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SPEAKERS

Chris

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'm Chris Reeve, your host. And we're in the midst of some bite sized episodes looking at the critical elements of the instructional process for students with autism.

I've talked about clearly defining the skill and breaking it down into steps in our last two weeks. And today's episode is going to focus on creating effective special education teaching materials for learners with autism. Because, believe it or not, it matters more than you might realize, specifically with students with autism.

Students with autism often overgeneralize concepts, or they focus on the most minut detail of a picture or material that you might not even notice. For instance, I once had a student who we thought could identify a picture of himself, but when we added in new pictures, we realize that he knew how to choose the one with the folded down corner of the card. Without that cue, his responses weren't correct anymore. So let's get started learning how to avoid that.

So the first thing we want to make sure that we do is start off by introducing new concepts with examples that are very different from each other. So say you're teaching animals, instead of starting with a cat, a dog, and a cow, which all have four legs and a tail, go for a dog, a snake, and a bird. Because trust me, the contrast makes it way easier for learners to differentiate between those concepts. And we're not going to stop there.

Next up, let's talk about representativeness. When we introduce a new concept, it's vital to keep it clear and straightforward. So for example, if you're teaching the color red, go for a bright, unmistakable, primary red, instead of a maroon or a pinkish kind of color. Stick with examples that most people would agree represent the concept that you're teaching. I always talk about the fact that you know, we start with a very classic Labrador Retriever instead of starting with a pug or a Chihuahua as options for teaching dogs. We can always add in the subtleties and the nuances later on and we will.

So number three, is think about your backgrounds and anything in them that could be distracting on your materials or your pictures. So you want your learners to focus on the main thing, right? So choose images that highlight that item that that you want them to focus on, and avoid those that have really distracting or irrelevant backgrounds. So if you have a picture of a dog with a neutral background, that's going to be more effective than one in which you see a dog playing in a field and the dog isn't front and center of the picture.

Number four is avoid material overlap. And this is a big one. Keep your materials focused. If you're teaching the color green, and you show an image of green peas, and that's the only one you have, your learner might associate green only with green peas. So if you're teaching colors, make sure all the shapes are the same. So that you don't have a blue circle and a red triangle all the time. Likewise, if you're teaching shapes, make sure they're all the same color so that you're not giving it away. That's what you really want to keep from doing is you don't want to give the answer away.

Number five, you want to eliminate guesswork from your materials. And this one is important because you don't again, want your materials to give away the answer. So if you're using a matching task, for instance, be careful not to make it so easy that the learners can guess the answers by process of elimination. We want them to learn not to finish the task quickly. And that's important because a lot of times we use things like file folders or matching tasks in file folders for students to learn. And sometimes what they learn is, I learned all of these and then whatever's left are the rest of them. So we want to be careful that just having an empty space isn't giving information that they can just guess for the answer.

Number six is we want to as a student becomes more competent at a skill, we want to build in the generalization. So start with those consistent materials that I talked about earlier, but once your learners start to get the hang of it, switch things up. Introduce them to a variety of examples, so they can apply their learning to real world situations. I'm a big one for saying that the world doesn't exist in a vacuum where there's only one kind of dog or one kind of mouse, we have to change up what we want them to see so that they're using their skills with different people, with different materials, in different settings. So changing up the materials for the same skill is a really important one.

So that's how bite sized episodes on choosing and developing special education materials for learners with autism. Your action item this week, is to choose a skill that you are teaching, perhaps the one you used last week in your TIP, and look at your teaching materials. Determine if maybe you need to

tweak them just a bit to make sure that you're really teaching the skill that you want to teach, not always presenting the same thing in the same row and he always puts it on the right.

And then come back next week when I'm going to be talking about how we give the most effective instructions and queues when we teach so we get the best result.

If you're enjoying the series or the podcast, I would really love for you to hop over to Apple podcasts and share a review. Or if reviews aren't for you, share it with another teacher, friend or share it on social media. My goal is always to make your jobs easier, and to reach as many teachers as I can to help them do their jobs. If you think that the podcast has helped you with that, then sharing is a really great way to expand that effort. And as always, thanks for listening.

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