

ACR 184 final draft

Tue, Sep 26, 2023 7:56PM 10:46

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

instruction, student, direction, give, episode, teaching, autism, skills, talk, effective, classroom, hand, materials, language, attention, show notes, prompting, identifying, break, put

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, and I'm your host. And we are in the midst of a series of bite sized episodes on effective teaching characteristics for students with autism. And really they're effective for any student.

As I reviewed in Episode 180, good instruction is good instruction, regardless of whether you have a disability or not. The difference for students with ASD and some of our other students in special ed is that they require more attention to the elements. And sometimes we need to make the elements of instruction more apparent to them to follow the instruction.

So far, we've talked about instructional loops in Episode 180. And choosing our instructional targets like vocabulary words, or reading words or letter sounds in 181. I talked about breaking down the skills that you're teaching and why that was important in Episode 182. And creating effective teaching materials in Episode 183. I'll put all those in the show notes, but you can find all of them by going to autismclassroomresources.com/episode and whatever the episode number is.

So today, we are moving on to how to give the students instructions on tasks. And again, because their language skills are affected by autism, this is a really important area that we want to pay some attention to, so that we're clear and our instruction is effective.

Now I'm trying to keep all these episodes to 10 minutes or less, so you can grab them on the short

now I'm trying to keep all these episodes to 10 minutes or less, so you can grab them on the short grocery run. So let's get started.

One of the first elements that we need to keep in mind when we're giving instruction is making sure that we have the student's attention. Now while this might not be a big issue with many of our students, those with ASD often don't have the skill maybe when they first come to school. A classic characteristic of autism is not orienting to their name, meaning that they don't respond when someone calls their name.

So the first part of giving good instructions is making sure that we have the students attention. Now I'll talk about learning to learn skills that include teaching students to gain their attention in episode 188 at the end of the month. But for now, we want to make sure that we have an effective way of knowing that the student is attending. It might be that they make eye contact with you. But that might be difficult for an individual on the spectrum. So it might also be that you have a signal where they move a finger, or let you know in some other way that they're listening.

The main issue here is that if we start giving directions when a student is not attending, then we tend to end up either prompting them too much, or repeating the direction multiple times, which really is just another form of prompting.

Once we have their attention, we can give them the direction. The complexity of the direction we use is going to vary depending on the skills of the learner. And probably it's going to vary on the skill that you're teaching, as well. If I have a student who loves dinosaurs, then instruction involving dinosaurs would probably be more complex than an instruction that involves identifying things that they aren't as excited about, like math signs, plus, minus, multiplication signs.

Similarly, the instruction type might vary depending on the teaching strategy that we're using. So for instance, in teacher led instruction, something like Discrete trials, or even some of your IEP instruction, it might be the verbal direction or what behavior analysts call the discriminative stimulus, the SD that you give. So it might be an actual verbal direction, give me this, that we're using.

But we can teach some of these same skills in naturalistic instruction settings, and I'll talk about that in a later episode as well. I'm going to talk about different kinds of instruction, but this might be an environmental cue that you've set up or that is naturally occurred. So for instance, I put their favorite thing in a container and they can't open. Seeing it is their direction. I'm trying to get some initiation, so I'm not giving a direction, I'm setting up a direction in the environment.

Regardless of its complexity or its strategy, though, we have to make sure that our directions are clear to the student. We want to make sure that we've highlighted the relevant information, and that we're not getting lost in a lot of words. If the student has difficulty comprehending language, as many

students with ASD do, we want our instruction to be clear and concise. Short enough to convey the needed information and not overly cluttered with words we don't need.

Most of us give simple instructions that include part of the instruction of what to do, and another part of what to do with. So here's an example, when I want a student to identify a spoon, I might say, give me the spoon. And then later, I might say, give me the fork when I'm working on fork, I might say give me a knife when we're working on knife, obviously.

However, you'll note that in each of these directions, it includes the same carrier phrase of, "give me the." The target of what the student is supposed to give you is the only thing that changes - knife, fork, spoon. But it's also the only variable that's really relevant. Because the vocabulary that I'm teaching is the utensils, not following the direction, "give me." And in fact, I'd probably be fine if the student pointed to the right item instead of handing it to me.

Now, interestingly, researchers have noticed that many of our students, these extra directions might be confusing in understanding what is relevant in the request, like identifying the right utensil. I'll put links in the show notes to some of the articles about this if you're a research geek like me, and you want to go find them. But it's clear that for some students, we could be clearer, if we just held out her hand and said fork. Held on our hand and said spoon, depending on which item or picture we're working on. The give me, the touch, the show me, the point to, those kinds of directions that we often use are probably fine for some students. But for those with significant language difficulties, they're going to be confusing as to what they need to pay attention to. Essentially, it becomes a two step direction, which is a later skill.

If we think about the need for directions to be clear, and concise, we can think about how we break things down in academics. Grade level curriculum might ask students to name all the characters of a story and how they're related, and what they want to do in the story. That's a lot of language. To modify it, we might ask them first, who is one of the characters of the story? And when they answer that, we might ask, what does he want to happen?

By breaking down just the instructions, we're using less language at one time to get some of the same information. Now, depending on the student, this might be an accommodation or modification. And that's not as important in this discussion. But it's important to recognize that that is a way to scaffold and break down our language.

So in short, and hopefully, clearly, we want our instructions to be concise and clear for what we're asking the student to do. We want them to include only the relevant information to answer the question in order to avoid confusion. We also want to make sure that our direction matches the skill.

So for instance, if I'm teaching a student to imitate me putting my hands on my head, I would say do this and put my hands on my head. If I'm teaching a student to follow one step direction, I would say

and put my hands on my head. If I'm teaching a student to follow one step direction, I would say, put your hands on your head. And I would just get the direction and words with no demonstration, because the demonstration would be a prompt.

So finally, make sure that all of your materials clearly support your instruction. So I talked about this in an earlier episode, and I will make sure that's in the show notes as well.

In addition to some of the effective teaching characteristics, there's some things we want to avoid when we're giving an instruction. For instance, we want to make sure that our smile when the students hand nears, that correct answer and we're excited about it doesn't let them know that's the right answer. Because sometimes the student might be focusing on your reaction rather than the materials.

Similarly, make sure that if you hold out your hand that it isn't giving the answer away by where you're putting it. There are more issues like this, and I'll link in the show notes to a blog post where I talk about ways that you can sabotage your instruction without meaning to.

In the meantime, your action item for this week, is to look at how you give directions in your classroom. Ask paras in the class if they feel that your directions might be confusing or too wordy. And this is a really good opportunity to build relationships with your parents by showing that you don't have all the answers and you need their help in looking at your own behavior because we all do.

If you feel that your directions might be getting in the way of instruction, then brainstorm some ways that you can make them clearer and try that and see how it goes.

I'll be back next week when I'll be talking about how we handle errors that students make in instructions. Spoiler alert, sometimes we just try to avoid those errors, and I'll talk about that. Until then, have an amazing week.

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.