

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development.

Christine Reeve: I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education but my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research-based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to The Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. Hi, or welcome for the first time. Either way, I am very excited that you're here, especially for today's episode. And yeah, I know. I say that all the time every episode, but humor me, it's only because I really think it's true. Every episode is like my little child that I send off, and I hope that people will find it helpful. If you do find it helpful, maybe you could go over to your favorite podcast app and leave some feedback. I would really love that.

I had not planned to start off my episode that way. I am really glad that you are here and that you found us today because this month I'm talking about classroom teams. Special ed is such a unique field because there is a level of supervision in our classrooms that you typically don't see in other parts of the school, and yet, you aren't really the supervisor. You're running the classroom so you are leading the classroom, but you don't typically have input into selecting the staff that make up the classroom.

Although you're expected to train them, you aren't really their supervisor. You don't really have a ton of opportunity to do that training because, well, special ed and students kind of take up all that time. So in today's episode, that's exactly what I'm going to talk about. I'm going to focus on some of the biggest roadblocks to training staff in your classroom, and ways that you can clear those roadblocks so that you have time to train your staff.

If you would really like to learn more about how to set yourself up for success this year in just 15 minutes a day, come check out the Special Educator Academy. We have tons of tools and tips that can help you help your students from workshops and trainings, to tips and templates to help you work and plan efficiently. We're not all about webinars, and most of them can be accessed in just 10 to 15 minutes a day. So grab your seven-day free trial at specialeducatoracademy.com. Now, let's get started.

Don't miss our last episode, in which I talked about the nuts and bolts of setting up your classroom culture and your structure with the adults in the classroom. It's all about laying the foundation for what we're going to talk about today and over the next couple of weeks. If you missed that episode, definitely go back and grab it. You can find it at autismclassroomresources.com/episode131.

The first roadblock that I want to talk about today is attitude. Many times when you are working in a classroom, especially if you're new to the classroom, or the paraprofessionals are new to the classroom, you may find that they are resistant to receiving "training". It might be that they're older than the teacher, they have more years of experience than you as the teacher, or they don't feel that they need to be trained.

You know what? Sometimes they're right. Sometimes they don't need to be trained. Yeah, I said that. Sometimes they don't need a ton more training. Many of them know what they're doing. They've been doing it for a long time. So my first tip in this roadblock is that we actually need to assess and observe before we start riding on training. I think a lot of times we jump into a classroom and we're like, "We've got to train everybody," when in reality, a lot of them had training before. What skills do team members already have? What do they do well? What outside training might they have had in other classrooms or elsewhere in the district?

The first step in the attitude roadblock is really to get to know your staff and find out what their training needs really are. What do they perceive that they need more training about? If they have areas that they think they need more training on, more needs on, then that's a good place to start. People are more motivated to learn in areas that they have identified a need in. Maybe they have a skill that they could train you on. The more that training can be a collaborative effort within the classroom, the more collegial the environment will be, and that's going to make it a happier place for everybody to work in.

Now, if you notice areas that a staff member needs some training on, is it something that everyone in the class could use some training on? In other words, is it something that's a global need, rather than something that requires singling out one staff member? Now, I'm not suggesting that you're going to have time to do full-class training, nor am I saying that that's the best kind of training to provide, but if you're focused on training for everyone in the classroom without singling out one person, that takes the spotlight off that one person who might be a little bit more resistant to adapting to a new strategy, and it might make it easier for them to adopt something new.

It's a little hard to do something when everybody's staring at you and when you feel like you've been kind of picked out that crowd. If I noticed that everybody in the classroom, perhaps even including myself, is getting kind of lax about providing too many verbal prompts, I might decide everyone needs a refresher, or everyone needs initial training on prompt hierarchies and fading prompts. There might be one person in the room that I'm really concerned about not fading prompts out, but rather than calling them out, it's something everybody could learn about because everybody's having difficulty with it. I'll talk in a few minutes about how we're going to do that kind of training.

Those are some ways that you might address the issue that someone is resistant to being trained, takes the spotlight off of them and focus it on the classroom as a whole. Because when we keep our eyes on the focus of redoing this for the students, and everybody can benefit, then you're never going to go wrong if you always just keep everybody focused on the needs of the students.

The second roadblock that comes up with training in the classroom is how to determine if it's a can't-do or a won't-do situation. When we teach our students, we always have to think about whether their behavior or their difficulty with demonstrating a skill is a can't-do, (doesn't have the skill or doesn't have the skill today, maybe he had it yesterday but he can't do it today), or a won't-do, (he's not motivated to demonstrate the skill because the reinforcer isn't powerful enough today. Maybe it was powerful enough yesterday, but it's not today).

When we use the strategy, we always ask ourselves when a student isn't doing what we asked, he's not finishing his work, or he's getting the answers wrong, whether it's a behavior issue or a skills issue. Because for some, or often, many of our students, they could do it yesterday but they can't do it today, but it's not necessarily a behavioral issue. It could still be a skill issue from day-to-day. In those situations, where we're not sure whether it's a skill or motivation issue, my rule of thumb is always to assume it's a skill issue. You will never go wrong with teaching more, which is what we do if we assume it's a skill issue.

We can try to increase the reinforcement and see if that helps. But if we back up to an easier skill and see if it helps, or provide more support and see if that helps, it's likely a skill issue and the student needs more instruction. Well, guess what? The adults in your classroom are people and they're just like your students. They may not have the same disabilities. But a skill or a behavioral issue isn't a disability thing. It's a human thing. It holds for all of us. So when you see an adult who's not doing what you've asked or not doing something the way you thought you had told them or trained them to do, ask that same question.

It isn't that they don't know how. Maybe they knew how yesterday but they don't know how today. I will tell you, as I get older, this is happening to me, they told me how to do it yesterday and I knew how to do it, but I don't know how to do it today. Again, you can't go wrong with more instruction. Now you want to approach it by saying, "Clearly, you haven't learned this correctly." Because you would never say that to a student. Because you would never say that to anybody. Instead, you're going to start with the I statement: "Do you mind if I try this with him and see how it works?"

That gives you an opportunity to model something. If it works, and the aide wasn't watching, call them over and say, "I think this might be our answer. Can you watch this and tell me what you see?" and get their feedback about it. Ask for their assessment of the strategy. You could say, "Do you think this would work for you?" If they say no, better that you know now that you're going to have to come up with a different solution than after you go through that a few times to find out that they don't think that works for them, better that they tell you now so you can switch, you need a different solution at that point. Pull them into helping you come up with a solution and use that as a way to model that solution for them.

Finally, the third roadblock is probably the biggest, and that is time and opportunity to provide the modeling, the collaboration, and the coaching that training requires in the classroom to be successful. Time is our biggest roadblock of almost everything that we need to do in the classroom. But luckily, I do have some solutions to share for that as well.

One is you might make arrangements to share after-school duty with fellow teachers. If your paraprofessionals or you have duties after school, maybe you could work with other teachers in your building and see if you could trade off duties for a day. Maybe the teacher could take your paraprofessional duty for the day, for a day a week, and you could take her paraprofessional's duty for another day a week. That frees you to meet up on that day with your para and she could meet up with her para on the day you take her para's duty so that you could each meet with your staff one day a week. Maybe that's one solution.

Another solution is to talk with administration about maybe carving some time out to collaborate. We've had several teachers in the academy who have gone to their administrators and said, "I really need time to collaborate with my paras and they are not scheduled to stay past when students leave. Is there any way that we could have them stay for an extra 15 minutes one day a week? Here's what a training audit agenda would look like of what we need to cover. These are the things that we would need to discuss."

Share with them why you want the opportunity to collaborate, the function of it, the agenda of information you would discuss, and the impact that it will have on the students. Make sure you're focusing again on the students. That might help an administrator see why this is important. They've gotten the administrators to buy into it, which has really, really helped them and given them that time. That has actually worked several times for teachers that I've worked with.

The third way is that we've talked about the one-man-down plan at other times, but a one-man-down plan is when you take the zoning plan that I talked about in Episode 131 and you create with your schedule in your zoning plan a one-man downtime. You might do it for the whole day. You might also do it for just a part of the day like during centers where you are running as if one staff member is missing. Then you run that time of the day and you might free either yourself up or a para up; maybe a para to watch you or you to watch them so that you can have time to observe, model, and give feedback. That gives you that time.

I would run that probably at the beginning of school, maybe one day a week, one every other week, and then periodically throughout the year as checks and balance, one every couple of weeks. Maybe I wouldn't do it as often when there's flu season or when we're out with COVID or something like that just because we're running a one-man down because we're short staffed more frequently, but I would rather run a one-man-down plan periodically, frequently at the beginning of the year, and have trained staff across the year, then run a full schedule of staff, of untrained staff. That's a compromise that you're making in that way. I think that there's a benefit to that. I think it's worthwhile to do that and make that compromise.

I will make sure that there's a link to a blog post where I talk about the one-man-down plan and show you a little bit about how that works. It's also really great for when you have staff absences because you've already thought it through and it just clicks in at the beginning of the day without having to move everything around at the last minute. Those are some ways that you can set up your classroom for providing the training that's needed, as well as some ways to handle some issues with some of the mental roadblocks for providing training in the classroom.

I hope that you found them helpful. I know that this can be a really tricky part of running a classroom, and I would love to continue the discussion in our private Facebook group. If you aren't already a member, hop over to [specialeducatorsconnection.com](https://www.specialeducatorsconnection.com) and answer the questions. If you're a teacher, a related service provider, or a paraprofessional, we will get you inside the group. If you're looking for more resources for training staff and setting up a successful classroom team, you can check out my Paraprofessional Schedules and Zoning Plan for Managing Special Education Teams toolkit. I'll make sure there's a link to that in the show notes.

If you want more ideas about training, we have workshops and training on leadership and training staff and collaboration in the Special Educator Academy. Come and grab your seven-day free trial at specialeducatoracademy.com. I hope you come back next week when I'll be talking about ways to provide feedback effectively to staff in the training with limited time. Until then, I hope you have an amazing week.