



AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST, EPISODE 24 TIME-SAVING SYSTEMS

URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode24>

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. 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. Thanks for joining us today. I'm Chris Reeve, your host. And I have set up a LOT of classrooms in my time. At one point in my career, I felt like I set up classrooms for a living. At the beginning of every year as a consultant, I started school over and over and over in different parts of the country. And that doesn't even account for all the classrooms I've set up over the years in the middle of the year, or just did minor revisions to.

And there is one reason for spending all of this time setting up classrooms. I firmly believe if you set up the classroom well, it cuts down on the amount of work you have to do for the rest of the year. If the classroom systems aren't established, you play catch up for the rest of the year.

In this episode I want to share 5 tips for systems you can use in your classroom. These tips can help you delegate more effectively. In other words, if you are like me and have a hard time giving up responsibility, I've got some suggestions for you (and me). The tips will also help you set up systems in the classroom that will increase productivity of all the adults in the area where they are needed. And this means less work for you at the end of the day.

So more productive, less work, less overwhelm, less stress. Sound good? Great! Then let's get started.



I. Clear & Detailed Zoning Plan to Increase Productivity

OK, first up may not surprise those who have followed for a while. Our first system is making sure that the zoning plan for the classroom clearly outlines everyone's duties.

For those of you who don't know what a zoning plan is, I'll put a link in the show blog post and you can hop over to autismclassroomresources.com/episode24. But wait, if you are familiar with zoning plans, don't go just yet. I have some tips for them that will make them even more critical to the productivity of your classroom.

So, a zoning plan is essentially a collaborative schedule that is designed for all the classroom staff. HOWEVER, it doesn't stop at just where people should be, what activity they are working in or which students they are assisting.

Your zoning plan should also outline all the little duties that need to be done during the day. So who is wiping down the tables? Who is turning in the attendance (cause I always forget this). Down to who grabs the walkie talkie when the classroom leaves the room.


Who is making sure that the schedules get reset. Is that something that can be done at the end of the day by staff before they leave?

Who is checking the take-home folders for notes from home and permission slips? Can that be delegated to a staff member and save you a step?

Why Do I Need a Detailed Zoning Plan?

Making sure you specifically assign (with feedback and discussion with your classroom staff) to someone in the classroom means that I. You don't have to direct someone to do it (30 seconds saved). It also means that you won't have 4 people cleaning the snack table and one person trying to run a group with 10 students at the same time.

In almost every classroom I've been in, all of the staff (teachers included) just want to do what needs to be done in the classroom to make it run smoothly. But the key is, the teacher may have an overall picture in her mind



about what needs to be done. But the rest of the staff may have no idea what that looks like...if you don't create a plan and share it with them.

So, if you don't share the plan...then they pick up and do what they see or think is needed. Hence, the 4 staff members I once watched wash the snack table while the teacher tried to wrangle 15 preschoolers into circle. And it wasn't because they were avoiding it or being problematic, it was because they knew it needed to be clean. So they just all gravitated over to that cause it wasn't assigned to a specific person. And it was a good lesson for me about why it's so important to write those things in.

So your zoning plan when it's detailed and clear, helps to increase the productivity in your room by making sure that everyone (yourself included) is working smarter, and not harder. And, and that saves time and gets more done and it provides the foundation for the other four elements I'm going to talk about.


2. Get the Students Involved

Yes, you heard that right. The second tip is that you can and should include students in your systems. .Because think about it, who really needs to wipe the snack table? That could be a student's job. That could be something that they're learning to do in a life skills classroom regardless of their age. They could help an adult do it if they're not ready to do it on their own.

Students need to learn to clean up after themselves. So while I will cry if they take their independent work apart when it's finished (don't know why? email me and I'll point you toward that answer), the rest of the room is fair game.

Here's what that means. The students may benefit and help by resetting their own schedules for the next day. Several times in classrooms I've had students who love putting things in order. I often give those students jobs that involve keeping the group schedule visuals up to date. And I've had classrooms where one student is responsible for resetting everyone's schedule. And they were really good at it!

Similarly it's useful for students to learn to reset their own schedules. It helps them review the events of the next day, teaches an effective



executive functioning skill, and teaches them responsibility for their own self-management. And that's one less thing you need to do at the end of the day.

If you have students who have goals for life skills, build those life skills into caring for the classroom. Learning to take care of, clean and manage your surroundings is a life skill.

So let's not take that opportunity away from them. Now they need to be able to make a choice in what they're doing. This is not an opportunity to exploit them in any way. This is simply setting up routines where they have responsibilities. I'm not going to push them to the point where they have a behavior problem, but I am going to kind of put it into their schedule.

3. Create a Task List for Adults


We all know that there is more to running a classroom than the things that happen everyday. We have a ton of materials to create, copy, etc. So, create a an ongoing to-do list that stays in a central place in your classroom. These are separate from the things that have to be done everyday (i'll talk about them in a minute). These are all the things that need to be made. Realized you are missing a visual? Put i on the list to make a new one. Need copies for tomorrow or next week? Put it on the list.

Keep the list of materials to make and on your zoning plan, in the notes, write in that if a student is absent or pulled out of the room or someone has a free moment, their next stop should be the to-do list. They pick the next thing on the list and just do it.

IF they have questions, tell them to skip to the next thing on the list they are comfortable with. And I will talk in a moment about how to keep that from happening. With the to-do list, you can make the most of everyone's time in the classroom, and not have to stop working with students to direct them.

4. Create a Materials Production Area

If you have the space, you can create a teacher corner that has the laminator, scissors and Velcro at the ready. If the only laminator you have



to use is in the library, then think about laminating your stuff but not cutting it out in your afternoons. Then it's ready for someone to sit and cut and put Velcro on.

If you can't have material production tools out in the classroom, for safety reasons, keep them in a designated and labeled drawer. Keep the do-list nearby. Make sure that you are cutting down on time to have to go find the materials to make what's on the to-do list by keeping it all nearby and labeled.

5. Checklists

Finally, I've saved the best for last. I know many of us are quite particular about the way things in our classrooms are done. This is one of my fatal flaws in every job I've ever had. I want to delegate but it always seems like it would be 1. Easier to do it myself. And 2. it seems like I have to do it over because it isn't done quite like I like it.


I have finally come to the realization that first, I have to delegate. And so do you. At some point, a task that is DONE but not perfect is better than a task that is perfect but never finished.

Similarly a task that provides what you need when you need it that you don't lose sleep over...also better than one you had to stay up till midnight to finish.

My second realization (trust me it took me many years) is that my time is worthwhile. SO IS YOURS! Your time is worthwhile even if it's just time to watch your daughter on the swings or have time to lie on the couch for 20 minutes petting the dog. So don't waste your time if someone else can do something well enough to get the job done.

But how can you make it more likely that the regular, routine jobs around the classroom get done in a way you can live with? Checklists.

When you want someone to do something in a certain manner, if it's a something that has to be done more than once, make a checklist. If you want to make sure that schedules get set up in a specific way, make a



checklist by writing down how you do it so that it is likely to get done consistently the same way each time.

Same thing for prepping materials. I personally am one of the cut-laminate-cut people because I have had too much laminate peel over the years. However, I recognize that others have a different experience and do not think the first cutting is necessary.

Similarly, have a pattern to how you use Velcro. I use the rule "Hard on the card; soft on the surface." Some of you do it the opposite way and put the rough velcro on the wall and the soft velcro on the surface. There are arguments for doing it both ways. That doesn't really matter...what matters is that the whole classroom staff within the room does it the SAME way. Otherwise the velcro in your systems won't match.

I just need to make sure that everybody else is doing it the same way because I'm going to be really frustrated if I want something cut then laminated then cut. And what we have is something that went through the laminator as a full sheet and got cut apart and peels in five days. Cause that's going to drive me insane. No one else is going to know that if I don't tell them that. So I put it on a checklist.

How Do I Make a Checklist?

Checklists don't have to be complicated. They don't even have to be long. I believe they do have to be personalized to some extent because they need to reflect how Team wants things done.

You can make a checklist on paper by just writing down each step as you go through the task. It will take some revising at first, but once you have the procedure and process done, everyone will be doing things consistently. Plus, it's so easy to give NEW staff so they can avoid the learning curve of how you like things done.

If you have systems in your classroom that your amazing paras run, ask them to write down the steps for you. So if you have a para who is the king or queen of independent work, ask them to write down the steps they follow as they do it one day. Then, if they are absent, someone can step into their place more easily with less confusion.



You can do it on paper, put it on a Google doc, or use a Trello board. There are tons of ways to give folks checklist. I think the easiest way is to use them though is to post them in the area where they are needed. Laminate them and have staff use a dry erase marker to check them off as they go.

So if I'm going to use something electronic, I'm going to tell them, check your phone for the checklist. I keep them in the area that they go.


So those are 5 tips you can use that can save you time and energy in the classroom. Let's go back over them quickly.

1. Make sure you have a detailed zoning plan that outlines responsibilities throughout the day.
2. Get the students involved by assigning routines that maintain the classroom and give them life skills practice of taking care of their community.
3. Set up an ongoing task list of material prep tasks needed to be completed.
4. Develop an area with all the materials needed for material prep so more time is spent doing and less time is spent looking.
5. Make checklists of routine tasks in the classroom so people are completing them the same way and no one is having to go back and redo them at the end of the day.

And just as a caveat to that, it isn't just you that may have some issues with how things are done. If you've got a para that it drives them crazy that the schedules aren't set up right every day or that something in independent work isn't done, ask them to tell you the steps and add it to the checklist.

So it doesn't, if you're not the type a person, maybe it's someone else in your classroom and your classroom will be more pleasant if everybody is happy with the materials that they're using.

The true key to all of this that the more systems you have set up in your classroom, the more the classroom runs itself. The more it runs itself, the more time you have to focus on teaching the students. And my hope is that these strategies can reduce a little of the time you spend each evening or



early morning setting up the classroom and prepping, leaving some time in your day for lesson planning, family, a life and sleep.

I would love to hear your strategies for increasing the automation of your classroom and increasing productivity! Hop over to our free Facebook group at [specialeducatorsconnection.com](https://www.facebook.com/specialeducatorsconnection) and share. Or just share a tip on Instagram and tag me! I'd love to share more ideas about this because we need all the help we can get in productivity to prevent overwhelm and burnout.

IF you are interested in more tips like this, come join the Autism Classroom Resource Library for weekly tips and ideas that will save you time, energy and hopefully give you more ideas for the amazing instruction you do for our students. To sign up just go to autismclassroomresources.com/community

Thank you.