbolic qualities, and limited flexibility. Praxis or motor planning difficulties are often present as well. Praxis can be simply defined as the ability to do. It involves purposeful interaction with the environment, as well as planning of new and unfamiliar motor tasks. It includes three steps: ideation (the ability to think and conceptualize about an action), motor planning (the ability to formulate and readjust a motor plan, in order to sequence ideas in space and time), and execution (the ability to carry through planned actions).

Children who engage in solitary play must conceptualize ideas, create effective plans, and carry out their strategies to remain productively engaged. During group play, children must also interact, be flexible, and incorporate their ideas with ideas of others. Many difficulties described in children with ASD (i.e. communication, social, behavioural, sensory processing and modulation difficulties) affect praxis and their ability to engage in productive, meaningful play. Therefore, a common goal is to expand their play abilities in order to help them function optimally in their environment.

The following strategies compiled by Anne Trecker, MS, OTR/L, can be used to enhance play in children with ASD: Provide a safe attractive environment, with an optimal level of stimulation, allowing for exploration; try to read the child’s wants, desires, and attempts at communication, and respond to them; consider the child’s comfort level and adjust your attitude (playful, animated), physical proximity and eye contact accordingly; be interested in what the child is doing, if needed “get into their world”; attempt to motivate the child to engage and interact at some level; set up developmentally appropriate play activities; allow the child to have control in initiating and ending an activity, follow the child’s lead whenever possible, and provide an opportunity to make choices; talk about what you are doing; sing, use music, exaggerate vocalization, silly talk or sounds; provide just the right level of assistance to allow success; provide opportunities for turn taking; imitate the child and allow opportunities for the child to imitate you; expand on what the child is doing; playfully block repetitive play by adding an obstacle or doing something unpredictable to generate new ideas or movements; provide an appropriate level of predictability and novelty; and finally use familiar play themes or preferred interests when beginning pretend play.

Good luck and don’t forget to have fun!!!

Joëlle Hadaya, erg.
Occupational Therapist

Communication Corner



Pictures! Pictures! Pictures!

If you are working with a student with ASD, chances are you are trying to manage access (both yours and the students) to these pictures. With so many pictures to manage it is easy to confuse their purpose. This article will help you understand the various uses of pictures.

Types of Pictures

Pictures can come in a variety of forms. These can be digital photos, images taken from the internet, hand-drawn pictures and pictures taken from the Boardmaker program (these pictures are called Picture Communication Symbols). **All** of these pictures can be used for a number of purposes.

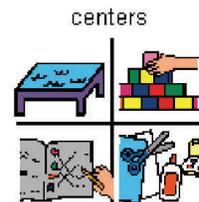
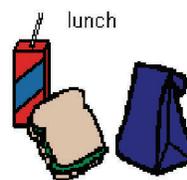
Uses of Pictures

For the majority of our students, we are using pictures (in whatever form) to help our students **understand** what to expect during the day and to help students change activities easily. These pictures are used with **daily schedules**.

To assist students in persisting in a task, a **First-Then** card may be used. This card visually shows students a reinforcing activity that they will have access to when they have completed a less desirable task. Pictures may also be used as **Cue** cards to remind students visually of what is expected, e.g. sitting down, hands to yourself etc.

For some of our students, pictures are used as a means of **expressive communication**. The most common system being used is called **PECS**, which stands for **Picture Exchange Communication System**. This system teaches students to initiate communication and is designed for students who have limited expressive language. Once again, different types of pictures may be used. (For more details see "What is PECS?").

Often pictures being referred to as a "PEC". PECS is a **system**, not a type of picture. On the other hand, I sometimes hear that a student needs to be on a PEC system when in fact, they need to use pictures to help the student understand (i.e. visual schedules). Keeping the uses of these pictures in mind will hopefully result in less confusion for our students and the people who work with them.



Teacher Tips

Have you ever tried to get through the day without your agenda or plan book? Do you forget what time that parent meeting was and need to repeatedly look it up? Do you have students asking "When is gym?" although you told them twice earlier that it was at the end of the day? Or do you have that student who is not respecting the fact that computer time is over and the next activity needs to begin? How about students who think it is unfair that John with an ASD gets to have these nice little pictures on his desk and they do not?

If any of these situations have happened to you then you may want to use a whole class visual schedule. We all benefit from the use of visuals and there is much research that supports the fact that language is enhanced with the use of visuals. The Boardmaker software in your school can be used to create large pictures to stick or Velcro to a designated, easy to read location in the classroom. Teachers of older students often have success with a "Menu" board for each half day that lays out the events of the day. Ask any teacher who has used a whole class schedule and they will tell you there is no other way.

"What is PECS?"

PECS stands for the **Picture Exchange Communication System**. PECS was developed in 1985 by Andrew S. Bondy, Ph.D. and Lori Frost, M.S., CCC/SLP. PECS is an augmentative communication system designed for individuals with ASD or other disabilities who do not use speech, or who speak with limited effectiveness. PECS does not require complex or expensive materials. It was created with educators, families and care programs in mind, and as such, is easy to implement in many settings.

PECS begins with the exchange of a picture of a desired item with a "teacher" who provides the item immediately upon the exchange. PECS allows an individual without speech to communicate with

intent. It focuses on the initiation of the student. PECS training is divided into 6 phases; each phase allows the student to use more sophisticated language, moving beyond requesting items and meeting basic needs. PECS is not designed to teach speech, but the acquisition of speech is encouraged indirectly. A student who is using visual supports (i.e. a visual schedule) may or may not be using PECS. It is important to make this distinction.

The foundation of PECS is the PECS Training Manual, which provides all the necessary information to implement PECS effectively. To find out more about PECS, visit www.pecs.com.

Top Shelf



Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and Other Hands-On Learners

- Horstmeier, D.; Woodbine House.

At last, a book for teaching practical math skills to students with Down Syndrome or other learning delays. This book uses hands-on activities that appeal students' learning styles. This guide focuses on teaching essential, basic math, as well as concepts of time, money, measuring and more.

This book is available from the ASD Library. To borrow it, ask your Consultant for Special Needs, or e-mail Ceri Howe, SSD.

Shopping Corner

Now that many of you are enjoying all the uses of pictos you will want to preserve your materials. Our ASD Team has saved a great deal of money by purchasing laminating film from a company called HOP Canada. You may contact them through Donna Marziliano in Purchasing if you are a LBPSB school, otherwise you would go to their website, www.HOP.ca. These films come in a variety of sizes and thicknesses. As a team we recommend the 3 mm , 9" by 11.5". This will cost you approximately \$16.00 including shipping, as opposed to about \$80.00 per box as found in local retail stores.

Karina Fasteners (karina@sandmate.com, 514-744-5718) is a supplier we like to use for hooks and loops, (Velcro). We recommend the half-inch dots, adhesive white, which will cost about \$25 per roll of 1200, including shipping. You will need to order one roll of hooks and one roll of loops (the hard and soft Velcro).

Try This!

Do you have a student who needs direction, but feels singled out if spoken to too often? Or who has a hard time remembering more than one step of a multi-step task? Try carrying a small pad of post-it notes, and put a short, concise note on her desk. If the child does not read, a simple picture will do. Then if the child becomes off-task or forgets, the adult can point to the post-it as a reminder, rather than repeatedly speaking to her. Not only is this less disruptive for the rest of the class, it is also more easily faded than a verbal prompt.





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We're on the web!

www.lbpsb.qc.ca/~asdn/

Our team is comprised of many professionals with a variety of specializations. Designated as a Centre of Excellence within the province, our mandate is to assist schools in the implementation of best practices for the inclusion of students with an ASD and to serve as a resource to the other English school boards in Quebec. Our team provides assistance to students and families and works to support educational personnel in developing their capacity to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom. We do this through direct intervention, coaching, consulting, professional development, and the sharing of materials.

BEST WISHES !

Diana Carr, our Team Coordinator, is on a leave of absence from LBPSB, effective October 1, 2007, to work on a MELS initiative coordinating a special project. We all wish her well.

Coming Soon!

The Abe Gold Learning and Research Centre presents its **Annual Symposium on Autism and Developmental Disabilities** at "Le Chateau Royal" 3500 boul. Du Souvenir, Laval, **November 8 and 9, 2007.**

A number of sessions are planned in French as well as English, such as "The Social Brain in Autism" with Bob Schultz, Ph.D., "Complex Intervention", with Dr. Kathleen Ann Quill, "Navigating the Social World for Children and Adults with Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, and Related Conditions" Dr. McAfee and "Exploring Language and Communication Impairments in Autism Spectrum Disorders" Helen Tager-Flusberg. To discover the many other topics and speakers who will be at the Symposium please visit www.goldlearningcentre.com

Autism Today will be featuring some of the world's foremost autism authorities speaking on topics covering ASD Through the Lifespan. This theme reflects the reality that ASDs represent an evolving set of personal, familial, societal and therapeutic issues as affected individuals pass from infancy, through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and finally into old age. Adopting a life-span perspective is a fundamental requirement for developing a set of comprehensive services for individuals and families who are dealing with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

November 2—3, 2007, Ottawa, Ontario

Travelodge Hotel & Conference Centre, 1376 Carling Avenue
 Detailed information is available at www.autismtoday.com or by e-mail info@autismtoday.com

WWW

Autism Central:

A "resource-full" new Canadian bilingual web portal launched by the Miriam Foundation.

The goal of *Autism Central* is to simplify access to reliable information on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other developmental disabilities as well as to promote communication between parents, professionals, and people with ASD, locally and across Canada. Parents and professionals can search for local resources in their community and link to numerous websites offering information from across Canada. For example, the page on what to do after your child is diagnosed presents general suggestions, followed by links to provincial government or websites which provide specific details for navigating the health care system and accessing funding (as these vary from province to province). There are also links to local special needs resources such as schools, advocacy groups, camps, respite, and other services. More content is being added to the site on a regular basis. Visit www.autismcentral.ca, e-mail info@autismcentral.ca for more information contact Arlene Segal at The Miriam Foundation, (514) 345-1300 x133.

Thank you to Nicole Guy, Lester B. Pearson Career Advisor and students from Pierrefonds Comprehensive High School for preparing this newsletter for distribution.

