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Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I am glad that you have joined us. I'm Chris Reeve, I'm your host if you haven't been here before, and at the time that I'm recording, this is our first episode of 2023.

And in keeping with the start of a new year, I want to talk about how we can build support and tweak your Classroom Core so that it saves you time, it saves you energy, it reduces stress, it promotes collaboration, and it allows you essentially to get back to teaching instead of managing.

So I'm going to talk about what the Core Model is, where it came from, and what it involves, what we want to include, and why it's so important. And then next week, we will actually dive into what systems you need in your classroom to start achieving those results.

In addition, I am in the midst of making some changes to our free webinars as well as working on putting all of these resources together in the Special Educator Academy.

Our Organizing Classroom or Setting Up Spaces to Maximize Efficiency is definitely a huge piece of the Core and I'm going to be developing a pathway of how you can make sure that all of your Core elements are tuned up, as well as they can be to reduce the amount of time you have to spend at work, to reduce your stress and you're needing to make decisions on the fly so reducing your decision fatigue, as well as how we can help you do that.

So I'm going to talk about what all that is, and the Special Educator Academy will have step by step pieces in place in a pathway for you to implement that if you want to come join us. You can definitely find out more information and get a free seven day trial at specialeducatoracademy.com.

So the Core Model stands for actually stands for something it stands for classroom organization

So the Core model stands for actually stands for something it stands for classroom organization results in efficiency. And when my colleague Sue Kabat and I first put that together, you may have been around, we crowd sourced it a little bit. And when we put that together, it sounded very clunky to me.

However, in that time, since we first named it this, I have been through some extensive physical therapy. And as part of that, I have learned the importance of core strength. And the fact that you really have to focus on building the core of your body before you worry about building muscles in your arms and your legs, you're concerned about what a difference it will make when you have actual core strength.

That analogy holds very true in this situation because the way that we have set up the Core, it is everything that allows your classroom to run, so that you can focus on implementing those evidence based practices.

And one of the things that I've seen consultants and coaches do over the years, is to come in and make recommendations about what interventions you should be using. And that's great. But it's sort of like telling somebody that they need to use a visual schedule or a picture schedule but they don't stop to think and look at whether or not there is a structured routine schedule in the classroom to match that schedule to.

So I've been in many classrooms where people are like, well, they told me I needed a picture schedule, but it's just not working. And it's not working because the classroom schedule isn't predictable and routine, which is then making it hard to teach the use of the picture schedule but also is making it that much more important that we have it.

So the Core is what you really want to focus on in the classroom at the beginning of the year. But it is something that you can tweak and improve all throughout the year.

And if you are say a preschool teacher or an early childhood person, then you have students coming to throughout the year. So you're constantly tweaking your Core in order to support the increasing needs in your caseload.

So, I also think of the Core as being something that makes the difference as to whether or not you most personify a firefighter in your classroom, or a Zen master in your classroom.

The firefighters forget to develop the core, or they get distracted and focus on something else. They jumped straight to their evidence based interventions, they focused on the teaching, expecting that the rest of it was just going to work out. So they didn't put their classroom management and structure

first in their classroom development. They didn't make that the priority.

Whereas the Zen master makes the Core a priority. They spend time planning for each individual student in the classroom. So making sure that the classroom that you're building is meeting the exact needs of the students who are with you at that time. You may have gotten some new students with the new year or you may have lost some students. Lots of things can change and when that happens, we have to go back and tweak what we have as far as our structure.

A Zen master who made the Core priority knows how each IEP in their classroom is going to be implemented across their day. So their schedule is clicked in with their IEP needs of their students. They spent time developing the classroom structure and routine.

We do that regularly for a few weeks, if not more at the beginning of the year. Because again, if we've got that strong core, then we can start doing our instruction.

They develop positive behavioral supports, both for specific students with their VIPs, but also class wide classroom management systems that promote appropriate behavior and good replacement skills, so that there aren't as many fires. And that obviously, is what we're aiming for.

Now, I am not going to tell you that running your classroom will ever be like Zen meditation.

But the hope is, and the plan is to put the Core in place so that once the Core is solid and can kind of stand on its own, your classroom will run itself. And you will be able to make better decisions because you won't be making every decision on the fly while you're dealing with a crisis, while you have a student who's acting up, while you're trying to figure out how to get these kids reengaged because you lost their engagement.

So the elements that go into the Core are your basic classroom structure. And I start that with the Teaching Implementation Plan. And I have done some podcasts about that in the past, and I will make sure that they are linked in the show notes.

The TIP tells us what each student needs to learn on their IEP and makes us really think about how we're going to teach the skill, and in what activity are we going to teach the skill.

They allow us to plan out which skills are being addressed at which time during the day. Hand in hand with that is developing that classroom schedule, getting the classroom scheduled to be a routine, getting the classroom schedule where we don't have downtime in between activities, where activities

are the right length.

Hopefully we're at a point in this year, unless you're walking into a new classroom this year, where you've had some, that activity went too long, that activity went too short. And so you've got a better idea and understanding of how long your students can maintain.

If you started that at the beginning of the year, and things are going smoothly, it might be time to reevaluate and tweak that a little bit, too. You might be able to push your group activities a little bit longer and maybe not have quite as much individualized one to one kind of instruction if that's something that you're doing.

Along with that routine classroom, what we're trying to do with that classroom schedule is make sure that our students are engaged and moving from this to that to this to that. There's no moving to this and now we hang out for five minutes and now we move to this. And I'll talk in just a minute about the importance of maintaining that engagement.

So we want to have our zoning plan that tells our staff what to do. We want to have our physical environment organized in a way that it's predictable where the materials are where we need them. Where the things I need to put my hands on immediately are where I can do that without leaving my students and going across the room.

We want to have visual cues that are not just providing support for our students, but also let's face it, they're providing support for our staff. We all get messed up if a student's picture schedule gets messed up. And it's not because we need a picture schedule, it's because that's what we're using as our schedule for the day.

So we want to make sure that we've got visual cues in place that makes sense for our students but also, we may have some that are going to make sense for our staff as well.

We have a plan for data collection and we work that plan. We take a plan for doing the TIP. We build that into our schedule. We build that into our lesson planning. And everybody knows what's expected with data collection, and the data gets collected on a regular basis. It's not a dream, we can actually do it.

I actually haven't podcast episode where I talked about ways to create a system for data collection and why a system is more important than what your forms are. So I will make sure that is linked below as well.

Along with our data collection system, we need a system for lesson planning, and how we're going to implement our curriculum across the room. Whether that is a full day curriculum, like the Unique Learning System, or Teach Town or Star. Or whether it's the more individualized subject based curricula, like different reading curriculum or different math curriculum. We want to make sure we've got those in there as well.

So I will be talking about lesson plans. And I will talk about how to create a system to help with them as well, because you want to make sure that you have consistent lesson plans. Because just like with our students, if I can give my staff something they can look at, they're going to be more likely to follow it. And I don't have to be there to tell them to do it.

So it's going to make our classroom run more automatically, as I like to say. It's going to run by itself. So again, that frees you up to actually do other things.

We want to make sure that our curriculum, our IEP, and our lesson planning are all adding up. Finally, we want to make sure of two very important components for our students in Special Ed.

First, we want to make sure that we've got a classroom management system that is going to make sense for our students.

And second, we want to make sure that we are planning our instruction in a way that our students are acquiring new skills, getting fluent in new skills, and then being able to use those skills in the situation in which they need to occur.

So we want to make sure that we are building those. When we have those elements in place, the outcomes that we're trying to focus on are going to be more likely.

The first is that we have high levels of student engagement in instructional activities. Engagement is critical. It is something that the CEC identified as a highly leveraged practice for every special education classroom or caseload.

Students need high levels of engagement and instructional activities to make progress. In addition, that reduces your problem behavior. So the more that your students are engaged, the fewer problem behaviors you're going to have. That it to me is the magic of engagement.

If the students are engaged, you can keep them engaged. But when you lose that engagement, it's five times harder to get it back. So you really want to think about how you're setting that up.

The focus of the adults is on the student. So they don't have a lot of need for coordination during the day between each other, which allows all the adults to focus on the students that they're working with.

Essentially, we're creating a semi automated classroom, where the systems are running independently, so that you can work at a higher level.

There's less challenging behavior, because we've got regular behavioral support in the classroom as a classroom management tool, as well as individual programs for our students who need it.

And the hope is that both we're keeping it low, which increases our student engagement. By increasing our student engagement, we're also reducing problem behaviors. In addition, hopefully, we're eliminating the need or preventing the need for behavior support plans for the individuals.

So we also want to make sure that our instruction is clearly individualized. So it's implemented across the classroom effectively, and that all of these decisions are made in a way that is in keeping with what the students in this particular classroom need.

There's a reason why your schedule and your room doesn't look like another classroom. And that's because the students that you have have unique individual needs. And you always want to make sure that you're making your decisions around those individual needs. That's the reason that I start this process with the Treatment Intervention Plan or the Treatment Implementation Plan.

So those are the elements that make up the Core. And we want to implement them, get them running, get them running smoothly, so that we can take a bigger classroom view than just this specific situation.

So in our next episode, I will be talking about what kinds of systems you want to have in your classroom and where to find more information about them, or I'll be sharing about them as well.

Then we're going to talk about ways to reduce stress and strategies for increasing efficiency so that you can spend less time on your classroom and more time in the rest of your life, which really should be, I think, a goal for all of us in the new year.

So then we'll also talk about behavior and instruction and all those other kinds of things. We'll come

back and do some more in depth looks at some of the elements that make up the Core.

I want you to think of, I'll leave you with this, I want you to think of the Core as being like the core of your body.

If you ever go to physical therapy, the physical therapist will tell you that you've got to strengthen your core, more than worrying about your arms or your legs or anything like that. The core is the central piece of your body, that makes a huge difference in what you're actually able to do. When you have very little core strength, you have very limited ability to make the muscles in your arms and your legs do what you want them to do, effectively.

That's one of the reasons why the Core acronym has really stuck with me is because we are getting at the core and strengthening the core, so that we can do the interventions that we know we need to do that are more like the muscles in our arms and our legs.

They're critical for our students, but if we don't have the core tuned up, then we're not going to be able to get the rest of it.

So I hope that gives you some things to think about. I hope you'll come back and join us for the rest of this series. I am super psyched about that. I am super psyched about some guests that I'm going to have lined up in the future, as well as some of the things that we're going to be adding and talking about here.

I would love to hear your thoughts on the Core and what you think it means and how it works in your classroom. So definitely come to our Facebook group at [specialeducatorsconnection.com](https://www.facebook.com/specialeducatorsconnection), and I'll make sure that link is in the show notes, and share with us.

In addition, make sure when you do that, that you answer all two questions so we can get you in. So I hope you have an amazing week and I hope I'll see you here again next week.