ACR 205 final draft

🗓 Tue, Feb 20, 2024 7:04AM   🕐 18:32

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

work, students, finish, task, independent, talked, put, motivating, classroom, system, contingency, laundry basket, schedule, basket, podcast, walked, set, teacher, episode, reinforcer

SPEAKERS

Veronica

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. I'm Chris Reeve, and I'm your host, and you are listening to Episode 205 of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. We are just finishing up a series on independent work systems today.

In the last few episodes, I talked about how to set up an independent work system and why we do it that way, what you need to know about the tasks and their development and what they should look like, how to teach the system, and specific strategies that we use. And then I've also talked about how to bump up the system difficulty for students as they learn independence to make more use of that independence. And that was in our last episode.

So in this episode, I want to talk about some problem solving. And I'm going to talk about what to do when your students don't finish their independent work in the allotted time. Most of us don't have an unending amount of time for our students to just work until they're done. The whole point of independent work is that they have a set period of time where they need to get their work done in order to get to the thing that they want to do.

So I'll be taking you through the problem solving system that I use to figure out how to deal with that issue. And we'll be sharing some case studies as we go along.

So I love independent work. This is not a secret after the last month of episodes. I love it so much I wrote a book, and I will make sure that the link to that is in the show notes. But you can find it on

wrote a book, and I will make sure that the link to that is in the show notes. But you can find it on Amazon or at Future Horizons. It's called Building independence. I wrote it with my colleague Susan Cabot, and it has all everything you want to know about setting the work system up, as well as tons of examples of work tasks and the systems themselves.

If you are looking for a toolkit that already has the materials that you just have to print out and create to set up your systems, check out my starter kits or starter bundles in my store at autismclassroomresources.com/independentwork. Or if you are catching this before February of 2024 ends come join us for the theme this month in the Special Educator Academy and grab them there, as well as training for you and training you can use for your staff for work systems. Find out more about that at specialeducatoracademy.com.

Today's episode is focused on problem solving when it's not working. And I'm really excited to share some of these case studies with you. So let's get started.

I'm going to share two case sets of case studies with you. One is an elementary student that was really good at independent work, because when I'm talking about students who aren't finishing, oftentimes I'm talking about students who already had been really good at independent work. But now they're not actually finishing it. They're not doing it. They're not completing their work. And so the problem solving comes into why is this happening now. And that's what we're trying to figure out.

So, one student was an elementary student who had been probably the best in his class at finishing his independent work. He used to zip through it in order to get to the computer, which was his reinforcer, or his what's next. So when I walked into the classroom, he was literally standing on his head on his chair, which I didn't know was possible until I saw this, instead of working, which was really mystifying. So I'll talk about him as an example.

I also walked into another class with a teacher who was amazing. She was an amazing teacher in general, but she had really bought into independent work systems, she had tons of tasks, she had them really well organized, and her kids were really good and had had a lot of experience completing them to where she'd been able to bump up some of their difficulty and things like that. And but I walked in and had a couple of examples of students who suddenly were not finishing work that they used to be able to do.

So I'm going to take you through some questions that I generally will ask about when I see these types of situations happen. And they happen to all of us. We've all had students or situations where we've gone, "Oh, I missed that." And so I'm going to share some of those things and some of the steps that we take to try to figure it out.

So one of the first things that I ask is, do we have the right tasks? So you remember that Add in Episode 202, when I talked about tasks, I talked about making sure that the tasks that we put in the

system are tasks that are mastered. In order for a student to do them independently, they have to be tasks they can actually do. So if he hasn't mastered the work, he won't be able to do it independently. So we want to make sure that it is work that is at their level that we know they can complete independently, if not, we may need to switch out the task.

We also want to make sure that our tasks have a clear beginning and end. If a student can't tell that something is finished, then they might put it partway together, and then take it apart. And then they're never going to finish because they're going to be in that endless loop of taking it apart. So I've given them a file folder, and it's missing a piece. And so they see that it's missing. So they take it apart and do it again. And then they put it together, it's still missing the piece. So they take it apart and do it again. And that endless loop is a cue that maybe my task is either not visually clear, or it doesn't have a clear beginning and end.

And I talked about those characteristics of tasks in episode 201 as well. So you can grab those there. But I think those are really important things that we want to look at is is our task, giving the right information? So the quick check are has the student previously mastered the task? Can they complete the amount of the task in the time period? Have we bumped up the amount that we asked them to do? Maybe we gave them two file folders or two worksheets, or, you know, two sets of things to file?

If that's the case, then we may want to back down a little bit. Maybe we've given them too much work to do in that amount of time? Is it work that they're familiar with? So is it a skill that they can do but they've never done it in this form before? Because sometimes that can make a difference? Does that task have a clear beginning and end? Does the student know what's expected of him to complete the task? Is the task of visually clear in terms of what they need to do in order to be finished?

And are you sure that he knows that when the task is complete, he can put it away? So does the task stay together when he puts it away. And that's a really important one, because if it falls apart, many of our students will open it again, put it back together. And again, they're going to be stuck in that endless loop.

A second thing that you might want to think about is do you have a finished basket? The teacher I was telling you about that the students were really pros at finishing their work. I walked in, and I was watching the student and he was stuck in an endless loop. He would put something together, he would finish it, he would pick it up, and then he would put it down. And he take it apart and you do it again. And you pick it up. And you put it down.

And as I watched I went away or missing a finished basket or a place it doesn't have to be a basket, it can be a slot or somewhere where the finished work goes. And they'd always use the laundry baskets in this particular class, which was a life skills class. And he didn't have that.

And so in order to figure it out, I generally will say let me try something and figure out before I tell you what I think we should do, let me see if it works. So I say, "Can you get me a laundry basket?" she got me a laundry basket, and then put it down on his right hand side, because you work from left to right, the finish basket goes on the right. And when I did that, he completed the task, he picked it up, he put it into the finish basket, and he went to the next test. That's where the loop was coming from. He didn't know where it went when it was finished.

And so the teacher said, I really thought that they could do without them. I didn't think they needed them anymore. But obviously this student does. And I'm like okay, so look, let me see how it's going with the rest of the class.

I walk over and there's this kid who comes in and he has three things that he's supposed to do. And he looks at the teacher and he says, what do I need next? Do your independent work. So he goes to his work system area, and he looks at his tasks. And he goes, I already did my mark. And she's like, okay, and you're right, you did so you don't have to do that task. What do I do with it? Well put it on my desk.

I'm like, Okay, well, that makes sense. She's taking something out of his work system. And then he finishes the tasks and he goes, What do I do with it? And she's like, put it on my desk. And he got to the third thing and he finished it and he just got up and put it on her desk and she looked up she goes, I see. Yeah, I know. The desk is now the finished basket. I got it.

And he needed to know where he needed to put it. That where does it go when it's done is a really important step. So that's something we want to make sure that we haven't inadvertently left it off or the a laundry basket got kicked across the room, which definitely happens. All those kinds of things are going to play a role in that.

Another thing that you want to ask is does he know what to do next? I think a lot of times we think that students know what they should do next. Now, when we first started out, typically that is something that they enjoy doing, it's going to be a reinforcer of a kind, so that they finish it. Now remember that in Episode 201, I talked about those four critical questions to answer with an independent work system. And one of them is, what do I do next? And it needs to give them that information. But it also serves as a motivator. But for other students, it may, you may not need that motivator anymore, they have become self driven, and internally motivated. So maybe that what's next is the next thing on their schedule. But they still need to know what do I do when it's finished, because we want them to make that transition on their own.

But for some of our students, sometimes we think that they are internally motivated, and maybe they're not. So I came into this class with my kid who was standing on his head on the chair and I watched him for a little bit and I went, I went to the the teacher. And I was like, What happened to the

what's next visual on his, because he used to really work well for the computer. And he would do his homework system as fast as can be. And we were able to give him more and more work to do before he got to that point.

And I said, where's the what's next? She's like, Oh, he doesn't need it anymore. And I'm like, he's standing on his head on a chair. He hasn't done anything. And she's like, well, you know, he's just been, he's been really difficult. I'm like, as you've been really difficult in everything, she's like noticing an independent work. So I was like, can you go get me a picture of the computer, and I'll put it on his schedule and let's just see what he does?

And lo and behold, I put the picture of the schedule in the what's next part of his schedule at the end of the schedule. And the kid immediately sat down, did all of his work and went to the computer. He still needed that external motivation. And all of us do at times. I mean, let's face it, it's great when people are internally motivated, but there are definitely times that I'm, I'm working for ice cream. If I get this done, I can get up get ice cream. And so that's a really important component of it. So if you've somehow lost that piece of it, maybe go back and add that in.

Another thing to look at is is what's next motivating. A lot of times, we put things in the what's next. And we think that it's really motivating, but it's not. So if you know that they can do all the work easily and you have a what's next visual on the schedule, but he's still not finishing his work, then I start asking is what I'm telling him to do next something that he wants to do.

Because frankly, if you give me a schedule that has something I don't want to do, at the end of it, I'm going to take a long time to finish my work too, because I don't want to do the thing that comes next. That's why I put the hardest thing to do in my day first. Because otherwise, I just take forever to do the other things to avoid that the thing I don't want to do.

So go back and see if what you're using as that what's next is really motivating for him or her. You want to make sure that it is something that is reinforcing. Change it up, see how it goes, see what else might be working for that.

So once you're sure that a student knows what work needs to be done, they're able to do it independently, they know when the work is finished, they have a finished basket, they know what to do with it, they know what comes next and it's highly motivating, but they're still not finishing their work.

Then what I would do is stick to the allotted time for independent work. By doing that and having the student not finish, if that motivator is really reinforcing, then you're going to be using differential reinforcement, you finish your work, you get the thing, that reinforcer, if you don't finish your work, you don't. Sometimes students just need to not do that.

Sometimes we need to maybe pare back on the amount of work we do, which I talked about number one, but if he finishes his work quickly, he gets a longer time with the reinforcer or more of it if it's a tangible thing. But if he doesn't finish his work in that time period, then he doesn't get the reinforcer. So he gets more reinforcement for working quickly to complete his work. So that's kind of the the contingency that we're setting up. Try that for a little bit and see if that works.

If he's still not finishing his work, we've done all of these things, and we're still not seeing him for a whole week or two where he never almost never finishes his work. There's some other things that we can do. We can reduce the amount of work that he has to do and see if it gets finished me he's Just overwhelmed, even though we didn't realize it. We might change the amount of time he has to do his independent work so that he has longer. That may or may not be a possibility depending on your schedule.

We may change the time that we do independent work so the reinforcers really motivating. So for instance, if you have an edible reinforcer, but you do your independent work right after lunch, maybe he's not hungry so it's not really worry enforcing, even though when you put it before lunch, he'll do it.

I might use a social narrative. If you have my independent work starter kit, it has a social narrative in it. If you're in the Special Educator Academy, we have one in the social narrative bank, that just reminds them how independent work is done.

And sometimes we have students who just need reminders about, you know, if I get all this done, then I will get this thing that I like. You might try a contingency map and you can download a free one at autismclassroomresources.com/free and the free resource library that shows that if you finish this work by this time you get this, if you don't finish the work by this time, you don't get this so that he can see that contingency more clearly.

And another thing you might do is you might use a timer to show him how much time he has left to finish his work to get to that what's next. So a timer can sometimes be a motivator. I use it in my work all the time, where I use it with students, but I also use it with myself, you have this amount of time to do this, because I work more efficiently if I have a deadline. And the same is true for our students. So sometimes a timer can help with that.

So that concludes our brief series on using independent work systems in the classroom. I hope it's given you some thoughts to get you started in your own classroom. If you've got questions or you want more ideas, pop over. You can leave me a comment on TikTok @autismclassroomresources and I will be sure to try to help and comment back.

You can also find our free independent work webinar at autismclassroomresources.com/iw-webinar You can grab everything related to independent work in my store at autismclassroomresources.com/independentwork. And you can also grab more training and tools in the Special Educator Academy at specialeducatoracademy.com.

I hope that you'll join me next week when I'm kicking off a long series on all sorts of things having to do with challenging behavior. So looking over the stats, when I was doing the 200th episode of the podcast, it became very clear that behavior is something that people want to know more about. I know it's something that really challenges us. So that's what we're going to do. So come back then and join us and until then, have an amazing week and I'll talk to you later.