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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 today I am kicking off a series of what will be shorter episodes on seven things to get right for effective instruction regardless of what kind of autism intervention strategies you're using.

I recently watched a webinar by Dr. Ilene Schwartz. She's from the University of Washington, and she referred to good instruction as having a successful instructional or teaching loop. And she noted that the instructional loop or the teaching loop is a key element in all evidence based practices in instruction for learners with autism.

And this really resonated for me, because while I talk about specific teaching strategies that I think every teacher should have in their toolkit for students with autism, and generally those apply to special ed as well, it needs to be a pretty big toolkit, so that you can individualize your instruction to the learner and to the strategy or the situation.

Now, this series may seem a little bit basic for those of you who are experienced ABA teachers or BCBA's. But I promise that going back over the basics is worthwhile every once in a while, because it makes you look at your own instruction a little differently. And for those of you who are newer, this will give you a firm foundation on which to build your teaching strategies, and evaluate teaching strategies for students with autism.

So I guess what I'm saying is, there's differences between different strategies but there are some elements that are important at the core. And that's what we're going to talk about this week. And I'm going to talk about it more like that than what I just said. So it will be shorter.

My intention is to give you bite sized pieces of information that you can take action on each week to review your instruction in your classroom. And I'll also end each episode with an action tip to get you going as well. So with all of that, let's get started.

Now, I mentioned in Episode 169, where I busted some myths about instruction, that the more you look at good instruction being provided, the more you realize that good instruction is good instruction, whether it's naturalistic behavioral developmental behavioral intervention, or a discrete trial or even good reading instruction, it will contain the teaching loops that Dr. Schwartz talked about, because good instruction is good instruction.

So I found that people get wed to certain types of teaching strategies, and think that a specific strategy is required for students. And after this series on the characteristics of these instructional loops, I'm going to talk about some of the instructional strategies that you might use in your classroom and have in your toolbox so you can match it to the student and the situation.

But the more I look at good instruction, the clearer it is that the differences between say Discrete trials and naturalistic developmental behavioral intervention, it's more of a matter of tweaking the same elements to fit the skill and the student. Sometimes they differ by how you choose your objectives, for instance. So I'm going to give you an overview of what those important elements are in those instructional loops today. And then each episode over the next eight weeks will be short, I promise, and they will focus on each of one of these specific elements. So let's look at that list.

Number one is identifying and outlining concrete learning targets that are related to your curriculum, the student's IEP or just general skills that you know they need to be successful in a classroom. One difference we sometimes see between autism intervention strategies is how the goals and the learning targets are chosen. For instance, and developmental approaches they're chosen based on the norms of child development, and focus often on remediating the skills that the students have not mastered that should have been mastered by this stage of their development, like imitation is a good example.

For all of our effective instruction though, we have to choose our learning targets based on the needs of the students, whether it's learning readiness skills, which I'll also talk about in a future episode, or academics, or teaching life skills. And we need to be specific about what the actual skill is that we're teaching, so that we can move forward with it based on that particular skill, whether again, it's IEP or curriculum based.

Our next step is taking those clearly defined skills, and breaking them down into the component parts, many times we call it a task analysis. And then we teach these steps systematically. We can't just teach the whole scalp, we have to focus on the steps in a sequence, or progression towards the overall goal. The steps might be big, or they might be small, depending on the learner and the skill.

But if we just teach a student to remain in a group activity, by teaching the goal that he stay there for 25 minutes, and then track how many times he's able to do it, he's probably not going to improve, because all we're doing is putting him in a situation where we expect him to show the end result without the instruction.

Similarly, we might continually prompt him to stay there. But in order for that to work, we really have to fade those prompts out. So we really need to teach smaller steps leading up to that bigger goal to have him be successful. We use task analyses for shaping skills like that, as well as for routine chains, like washing hands, and we'll talk about more about this in Episode 182.

Next up, you have to design materials that are conducive to teaching the skills that you defined in number one, and that you broke down in number two. There are specific characteristics we need to think about when we choose the materials and create materials for our students with autism.

Students with autism have a tendency to over select, and not focus on either the most relevant part of the item, or even sometimes the most obvious elements of the materials that we use. So in Episode 183, I'm going to talk about how we choose good instructional materials for effective instruction.

Next, we have to think about how we give directions within that instructional session. Similar to the issues material. In number three, we need to focus on how we craft our instructions to make sure that our students with autism hear them, understand them, focus on them, and pick up the relevant information. And they have some of the same difficulties with that direction that they have with the materials. And I'll be talking all about how we craft our instructions that we give in Episode 184.

Once we've given the materials and the instruction, we need to think about how we help the student get to the right answer, because that's what does the teaching. And that means thinking about our prompting strategies and what to do if the student makes an error. Or perhaps we're using a strategy of prompting that is conducive to preventing errors. Sometimes we call that errorless learning.

We have a good bit of research on both of these. And I will be sharing some general strategies, as well as how we get our students to independence so they can be successful. When we are using an effective instruction, and then any kind of autism intervention strategy, we need to know how to respond to correct responses so that their independence and their correct responses increase over time.

Well, guess what? If the correct skill doesn't increase, or their independence at a certain task doesn't improve, it's very possible that the thing we think we're using as a reinforcer, isn't a reinforcer, because we define it by whether or not the skill increases. I think many of us feel like reinforcement is a basic skill, and we already understand it. But it's actually a bit more complex than you might think.

In addition, I know there are some teachers out there who say they don't believe in reinforcement or reinforcement doesn't work. Sometimes they say that they have been told that they shouldn't use reinforcement, guess what? We all use reinforcement.

And general educators are using it to they're just calling it something different. Why else do they praise their students for correct responses or good participation? And aren't good grades a kind of reinforcement? Maybe not the level of reinforcement our students respond to. Because the difference is that our students with autism, not all of them, but many of them, may not find praise, itself reinforcing. And they need us to help them move in that direction, while still making progress on their skills.

Okay, I could do a whole masterclass just on reinforcement and still have more to say. So stay tuned for Episode 186, where I promise to keep it to just what you need to know for your classroom.

And finally, step seven, we need to have data on the students behavior, not just because our admins tell us to, we need to have data so we can troubleshoot when things aren't working. We use our data to tell us which of the six steps above we need to tweak to get better learning from our students. And yeah, there's legal stuff you've got to have it, too.

Data in the classroom is something I have written a whole course about in the Special Educator Academy. And I actually have a free webinar on setting up data systems for instruction in your classroom. And you can grab that at autismclassroomresources.com/datamonster, all one word. And I'll put a link in the show notes as well. That'll make it easier. We will also be talking all about instructional data on episode 187.

And finally, I have a quick bonus tip that I'm going to sneak in that is important to remember, instruction is never one size fits all. What works for one student may or may not work for another. That's true of all children. But with students with autism, we have to recognize that the differences are more likely to occur because of their learning styles and their sensory differences.

Consequently, as with everyone, we want to make our decisions based on our student's performance, ie our data, rather than a one size fits all. Every student with ASD does not need one particular type of instruction. And while that makes your job harder, because there's more learn, it does make it

more satisfying when you start having instructional loops set up to help your students be successful.

And overall, we have to keep our instruction engaging to maintain any of our student's attention. Instruction that sounds like the social studies or the science teacher, I forget which one in the original Wonder Years will not keep our students attention. If you don't know what I'm talking about Google it.

So I recognize that's a lot and it's a lot to look forward to I hope. I promise the coming episodes will be shorter and more bite sized. The goal is to help you review your instruction and see if it's working as effectively as it can and hopefully give you some ideas for change if it's not.

In the meantime, I'll put some links in the show notes to relevant past episodes on some topics should you want to jump ahead a little bit. And if you're finding the podcast helpful for you, I would really love for you to go over to Apple podcasts, I'll put the link in the show notes and share a review of it. That really helps others find out about the show and hopefully get something out of it as well. Or just share it on social media channel or with a fellow teacher. Thanks so much for listening, and I hope you'll be back for our next several episodes on this topic.

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.