ACR 168 FINAL

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

classroom, students, behavior, systems, research, core, iep, engagement, evidence based practices, elements, instruction, student engagement, special ed, zoning, working, podcast, collaboration, implement, support, schedule

SPEAKERS

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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. I am Chris Reeve, and I'm your host.

And if you remember from Episode 146, I introduced the classroom organization results in effectiveness or the core model. I talked about how all of our evidence based practices like discrete trials and pivotal response training and specific kinds of social skills instruction, basic processes, like reinforcement and token economies are possible, really only if you have the core in place. I'll drop a picture in the website post for this episode to show you what the core framework looks like.

But essentially, it's a set of systems and strategies that are set up to create a highly structured environment and to allow you as the instructors implement the EBPs and practices.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that there aren't evidence based practices and research based strategies that are actually part of that core. And in fact, core is actually designed around a number of well researched practices themselves. And that is what I'm going to talk about today, how the core allows you to implement evidence based practices in your classroom, but also how it uses research to do it. In other words, I'm going to geek out a little bit.

So let's get started. The classroom structure at the heart of the core contains the elements and the

systems that we put in place so that we can provide meaningful instruction that's individualized for our students. And we do this in part as a way to automate processes and systems in our classroom, so that we're able to focus on instruction of students, and dealing with behaviors and things like that.

There are certain practices we can put in place that make our classroom run more smoothly, more consistently, works well for our students. But it also really works well for us. And I talked about that in a previous episode and I'll make sure to link that about how the core system can save you time and also save you stress. And I've got an episode coming up about those as well.

So if you look at the elements that are in that core triangle in the center, I'll just tell you what they are, since I'm on a podcast, they are the teaching implementation plan, which is the TIP or the document that takes the students IEP, and kind of translates it into what it's going to look like during your classroom day.

How are the IEP goals and objectives and accommodations, modifications, being deployed across your classroom scheduling? I find that the tip is the basis of me setting up a classroom because by the time I'd finished it, I typically had done some collaboration with other professionals, I have a very good understanding of what's in each student's IEP. I have assigned each element of the student's goals and objectives to an area or time during the schedule, a strategy for teaching it, and the data collection process.

So it gives me a lot of bang for my buck, essentially. And it does take some time to get used to doing it. And I've got some tips that I'll share along the way about how to speed that up. But it's really an important component because it's really the bedrock. I think of it kind of as the implementer of the IEP. It makes sure that you have all of your boxes checked.

That then also leads me to being able to create the classroom schedule, because now I know what kind of activities my students need. Those of you who've been in this field for a while, have probably had situations where you've had a classroom where a lot of your kids were out in General Ed most of the day they were on some General Ed standards. And other years you've had classes that are primarily self contained, where students really are just going out for specials and lunch and recess and their own an alternative curriculum, if you have one of those in your state.

You can't predict always who's going to end up in your classroom. So you want your classroom schedule to reflect the needs of your students. And your classroom schedules are going to look different every year, not just because times of outside activities change, but because our students change. And because they have different needs.

Once I have my schedule, I can put my zoning plan in place. And my zoning plan is simply how we're scheduling me and the staff to implement the schedule, the physical environment, how I'm setting up and designing the actual part of my classroom.

Now, I do this after I do my schedule. And I do it that way, because then I know what kind of activities and areas I'm going to need. And then sometimes I have to go back and tweak might schedule.

Part of that physical environment, are our visual cues. All of our students in special ed benefit from visual cues, and really all human beings benefit from visual cues. And so visual cues and how we set them up in the classroom is another component we need to think about.

Then we also want to make sure that if we've done the tip, we have captured our IEPs. We have thought about our curriculum selection. And that all kind of needs to go together in lesson planning. And so your curriculum and your IEP, make a baby, and that baby is your lesson plan. The two things go together, and they have to be integrated in some way. In some cases, they overlap in other cases they don't.

From that point, once I have my instruction in place, I need to make sure I've got my behavioral components in place. Some classes and might start with the behavior classroom management plan first.

How am I going to deal with behaviors just in general in the classroom? What are our systems for that? Are we putting token systems in place? Are we using working for it board? Are we using some kind of daily reinforcer or point system ora catch them being good program?

There's tons of different kinds of classroom management that we can use with all different kinds of students. It just depends on what's most effective for your team and your students. And, obviously, we also have to look at the individualized needs for behavior for our students.

And then the last thing that we need to think about, and this kind of comes in to thinking about our instruction and our curriculum, is generalization. Making sure that we have programmed time in our day, and strategies to promote the student using the skills in as real life a setting as we can be in.

That if they learned vocabulary in your teacher time direct instruction, they are using that in morning meeting and at music. So they're using those kinds of things in a fluent and reasonable way.

And that's the core, that's the triangle that makes up the center of the core framework. The outcomes of the focus on the core is that we're trying for high levels of student engagement. So our goal of every decision that we make, he's pretty much summed up in trying to make sure that our students are highly engaged in instructional activities.

To do that our focus of our adults is on our students, a semi automated classroom that kind of runs independently so that you can focus on teaching again, fewer challenging behaviors, because you have behavior support, individual programs, and behavioral support classroom management strategies in place proactively. Clear and individualized instruction that gets implemented across the day in a way that is effective. And that a lot of our decisions that we're making are being made with the students at the center of the discussion.

That's why I start with the tip, because who's in my classroom, runs what it looks like.

So first, let's talk about the overall goal of the systems of the core. Its engagement. I talked about what I call the magic of engagement in Episode 129. And if you haven't listened to that, I highly recommend going back and catching it just because I talk about the qualities of engagement and why it's so important to maintain it and not lose it.

It is critical for our students with special education, because it increases their learning and it also decreases problem behavior. And students who aren't engaged in instruction, have little availability to learn. And in addition, going back to my research premise for this podcast, since non engagement in activities has been associated with problem behaviors, we really want to make sure that the strategies we're putting in place in our classroom are aimed at keeping our students engaged.

In addition, engagement is a highly leveraged practice, according to the Council for Exceptional Children. If you haven't heard of the high leverage practice, one of the things that CEC has done is gone through a lot of different research, and pulled out across special ed in general. So this is not autism specific. They've pulled out practices that they have found to be pivotal and key in successful classrooms where students are learning.

And HLP, high leverage practice, number 18 is use strategies to promote active student engagement. That we're using a variety of instructional skills and working on specific skills that are working on keeping our students engaged, and that we're monitoring student engagement as we go, and giving positive feedback and corrective feedback as it's needed, and changing our strategies if we're having problems keeping our students engaged.

Now, I talked at the very end of that discussion of the core about keeping the students at the center of the discussion. And if you want more information about all these different things, I'll put the link to the original podcast here.

But I always want to touch on this because we have scores of research that show us that many of our students respond differently to different intervention strategies. If we didn't, we wouldn't have such a vast literature with so many unknown variables.

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For instance, there was an article that a research study that looked at the use of picture exchange communication systems or PECs, versus the use of sign language, both working on making requests by Matt Ticani and his colleagues. And they found that one of their subjects, it was a single subject design, which is very common in special ed and behavior analysis, they found that one of the participants did better with the PECs system, and the other did better with sign language.

There was a bit more to it than that, I'm kind of simplifying it. But I think it's a really good example of A- of why single subject research is so important, because if we had a certain percentage of people who didn't do well with an intervention, it kind of gets washed out in a larger design. But it's a great example of the need for making student based decisions about instruction based on how our students respond. And that's a really, really key element in special ed.

We also know that if we are taking a functional behavioral approach to dealing with challenging behavior, and what that means is we're seeing that outer behavior are biting and hitting and kicking. But we're understanding that the roots of the behavior are skill deficits, communication deficits, sensory differences, academic delays, social difficulties, lack of independent leisure skills, social perceptual differences, all of those things drive the underlying functions of behavior, to get out of things, to get something.

And if we have hooked behavior support strategies in place to reinforce the good behaviors for getting those needs met, and we're reinforcing those and paying as little reinforcement to the negative behaviors, that is a step in the right direction, it's not going to solve all of our behavioral issues. But we do get less challenging behavior when we look at behavior through that functional prism.

So that behavioral support is a really critical element with tons and tons of research about why it is effective. We know that knowing the functions of our behaviors are important. We know that addressing our interventions to focus on that are important. Doing that from the start streamlines that process.

The other thing that we do as part of the core is we have systems that automate the everyday activities. So the adults and the students know what to do, and what the routine is. And everything gets done without you having to go in individually assign it to everybody, from setting up to cleaning up. And I talk a lot about this. When I talk about zoning plans.

There's a limited need for discussion by the staff while they're teaching, which means they're more focused on students, which means more engagement. So the whole idea behind automating our everyday activities is one, the main one, which is student engagement. But it's also the fact that it

reduces the decision fatigue on us. And that's how it makes our day easier because we can focus on at least a fewer less things in our everyday routines.

The next step is our team collaboration. So it's demonstrated in the development of the IEP, in our child study process, where we talk with the team and get to know about the student, about our teaching implementation plan and how that's going to play a role. Our classrooms zoning plan is a key element of our team collaboration. And building our classroom teams are a big part of that.

All of these elements allow us to make decisions about the classroom based on the students, and high levels of collaboration and system automation allows us to keep them engaged.

Not surprisingly, collaboration is also a highly leveraged practice, from CEC. There is a need to focus on all the different people that are engaged and involved with the student and making decisions as a team. So, you know, we know that's where IEPs come from. We know that, you know, we work as a team to develop those. But we're also working as a team to implement those in our classrooms, through zoning plans, working with paraprofessionals.

There's a lot of people that are involved just in the school, not even including families, for a lot of our students. General ed teachers, the special ED staff, the speech pathologist, the OTs, the PTs, sometimes behavior analysts or behavior specialists and if there's a reading specialists and assistive technology specialists. There's a lot of people, and it falls to not a large degree on the special educator on the teacher to really bring them all together, but their collaboration is critical at getting results.

I talked in Episode 155 about zoning plans and zoning plans are the way that we assign duties to the staff in the classroom. We might also include a speech pathologist, she's in the classroom part of the day in our zoning plan. So it can include a lot of different kinds of collaboration.

Zoning plans are also have a research base behind them. They were developed in research by Kathryn LeLaurin and Todd Risley in the 1970s. And I talked in Episode 155, about zoning plans. And about some of the research behind it. There's been more recent research looking at the use of zoning plans and how it impacts the students' engagement. But the fundamental core of the research is that it is more effective at keeping students engaged than when we just have people taking kids if they're with.

Now, on our zoning plans, we don't always use a zone model. So it's not always using that same element of practice. But if we had a zoning plan where we had assigned the duties out, we automatically are going to increase the engagement of our students.

So start by the physical organization of the classroom, when we design the classroom, there are guidelines that we follow, that have a long history in research. While all of this research goes back to the 80s and 70s. There are a lot of variables in the physical organization of any environment that can affect the behavior of the students.

Twardosz and Risley looked at that in 1982, Horner in 1980, and Murphy, Carr, & Callias in 1986, found that the presentation and the kinds of toys that were offered in a early childhood setting could affect the students engagement in play. And it could decrease some types of problem behavior, because the students were engaged.

Nordquist, Twardosz, & McEvoy in 1991, did a really great study where they actually reorganized the classroom to have a greater number and variety of play materials, with clear divisions between the areas and more efficient use of space and making schedule changes that lead to high levels of engagement and compliance.

So essentially, what they found was by reorganizing the classroom, and having clear defined areas, and having schedule changes that maybe were shorter or longer, they got better engagement, which improved behavior. You have less behavior, there's less fires that you're dealing with, the more time you have for instruction.

There's lots of different research on this. Bailey and Wolery have recommended breaking areas up into visible activity areas for different kinds of activities. There's research that shows that there's a need for each area of the classroom to have clearly defined cues and be functionally related to the activity that they're doing.

Even material arrangement is important. We know that if we want a student to learn to request something, if he can reach it, there's no point. He's not going to request. So we know that we need to make sure we are arranging materials so that they're learning to request by keeping the item that they want out of their reach.

Similarly, if you want somebody to do something independently make sure they have all the materials. If you want them to share with other students, then there can't be one set of paints for every single student. Those are very common early childhood principles.

Our visual supports are considered an evidence based practice for toddler to young adult. According to the affirmed models from the National Standards Project, it's considered an established intervention. So we use them to organize our environment to give communication for all different kinds of things.

Structured work systems, or independent work systems, task box systems, when they are following the structure of a structured work system are also included in the visual support as an evidence based practice.

In the National Standards Project, they were considered an emerging intervention. Visual schedules have a very long history from way back in the 70s and certainly in the 90s. We have a lot of research that shows picture cues and picture prompts can be used with individuals with intellectual disabilities to be more independent. Picture schedules and visual cues have also been very effective in teaching children with autism to help ease transitions, to teach specific tasks. They've been used at home and at school. They reduce prompt dependence and they promote independence.

There's also data on activity schedules. So some schedules have found that breaking an activity down into smaller elements have increased engagement, and decreased problem behavior.

So those are all elements that are part of the core framework itself, the core triangle that supports all the other interventions. They are the pieces we put in place in his first weeks of school to keep everybody on track, we tweak it as we go, because it's never perfect the first time. And as we get that going, then we can start adding other components in.

But we're not going to be able to implement our evidence based practices, if our classroom isn't structured to support that instruction. And those elements that we use to structure it are also evidence based practices.

I hope that gives you some ideas just in the back of your mind, since it's June, for you to think about as you move through your summer and take time off, which you definitely need to be doing.

I will put together a podcast playlist, the core podcast episodes, as well as a playlist on some of the elements that I've discussed today. So we have previous episodes of those, and I will share them here.

I hope that this is helpful to you, I really appreciate your time. If this is something that you'd like to hear more of, please shoot me an email or tag me on Facebook on one of our Facebook pages. And I'd be happy to explore this more.

And if you'd like a deeper analysis of how we use this along with checklists and tools to actually implement it, we have all of that in the Special Educator Academy. So you can hop over there. And you can get a free trial and find out everything that is involved.

Just a heads up, I think the free trial will probably be going away later this summer. So it is definitely worth checking out now.

If you enjoy this podcast and the elements in it, I would love for you to leave a review on Apple podcasts. It would be absolutely wonderful to me. I read every single one. I take every single one to heart and I would love to know that this is something that you feel you are getting something out of.

I hope you have an amazing week. I hope that you are almost out of school if you're not already, and I'll talk to you later.

Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. For even more support, you can access free materials, webinars and Video Tips inside my free resource library. Sign up at autismclassroomresources.com/free. That's F-R-E-E or click the link in the show notes to join the free library today. I'll catch you again next week.