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Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I am Chris Reeve and we are talking about the classroom CORE. Now when I say core do not mean the Core Standards, or even the core curriculum, I mean the core of your classroom, the classroom organization that results in effective intervention.

And so last week, I talked about what the CORE is and the elements that make it up.

Today, I want to hone in a little bit more on what classroom systems do you want to make sure that you have to reduce stress, to keep your students engaged, and to make your classroom run automagically.

So I'm going to focus on what the systems are, I'll refer you to some episodes that I've done that have more details about some of them, and we have courses and workshops and quick wins about all of these strategies in the Special Educator Academy. So it's a really great place to get kind of the How-to if this is something that you feel really needs a tune up in your classroom.

So let me talk for just a minute about what systems are. Systems are any type of structure that you have put in place for tasks to be done, so that you don't have to really think about what you're doing anymore.

A good example is, when I am creating a podcast for the Special Educator Academy, I have a checklist that I use that says, you know, outline, research, you know, make your notes, record the podcast, and then I hand that off to an assistant who has her own checklist of the different pieces of editing the podcast and posting it for the group.

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So when you have a checklist, a checklist is a kind of system, you're setting yourself up where I don't need to worry about remembering the steps, I can focus on what I'm doing, because I know I won't miss a step because I'm checking it against the checklist.

So a checklist is one kind. You can also have a system that sets you up for success to make it more likely that you'll follow through on a New Year's resolution. So you know, if you've made a resolution that you're going to have your lesson plans done two weeks in advance, the question then becomes what system are you putting in place to make that happen?

Because just like with our students hoping is not the same as actual change in behavior. So we can't just say we're going to do it and have it magically happen, or it would have not been a New Year's resolution.

We want to think about what can we do to help ourselves meet that goal? What supports do we need? And what structure do we need around that task, so that we can focus on getting the task done. And I'll talk about that in just a minute.

So having a system and a routine of the way that things are done doing steps in the same order having a system are very much like a task analysis, if you're teaching a new skill to a student.

If I have a written teaching program, I'm presenting the systems in a consistent way, every single time. And because of that his learning is much faster, because he's not getting different messages from different instructors or different days have different steps. He's getting the same steps each time because we're following a written task analysis.

A task analysis is kind of a system that we use in instruction. It's steps that tell us what we're teaching. Teaching programs are as well and we'll be talking about those in future episodes when we talk about the CORE and instruction.

So I always believe that your systems have to start with knowing who your students are. That's where our classroom structure begins. That's how we decide what our schedule will be. It's how we decide what our physical space looks like. It helps us decide how we're going to manage our classroom staff.

All of it comes back to the students who showed up for your class this year, who may or may not be the same ones that you had last year. The chances that you're going to have the same scheduled two years in a row is not very high. It's not very high in Special Ed. because our students all have such individual needs.

So I start with the Teaching Implementation Plan. And the Teaching Implementation Plan, I will link to some episodes that I've done on it and some examples so you can see what it looks like, is a form that I developed to help teachers walk through this process.

Think about their students IEPs make plans for where this activity, what kind of activity is going to be most conducive for this student to learn this skill or for me to teach that skill? What is the time of day where we're going to get the most opportunities for him to practice because we know our students need multiple sets of practice?

So that's our first thing is where are we teaching this skill? But we need to take it to our next step in the teaching plan, which is how am I teaching this skill?

And so it's not just I'm presenting it and waiting to see if he gets it, and I'll reinforce him if he does. That's kind of like hoping that you're going to follow your New Year's resolution. Again, if the student if you don't have a system of instruction, then the student is probably not going to make the progress that you would like to see.

So we want to make sure that we've thought through, are we going to use a picture change communication skills, a PEC system to teach requesting? Or are we going to use regular reviews of after action reports and social autopsies for a student who has behavioral problems that are related to social deficits?

Do we want to make sure that if we're teaching math, how are we teaching it? Are we teaching it jumping to the end, and doing that first? No, we're starting with understanding how to do basic counting.

So we're assessing where the student is, looking at our goals, and making plans for what strategy we're going to be using to teach that skill. And I will spend some time on that in an episode as well.

Then, we also want to think in our TIP, our next piece is how are we going to take data? By the time you're done with your TIP, and then once you make your classroom schedule, you should have a document that serves a number of different purposes.

One is to get you thinking about what your classroom is going to look like because now you know what activities you're going to need, you know what strategies you're going to use, and you know what kind of data you're going to take. And you know where that data is going to be taken because you're going to take the data in the activity where you're doing the most teaching, so you can then develop a data collection system.

Now I have an episode where I talked about why you needed a system for data collection, instead of just hoping you have good forms for it. The system, I think is more important than the forms and so I will link to that in the show notes.

But I really want you to think about when you think through your instruction, we've got to think about how we're going to get the data that we need. And once you have a system for the data collection, you don't have to think about should I take data on this now, should I not take data on this now? Should I have somebody take data on this? Oh, did I tell such and such they need to take data in that activity?

None of that is necessary, because you have a written plan of how the data collection is being done, who is responsible for it. Who is responsible for it, is going to be put into our Zoning Plan.

So it's going to be implemented through our Zoning Plan, which we'll talk about in a minute. And then we also have to know, are we teaching the skill with the idea that it can be used in other activities? Are we teaching it in a way that can be generalized? So that's a piece of the system as well.

Once I have my TIPS done, it's very easy for me to pull the needed materials for instruction and the data sheets, because they're all thought about when I had a quiet moment to think instead of, well, I have a student sitting in front of me.

We then implement that TIP through developing our classroom schedule. Our TIPs tell us what kinds of activities we need in our classroom schedule. So then that helps us figure out what that schedule needs to be.

We want to make sure that our classroom schedule is very tight so that we make sure that our students don't have a lot of downtime. Because I talked last week about the fact that one of the beauties of the CORE system is that you're really taking advantage of the magic of engagement. Because if you lose your students engagement, it's 100 times harder to get it back.

I think that increases every time I tell that. I think it was five times now it's 100 times. It doesn't really matter. What matters is keeping kids engaged is a whole lot easier than re-engaging them and you get a lot less behavior problem and a lot more learning.

So we want to make sure that our classroom schedule moves quickly, it's routine, everybody knows what it is, it's easy to understand, and there's not a lot of downtime between activities.

We then want to make sure that that happens that all these things get implemented - our data collection system, our instructional system, our schedule all get implemented by the staff. Because chances are good that you're not the only person in the room. If you're a resource teacher you might be, but even then you probably have paras supporting your students in other places.

So we've really got to figure out how to make this team work together without the teacher having to tell every single one what to do at what time, because the more that we do that, the less time we're focused on teaching the students, and the more time that we have students who aren't engaged.

So that is a Zoning Plan. A Zoning Plan, which I've talked about for years, is more than a classroom schedule, the classroom schedule says you're going to be with Bobby and Susie and independent work. That's where you're going to be during this time of day, that's a schedule.

A Zoning Plan is how are you implementing your staff across the day? Does it make sense for them to always be with those two kids? Or does it make sense for them to be in an area and have students travel to them and then off to another area with another staff member supervising them?

In addition, it has a lot more detail in it. So a Zoning Plan should tell everybody all the different things that need to be done during the day. Who's cleaning up the art table so that you can have lunch at it later? Who is making sure snack is set up before you come into from recess? Who is you know, making sure that morning meeting is ready to go before the students arrive in the group activity?

Because all the time that you spend doing that, that you didn't plan for is time the students aren't engaged.

So you want to make sure that you know what needs to be done, but also that your staff knows what needs to be done. Four people don't need to clean the table, one person needs to clean the table three people need to be working with students doing something else.

You want it to be specific and detailed. Because the more things you put in that Zoning Plan, the fewer things you have to have racing around your head while you're trying to run the classroom. And the fewer things you have racing around your head, and the fewer decisions that you have to make while you're standing with a student that you're holding on to so he doesn't run away, the more calm it's going to be, the less stressful it's going to be.

That's how we avoid getting so much decision fatigue. That's how we make sure that our classroom gets that higher level of engagement. And that's how we avoid those crises that kept popping up when we didn't have those pieces.

So the Zoning Plan, you want to have it be detailed. It does take a while to get used to all of this. Takes a while to get used to the physical environment and the visuals as well. Because we're just not used to them. It's a new schedule this year.

If you tweak your schedule, it will take some time to get used to it. But once everyone's used to it, then it goes to the back of their mind, and they can focus their mind on what's in front of them, which is the student.

And another thing we want to make sure that we have, again, because we have to be communicating effectively to our staff, especially our lesson plans. So we want to make sure we have a system in place for doing our lesson plans.

Maybe it's having an accountability partner. Maybe it's batching, doing two weeks of lesson plans at a time. Maybe it's making sure you've got a strong form that you've set up and needs just a little bit of tweaking.

And I will do an episode about lesson planning and I will share with you the templates that I use, which don't require a whole lot of time. But they do assure that the staff knows what the lesson is and what their role is, what they need to be doing so that they can follow it through without you having to tell them.

You want to make sure you've got those systems of data collection that I talked about. You want to make sure you have as a systems for data analysis, because data we just collect and put in notebook doesn't do us any good.

We've got to make sure we've got a system for analyzing it. So maybe I have one day a week, that is my data day and that's and I use my hour after school to go through my data and make decisions. And I've got an episode about that that I will link in the show notes as well.

And then we want to make sure that we've got our instructional routines in place so that our students know, I go to independent work and this is what's expected of me. I go to work with the teacher and this is what's expected of me. And you know, from your lesson plan, what you're teaching, from your TIP, what you're teaching, and you've got the materials that you need in your area to immediately jump in and teach.

And finally, we want to make sure that we've got a behavioral support system in place for the whole classroom. some people would think of it as a classroom management system. so that perhaps we

classroom, some people would think of it as a classroom management system, so that perhaps we keep some students from needing their own individual plan.

And it will assure that everybody is being encouraged to use a more appropriate behavior and we're not having as much negative behavior pop up. Which again, is going to keep our students engaged.

Of course, the problem is when always ever we have one student that goes off, it's a snowball effect. We're trying to prevent that. So the more that we can make sure that we have everything lined up in the class, the more likely it is that that will be a one off and everybody won't just follow and you will have five crises instead of the one that you're having to deal with.

So in addition to these kinds of systems, you also want to think about with your Zoning Plan. Do you have a Zoning Plan for when you have a staff out, so that you have a one man down plan for what's going to happen?

Your schedule would need to change. Your zoning plan would change. But then you don't have to make those decisions at 6:30 in the morning when you find out you're down a staff, you just walk in, pick it up, and that's what you do.

So you trying to make a lot of these decisions when you aren't stressed when you aren't working with the student, so that they become routine, so that you just automatically do it. So you automatically analyze your data every Thursday. And then when it's time for progress reports, there you go. You've got all of your information to develop your progress reports from that no more all nighter.

So we will talk more about all of these kinds of systems. I'll be back next week when I'm going to be talking about how we can reduce stress using the CORE model and so the ways that it can actually help you feel better about your job. So I hope you're having a great week and I hope that I will see you again next week.