

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. I'm Christine Reeve and I'm your host. Thank you for joining us as we talk about setting up systems in your classroom to help you get set up and organized. Our goal in the CORE model classroom is to get your classroom running as automatically as possible. We want to reduce decision fatigue and help staff work as independently as possible, so you as the teacher can focus on teaching and not managing. Through this series from about Episode 80 to now, we've been talking about this process of organizing from learning about the students to setting up the classroom and choreographing your staff. Specifically back in Episode 83, I talked about staff zoning plans and that's where you really start to work on organizing staff for doing this. If you haven't heard that one, go back and take a listen at autismclassroomresources.com/episode83.

In our last episode, I reviewed some common routines that you want to set up and some strategies to help doing that in a way that gets it done. One of the routines that I touched on was lesson planning. Now, before you hit the skip button, hear me out. Lesson planning gets a really bad rap. I know there are many special ed teachers who don't think it's needed in their classroom because their students are also individualized. But if you truly want your classroom to run on its own and to allow you to teach your students, and not have to manage the room, you're going to need lesson plans as a tool to do that, and that is what I'm going to talk about today.

I know that lesson planning can be a bear in special ed classrooms for so many reasons. Whenever I take a poll at a training or on social media, I get mixed results on whether people do them or not. I'm still amazed at how many schools no longer require them. But I want to tell you that lesson planning does not have to be a giant time suck. It can actually help you. If it's a routine, you have a good template and it's functional in your classroom. Today, I want to focus on why lesson planning is important. I just have to make my case a little bit, I promise not to take too long, and how you can make it work for you. I've got a set of free lesson plan templates for you on the blog today for this episode. I'll talk more about that later in the episode. I've pulled them from The Special Educator Academy for you where we have a whole workshop on lesson planning and a whole course on setting up your classroom using the model that I've been talking about here. If you're really struggling with trying to figure out how to make your classroom work without making your classroom your life, come try us out with a free seven-day trial at specialeducatoracademy.com. Now, let's get started.

Now, I want to start with why do we need lesson plans? Why are they important? I won't spend a lot of time on this, I swear. It's important that we use lesson plans to plan out the curriculum instruction and how we integrate the curriculum, and the IEP. I'm going to talk a little bit about the relationship between lesson plans and the Teaching Implementation Plan because it really

doesn't substitute for a lesson plan. But that planning piece of it is really important as a way to really think about how you are teaching what we need to teach. But in the case that I'm talking about here in planning your classroom, lesson plans are critical for communicating to the staff. It allows you to give direction to paraprofessionals without having to stop at every transition and tell them what you want them to do in the activity that they're in. In that case, lesson plans can take some different forms. It can be the broad lesson plan across the day or it can be a more structured lesson plan for the activity you have planned in their center.

I'll share a couple of examples. You may have a lesson plan that talks about the objectives and the plans for the whole day, then you may have more detailed lesson plans that just talk about the art project that maybe you pull from something, like the Unique Learning System or a plan that you've actually laid out or bought maybe from a TpT lesson. For instance, if you own my set of laundry books and you're a high school or a middle school teacher, then maybe you put the lesson plan directly from that, that gives even more detail than you'd put in your weekly lesson plans.

Another really good reason to have a lesson plan is that it demonstrates all of this information to your administrator so that when they come to do an evaluation or a walk through, that allows your administrator to have a map of how you are implementing your curriculum, your instruction of the IEP goals, your implementation of all that stuff across your day. It does a lot to communicate to your admin about how you teach and that you've really got it all under control.

Finally, another thing that your lesson plan does for you is it's a key element in demonstrating to families the state. Hopefully, you don't have to deal with this but possibly to a due process hearing officer, that instruction is based on the IEP and the curriculum, and is planned out to provide that appropriately ambitious progress that IDEA requires us to provide to our students.

Now, let me talk for just a minute about the relationship between IEPs and teaching plans. The IEP and the curriculum tell us what we have to teach; IEP, the individual student curriculum, what we have to teach overall. The teaching plan simply takes the IEP and maps it out across the schedule, and the teaching strategy. The lesson plan takes thematic units, the curriculum, and the teaching plan and pulls that all together. Then from that, we also have teaching programs that break the skills down. There's a lot of different moving parts but the lesson plan just plans it out across the week.

When I think about making the lesson plan a routine, which is really the focus of what I want to talk about here, the biggest piece is to use a template because if you're using a template, A, that's less thinking and you know I like that; B, it's going to save you time; and C, it means that once you've done that initial template, you have very few things that are really going to change in a self-contained class and in most resources classes from week to week. You can really fill in the blanks every week with just the pieces that are going to change.

If your schedule is pretty structured and staying the same from day to day, and week to week, then you're just changing the things that are changing. Your students' IEP goals are generally not changing every day, every week. What your students are working on, like their arrival routine, their circle activities, those kinds of things aren't changing. Certain activities are going to

change like where you go in the community, if you do community based instruction, that might change. A cooking activity might change. An art activity might change. But your reading lessons are still going to be pretty much IEP driven a lot of times, and curriculum driven. Those might change in terms of the lesson that you're pulling but it's not going to change overall.

There's not going to be as much to put in there as you think there's going to be. I have a template for you on the blog and you can download them. There's a preschool and a middle school example. You can use the preschool as an elementary, primary, preschool. The middle school is a good secondary example. They are overwhelming to look at first, so please don't judge them when you download them. It took me a long time to share them because I really think that people look at them and see a lot of types. They say for each activity the objectives, the procedures, the materials, and your measure value of evaluation. You could also include the standards if that is something that's required by your admin. You may have a form that you're required to be used by your school, in which case, that's what you use. But what I have done with both of them is I've either used color type or highlight on each of them to just show you the things that are going to change. All of the black type, that stays.

Hopefully, when you see it, what jumps out at you is that you're not rewriting the wheel every week. Once you set that up, you're just filling in the little things that change. If you run a morning meeting, it's probably going to stay the same for a month or even a week or it's going to stay the same and a few things are going to be tweaked every week. It's not going to be that overwhelming. Your arrival routine is going to look the same every day. It's going to have the same objectives, the same routines until pieces are mastered and things get bumped up, then you make minor changes. That template is a really important component.

Another piece is to really carve out an afternoon or a planning time to complete your lesson plans. One thing you may want to do is possibly batch them. Maybe, every other week, you take the time that you're going to batch them. You're going to do two or three lesson plans at once. Maybe that's going to be easier. That may be a way. Sometimes, it's easier when you get yourself in lesson plan mode, just to do two of them instead of one. Then you only have to do them every other week.

Another thing is to post them in your classroom so that whoever comes in can see what your plans and your thinking are. Finally, the fourth one for making it a routine is to share them with your staff and make sure that they know how to understand them, and the elements that they need to look at for the pieces that they are running, so they know where to get that information for what they need to do because that's going to allow them to know, "What are my goals? What are my objectives? What am I doing?" If there's any extra material that you want to tack onto that for the cooking activity, like the recipe, the materials, where to find them, all that stuff, then add that as well, then they can pick it up and go. You're not going to spend your time working with your students, telling them how to run their center. You're going to be free to work with your students. That is our goal.

You'll see them. In this post I'm going to link to the post that walks you through them. As I said in the Special Educator Academy, we have a workshop that really walks through them in more detail but I wanted you guys to have this. You can find the templates at the blog post at

autismclassroomresources.com/episode86 to download the free lesson plan examples. Those are Word documents, so you can use them as templates. They're Word documents or Google Docs. I may put them in both. You can use them. They came from a workshop for the Special Educator Academy. If you want to give us a try and check that out, you can get a seven-day free trial at specialeducatoracademy.com.

As usual, thank you so much for tuning in. I hope that you'll come back next week when I will be starting to talk about organizing data collection. We're going to organize data collection and data analysis. Until then, I'll just be over here geeking out with my data and my lesson plans in my happy place. See you then.