

Case Study: Structured teaching to meet the individual needs of learners who have autistic spectrum condition (ASC)



The context:

Tyne and Wear Autistic Society (TAWAS), adult services provide education specifically designed for people with autism. We strive to excel in providing skills for life for adults with autism through inclusive programmes in education and vocational training. We aim to support our learners to achieve their full potential.

The challenge:

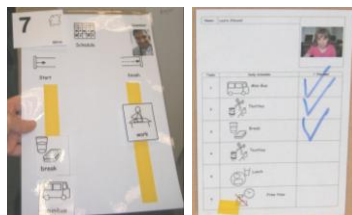
We are a society that provides equal opportunities for all our learners. Our learners have a wide range of needs and are all affected by autism in different ways. The triad of impairments describes the main ways in which a person with autism is affected. Social interaction, communication and imagination, also some of our learners have sensory difficulties as well as different degrees of learning difficulties.

Some of these aspects can be barriers to learning. Communication difficulties make it hard for our learners to express their preferences or needs; imagination makes it difficult for the learner to predict what will happen next, which can cause anxieties; sensory issues stem from difficulties; hearing some noises, seeing some bright lights and tactile perception issues.

What we did:

In order to overcome these barriers to learning it is necessary to consider the individual needs of each learner. One of the main ways we do this is by using a visual structured teaching method called TEACCH. (Treatment and education of autistic and other related communication handicapped children.) This is used throughout the curriculum.

- At all times each learner has their own personal schedule; each schedule is differentiated to meet the needs of that learner. This lets them know what will be happening in the future and this makes their day more predictable whilst minimising their anxiety.



- To support the communication needs, individualised visual methods are used. From picture exchange communication system (PECS) which uses symbols to enable learners who struggle to communicate, to request their choices and needs. Some non-verbal students use communication books, which allow them to build up full sentences using symbols or words. Teaching staff are also regularly trained in communication methods, ensuring that the learners are communicated with on their levels and not the teachers, as too much verbal language may be confusing and cause anxieties for a learner who does not communicate in that way.
- Each educational or vocational activity is also structured to meet the needs of the individual. To reduce the learner's anxieties it must be made clear to them, exactly what is expected of them. The learners must know: where do I work?; What work am I doing?; How much do I have to do?; When am I finished?; And what happens next?



Visual keys can tell the learner where to work



A workstation can be used to let the learner know: What work, how much, and when it is finished. By working left to right the learner has a clear start and finish. It can also help to block out visual distractions maximising the learner's concentration.

A separate free time area is also useful to let the learner know when they have finished. Also the free time area can be used to fulfil sensory needs.

The outcomes:


The structured teaching methods enabled the learners to:

- Communicate their needs and make choices.
- Reduce anxieties by making their day and environment more predictable.
- Promotes the learners independence and in turn ownership of learning.

The impact:

As a result of these methods barriers to learning are broken.

- The learner's anxieties are reduced, increasing their learning.
- The learners are happier increasing their self esteem.
- The learners can fulfil their full potential as they are supported to make choices and plan for the future.

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