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## The Flexroom: A flexible way to use the resource room

The beginning of the school year can be a stressful time for all of us, as we are in the midst of getting to know our students and organizing our resources to address their individual needs. As stressful as it may be for the adults, our students with ASD may be experiencing a much more significant level of anxiety as they start a new year, encounter new teachers and peers, and learn a new routine. This is because individuals with an ASD are extremely vulnerable to everyday stressors which often impact their availability to learn and function within a school environment. Stress factors include the demands that are placed on them socially, academically, and behaviorally.

Many of our students with ASD are given additional help from the resource teacher in their school and may spend extra time in the resource room as a way of supporting further academic growth and development. This is a traditional way of using the resource room. However, in recent years, there is an evolving philosophy regarding the way that schools have been organizing and using their resource rooms; a new model that has emerged is called the **Flexroom**.

Flexroom is short for *Flexible Resource Room* and is a method of designing the resource room in such a way as to meet the needs of ASD and other students. Using a multidisciplinary approach, this strategy can help increase the student's success in an inclusive setting. The functions of a Flexroom can be quite diverse and it can support different areas of development for which the ASD student requires assistance.

The main purpose of a Flexroom is to have the student spend time in an environment with a minimal amount of stressors. In keeping with this philosophy, the Flexroom can be used as a strategy to develop and increase emotional regulation of a student with ASD. Students can visit the Flexroom at the beginning of the day, before entering the classroom, as well as at the end of the day prior to going home in order to build the skills necessary to cope with a school environment. The flexroom can also be used more reactively by having an area accessible to the student should emotional dysregulation or some other behavioral crisis occur. As a consequence of this type of use, a student may develop positive emotional memories associated with the Flexroom, which in and of itself, can help support regulation of their emotions when faced with challenging situations throughout the school day.

Another purpose of the Flexroom involves designing fun activities aimed at helping students with ASD work together on specific social skills, emotional expression, and conversational competence. This can be achieved by grouping students together and supervising activities that provide an opportunity to share common experiences, whether it is with other ASD students or with typical peers. Additionally, the Flexroom can offer ASD students a venue to explore and nurture their special interests and talents. In many cases, there are few places and opportunities for these students to engage in favorite activities and expand on an area of talent. The Flexroom can offer a chance for them to develop their skills in a safe and positive setting. Examples of fun and engaging activities include art, music, crafts, special projects on a favorite theme or subject, or any other interest that can provide pleasure and relaxation to a student.

Within the ASD population, there is a diversity of needs and strengths. In inclusive settings, the challenge we face is to meet these various needs in the most productive and positive way possible. To achieve this goal, it is important to remember to think outside the box and be creative in the use of our resources.

Written by Patricia Assouad. Based on the article "The Flexroom: Supporting Inclusion and School Success", Autism Spectrum Quarterly Magazine, Summer 2013.

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## Behaviour Tip

Here is a simple strategy to help your students increase their motivation and improve their behavior during group activities either in the classroom or during resource activities.

**Using group reward systems:** There are several types of group contingency systems, an *interdependent group* system is described below:

- ◆ Ask your group to pre-select a reward (e.g. free time, special snack, movie, etc.) which they can earn by accomplishing a specific goal for the week. Examples of goals could include helping peers for a certain amount or number of times, a certain percentage of compliance, or the absence of verbal or physical aggression.
- ◆ Collaborate with your students to create the goal which will increase their 'buy-in'. Ensure the goal is readily understood by all, written and posted in a highly visible spot, straight forward for you to track, and realistic for your students to attain. You want to pick a goal that is easily achieved!
- ◆ Some of the benefits of this system include increased peer pressure to behave appropriately, a focus on adaptive/prosocial behaviors, and more opportunities to reinforce desired behaviors.

## Teacher Tip

### Teacher Tip: Creating Multi-Functional Resource Rooms

In order to meet the varied needs of numerous students of differing age and ability levels, resource teachers have had to become creative in how to use their resource rooms. Historically, resource rooms were used as spaces where specialized teachers could provide academic support to students individually or in small groups. However, resource rooms have since evolved into flexible and versatile environments which use proactive strategies to promote student success. Here are some specific activities and items that can be incorporated into multi-functional resource rooms.

**Independent Work Systems:** This space includes 2 - 4 desks along with a shelf to hold various academic tasks. Each student would have their own independent schedule indicating the quantity, as well as the activities to be completed. Classroom and resource teachers would work together to provide appropriate tasks. Having monthly themes is one option for ensuring variety in terms of assigned tasks. As students from various grades might be working at the same level, students could share the same tasks but on a different schedule.

**Exercise:** Some multi-purpose rooms place mats on the floor or include the presence of exercise equipment. Students can participate in a circuit of physical activities including stretching, muscle relaxation, and aerobic activity.

**Academic Support:** Students may come to the resource room to work one-on-one with an adult or in a small group on specific academic programs. This can include *Handwriting without Tears*, *PCI* reading, *Touch Math*, etc.

**Social Activities & Groups:** This can be an excellent forum for working on social skills, language and communication. An educator can animate a specific social skill curriculum to a small group of students who share similar needs. The SLP can also facilitate these groups by offering recommendations and ideas and by helping to provide feedback and coaching related to this theme.

**Break/ Relaxation:** A beanbag chair, blanket, or rocking chair in the corner of the room can be an ideal location for students to take a break or regain their composure after a particularly difficult incident in class. A coping box that includes some calming toys and visual sequence outlining a series of calming strategies may be beneficial tools for this space.

**Special Interest Groups:** Multi-functional resource rooms can also be used to designate certain times of the day or the week to nurture special interests and provide students with an opportunity to share these interests with other peers. Lego-animation, robotics, space and environment clubs are some examples of groups that exist in some of our schools.

There are multiple benefits to multi-functional resource rooms. Providing regular breaks from the stresses and sensory stimulation of the regular classroom setting can help to prevent challenging behaviour and supports those students who have short attention spans or who need to move frequently. Multi-age groupings for short periods throughout the day also help resource teachers to combine students who share similar interests or profiles together. Resource teachers can also use small groups to provide modeling and feedback to integration aides and to build relationships with students who have special needs. Please contact your Consultant for Autism for more support in setting up or refining an existing multi-functional resource room.





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Our team is comprised of professionals with a variety of specializations. Designated as a Centre of Excellence within the province, our mandate is to assist LBPSB 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 augmenting 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.

We're on the web! <http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca>

### Read all about it

In your interactions with students who have autism, how many times have you said to yourself, *I wish I could go inside his head for just a few minutes?* As educators, it is so valuable for us to understand how our students are processing information, why they are behaving in certain ways, how they are feeling. The book, *Carly's Voice*, written by Arthur Fleishman and Carly Fleischman, presents the remarkable true story of a young child diagnosed with severe autism, who, through typing, expresses articulately and poignantly what it is like to have autism. This book is inspiring and a truly revealing eye-opener.

If you wish to borrow this book or any other item from the ASD Library, please contact Janet Neville at 514-422-3000 ext. 3254 or at [jneville@lbpsb.qc.ca](mailto:jneville@lbpsb.qc.ca). All items from the ASD Library can be found on the Portal or the Centre of Excellence for Autism's website (<http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca/>)

### WWW

For ideas and a tutorial on how to set-up independent work systems, visit the Autism Helper at: [www.theautismhelper.com/indep](http://www.theautismhelper.com/indep)

Visit our new website at: <http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca> You will find resources, materials, previous editions of our Newsletter and more!

### Coming Soon!

We are excited to once again host the ASD Parent and Professional Seminar Series. The seminars will take place on Tuesday, November 26 and Tuesday, April 1 from 7 - 9pm in the Boardroom of the School Board. More information about the topics and speakers will follow shortly. Both seminars are free of charge.

### Try This

When creating a Flexroom, it is a good idea to ensure that spaces are well-defined and that schedules are consistent and structured to meet the needs of students. It is important that students come to associate each space with a purpose. For example, a designated area for independent work will help both students and school staff to remember that students must learn to engage in each task independently while in that specific area. A designated quiet area will support the relaxation of students after they have completed work tasks and will enhance the student's understanding that there is a time to work and a time to relax. Overall, the flexroom should present a more relaxed environment where students can work at their own pace and should not be chaotic or noisy except during physical activity which has been purposely scheduled into the flexroom program. Being able to follow simple rules should be the criteria for allowing a student to have access to the flexroom program. To promote this philosophy, it is a good idea to teach students to knock before entering the flexroom and ask for permission to come in. This sets the stage for building respect and positive communication between students and staff.