Education and Autism

The Importance of Thinking Developmentally in Educational Approaches

By Barry M. Prizant, PhD, CCC-SLP
Brown University

Educational approaches for autistic students are often categorized as either developmental or behavioral. (Prizant & Wetherby, 2005). Behavioral approaches utilize practices based on applied behavior analysis (ABA), and are used to change behavior: that is, to increase desirable behavior and decrease undesirable behavior. ABA uses behavioral strategies, largely based on learning theory, to measure behavior, teach skills, and evaluate progress.

Development approaches are generally more spontaneous and natural in the way that adults respond to a child or the child's behavior. Developmental approaches look at the interrelationships among different domains (e.g., language, social-emotional, communication, cognition) and take into consideration typical and atypical development, family strengths and dynamics, cultural diversity, with a focus on developmentally appropriate practices to build trusting relationships.

Barry M. Prizant, PhD, CCC-SLP

Over the past 5-10 years there have been attempts to meld the two approaches (Schreibman et al., 2015), referred to as Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Interventions (NDBI), primarily based on behavioral approaches infusing practices from the developmental and relationship-based literature. Notwithstanding, many practitioners and agencies continue to insist on rigidly adhering to more traditional behavioral practices, while claiming that other practices are ineffective and/or invalid, despite evidence to the contrary (Prizant, 2009).

Recent meta-analyses of intervention research are providing evidence that developmental approaches are more effective than behavioral approaches (Sandbank et al, 2020), and have fewer negative side effects. Therefore, it is imperative that all practitioners should learn - indeed be obligated - to think developmentally, as the dangers of not doing so are numerous. This assertion is also based on the author's 50 years' experience as a speech-language pathologist, autism researcher, and consultant to programs using approaches ranging from ABA to developmental approaches. There is increasing concern that ABA practitioners now being trained to support autistic children (e.g., BCBA or RBT) have minimal or no background in child and human development, and therefore, little to no training in how to think developmen-

tally. If services are to be respectful and effective in supporting children's development, it is essential that service providers and ideally, family members, learn to think developmentally (Sandbank et al., 2020).

Developmental approaches support the development of children and older persons based upon principles and practices derived from research on typical and atypical child and human development. "Thinking developmentally" goes well beyond what most practitioners consider when the term developmental approach is used, as it is often misunderstood as only teaching to a developmental checklist. Developmental approaches view the individual as an active learner (i.e., participant), who progresses through developmental stages throughout life. This developmental progression is considered to be a hard-wired neurological endowment that enables an individual to seek out social and non-social learning opportunities. In turn, partners respond with "guided participation" and promote the development of trusting relationships in everyday activities. Child and human

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Considerations for Choosing a College for Students on the Autism Spectrum

By Ruby L. Owiny, PhD
Director, Access Program
Trinity International University

Preparation for college requires careful planning. This planning often starts in a student's freshman year of high school, but usually not later than their sophomore year. When a student is on the autism spectrum, transition planning is a high priority, indeed it is required by law. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) stipulates that IEP teams must begin transition planning by the time the student reaches 16 years of age. In this transition plan, the student's goals for postsecondary life are addressed and goals are developed to help the student achieve those goals (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013). It is during this transition period from age 16 to the time the student graduates from high school that families begin looking for colleges.

Choosing the Right College For Your Student

While planning ahead for college, families may wonder what they should look for in a postsecondary setting to meet the goals and needs of their student. Of course, ensuring the university has the major the student desires is important. Beyond that, visiting the college to ensure the culture is what the student (and parents) desires is an important part of the process. Other factors may include identifying what opportunities exist for internships, international studies, and social life. The size of the college and how far from home the college is located are often important considerations, especially for a student with ASD who may require more parental support than a typical college freshman. In addition to these factors, cost, the financial aid package, and how well prepared graduates are for the workforce are considered. These are all valid and necessary considerations for all college-bound students. However, when a student is on the autism spectrum, more in-depth considerations should be addressed.

Specific Planning For ASD: What to Look For in a College

It is well documented that transitions are especially challenging for students with ASD (Hendrickson et al., 2017). It should be noted that while transition can be difficult and transition plans can often focus on the deficits needing to be addressed, every student with ASD is unique and capable of being successful with the appropriate accommodations and supports (Dymond et al., 2017). High school teachers and counselors, along with parents, can assist in preparing students for the transition to postsecondary life. They can help the student identify the things he does well and that will serve him well on a college campus. For example, he may be independent with caring for personal hygiene. This will be an area that is simple for the student to continue in college and parents can be assured their student will be able to independently shower, shave, put on deodorant and cologne or perfume, and wear clean clothes to class. However, maintaining a calendar with assignments and due dates could be a challenge for the student and something to work on in the transition plan.

Colleges can also support students in providing them an opportunity to visit the campus multiple times to become familiar with the location of important buildings for the student, such as the classroom buildings, library, dormitory, and cafeteria. They may also allow students to move in a bit early to have additional time to get settled in and familiarize themselves with the dorm and their new surroundings. Frequently, students can request a single

Effective Collaboration Models for Individuals with Complex Needs

By Keri Bethune, PhD, BCBA-D,
Sharon Onda, MEd, BCBA,
Silva Orchanian, MEd, BCBA, LABA,
and Erin Way, MS, BCBA
Melmark

Many students with autism require a multitude of services to aid in their success and independence within the school, home, and community environments. These services may include, but are not limited to, general and/or special education instruction, speech and language services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social skills training, clinical programming (i.e., services), and a multitude of other individualized services. Whenever more than one person is responsible for client programming, collaboration is necessary to best meet the needs of the client, and to ensure continuity of care across settings, contexts, and caregiver. There are, however, multiple different types of collaboration that are widely used to meet this goal.

Who is Part of the Team?

Members of IEP teams can vary from student to student. Some IEP team members are required, regardless of the student's disability, placement, or services provided. Required IEP team members include the parent/guardian of the child, a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, a representative of the local education agency, someone to interpret evaluation results, any necessary related service providers, and, when appropriate, the child. Related service members can include a range of specialist, but most common are an Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech/Language Therapist, Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA).

Occupational Therapists address activities that the student is required to perform daily and try to minimize the effects that occupational and performance concerns have on the completion of those activities (AOTA, 2010; Case-Smith and Arbesman 2008). Physical Therapists work to increase students' motor development and skills. They support health promotion, obesity management, differentiate programs for individual learners, ensuring safe and appropriate educational environments, and community education (APTA, 2022). Speech

Language therapists focus their efforts on improving student's communication skills (Koenig and Gerenser 2006). Increasing students' social skills and communication will increase a student's quality of life and social acceptance (ASHA, 2015). Finally, BCBAs use interventions derived from the science of behavior change to affect socially significant behavior change in students who may present with a range of behavioral challenges. Strategies may focus on functional communication training, function-based interventions, and differential reinforcement (Cooper et al., 2007; Donaldson and Stahmer, 2014).

While many common team members have been discussed here, it is also important to note that for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to be truly comprehensive, additional team members may be necessary in the collaboration process (e.g., orientation and mobility, supports coordination, school psychology, advocates).

Some Models to Consider

Pull-out service delivery is when a content area expert removes a child from large group or general education instruction to deliver individualized one on one or small group instruction in that particular content area (e.g., reading support, occupational therapy, speech therapy). Typically, these

Overcoming Challenges with Technology:
One Individual's Journey from Hospitalization to a Career

Bradley S. Stevenson, PhD, BCBA-D,
and Keri Bethune, PhD, BCBA-D
Melmark Carolinas

Individuals with complex profiles can display behaviors that are dangerous enough to lead to frequent involvement with police and hospitalizations. Such was the case for Bob (pseudonym), who had a history of significant aggression, property destruction, and elopement behaviors. Bob lived at home with his grandmother and a number of extended family members, and when these behaviors occurred at home the police would often be called to maintain safety. This led to regular hospitalization.

As with many teenagers, Bob loved electronics. He talked most about video games, but he really enjoyed anything to do with them. We would later come to learn that he disassembled and reassembled computers and video game consoles for fun. Unfortunately, this intense love also led to most of his challenging behaviors as he would become very upset if he was not allowed to have them or if someone attempted to take them away from him. Even when hospitalized this would happen, as he quickly moved up the hospital's system of privileges to earn video game access. Then he would quickly tumble down those privileges when his access ended. This pattern was

so common that it led the family and most professionals to limit his access to technology as much as possible.

This presented a significant challenge for many reasons. Primary among these is the integration of technology throughout society. Bob is a capable person with aspirations of having a full-time job that pays a competitive wage so that he can live independently. It is unrealistic to think a person can live independently in today's society without *some* access to technology. Also, technology and gaming are incredibly relevant socially. Bob had some friends in his neighborhood, and they connected over video games. Last, cutting Bob off from all electronics created a situation where he was left "bankrupt" and devoid of opportunities for reinforcement. He knew the thing he enjoyed most in life was unavailable. His relationship with his peers deteriorated as a result because he could not play games with them. Without anything else to provide similar motivation, Bob was left entirely *un*motivated and unhappy. As a result, even with limited access he still became aggressive and ran away from home.

At Melmark, we knew from the begin-

ning that simply avoiding the issue was not a long-term solution. Instead, it was the team's thoughts that Bob's strong motivation surrounding technology should be harnessed in a way that was safe for him, safe for his family, and had appropriate limits. To get some momentum, we began by implementing a plan with him at school. Technology was to be provided regularly throughout the school day at a rate of 10 minutes every hour and a half, so long as Bob was safe and completed his assigned activities. If he was late getting his activities done for any reason, it was fine. He would still earn technology as soon as he completed them. In addition, even if he were unsafe and lost access to technology, he would not be bankrupt, as he knew there would be another opportunity to earn it in just another hour and a half. We chose to begin at school because we anticipated some challenges the first several times he did not earn technology. Since Melmark is designed to support individuals with challenging behaviors, we were confident we could support him through those times, maintain everyone's safety, and give him the chance to succeed. Shortly after implementation, Bob began to demonstrate increasing periods of safe behavior in order to access technology. Bob would still become visibly upset at times. However,

The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Transition and Adult Programs at UM-NSU CARD: Creating Employment Through Community Collaboration

By Silvia Gil, MSEd
UM-NSU CARD
and Jose Roman
Autistic Self-Advocate

The University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UM-NSU CARD), established by Florida statute in 1993, currently serves over 14,500 families in South Florida. Our program offers a variety of programs and services at no cost to our constituents and utilizes public and private partnerships in order to continue serving as a go-to resource for all those affected by autism and related disabilities. UM-NSU CARD could not effectively serve as many constituents as it has without support from our community partners.

UM-NSU CARD has had to grow along with its clients. As a significant portion of our clientele have moved into adulthood (nearly 50% are now over the age of 16), the UM-NSU CARD team has expanded its offerings to include uniquely tailored services and programs for teenagers and adults. These expanded offerings would not have been possible without the support of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation (DJFF), a national non-profit organization established in 2002 to focus on developing, funding,

Job SEEKers participants celebrate the end of a successful employment training program at the University of Miami

and advocating for suitable and sustainable programs, resources, support systems, and services that address the lifespan needs of adults living with autism. Linda Walder, the founder of the foundation, has a vision for a world that embraces our diverse population of adults on the autism spectrum and one in which those adults can have

access to job opportunities that have been closed off to them for so long. By fostering access to jobs and community participation, adults on the spectrum can meaningfully contribute to community life and attain their maximum potential as individuals.

Employment rates for adults on the spectrum continue to be devastatingly low.

Young adults with autism have been found to have lower employment rates than peers with other disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. For those who were employed, jobs were largely part-time with low wages (Roux et al., 2015). Employment rates for people with autism (regardless of intellectual functioning) range from 4.1 to 11.8% (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). Adults with ASD with higher cognitive abilities are unlikely to be competitively employed, possibly due to fewer supports available to assist them. Adults on the spectrum face many challenges in the employment process, including navigating job applications, tailoring resumes and covers letters to the employers' needs, implementing successful interview strategies, exhibiting the social skills considered necessary in the workplace, and making decisions about disclosure and requesting accommodations (Wilczynski, Trammel, & Clarke, 2013).

UM-NSU CARD and other organizations such as the DJFF cannot meaningfully impact the historical employment rates of adults on the autism spectrum without the participation of businesses and local communities at large. Successfully closing the employment gap requires two significant steps: (1) intensive employment readiness programming and training for adults

Using IvySCIP to Guide Data-Driven Social and Emotional Learning Instruction for K-5 Autistic Students

By Eve Müller, PhD
and Lynn Cannon, MS
Ivymount School and Programs

For the past two decades, educators have placed increasing emphasis on social and emotional learning (SEL) as part of a well-rounded K-12 curriculum. Research shows that SEL plays a significant role in students' academic success (Corcoran et al., 2018; Schonfeld et al., 2015), and contributes to positive post-school outcomes like employment and participation in higher education (Dymnicki eta al., 2013). Instruction targeting social and emotional learning is especially critical for our autistic students, many of whom – as a result of brain-based differences – require explicit instruction in order to develop skills for effective self-advocacy, perspective taking, emotion regulation, executive function, and reading and responding flexibly to social context clues (Sigman & Capps, 1997; Vermeulen, 2012). Because SEL encompasses such a broad range of skills, and each autistic student presents with a unique social and emotional learning profile, a key challenge for educators is knowing where and how to begin providing social and emotional learning instruction to their students.

Introducing Ivymount Social Cognition Instructional Package (IvySCIP)

The *Ivymount Social Cognition Instructional Package* (IvySCIP) was designed by autism educators at Ivymount School in Rockville, Maryland to provide individualized, data-driven support for SEL instruction. Almost ten years ago, Ivymount teachers and related service providers working with their autistic students with average cognitive levels and language abilities realized there were no assessment tools designed to evaluate SEL skill levels for this particular population, and a group of us set out to remedy this. With input from dozens of experts in autism, child development, and social cognition,

IvySCIP
Ivymount **S**ocial **C**ognition **I**nstructional **P**ackage and How it Works

Generate SEL Profile
Use skills assessment to identify students' SEL strengths and needs

Track Data
Use tracking forms to monitor students' progress toward achieving goals

Identify Instructional Priorities
Use reporting options to identify priority areas for individual and/or groups of students

Select Curricular Materials
Use database of lesson plans and instructional strategy videos to support teaching

Develop IEP Goals
Use SEL goal development tools to customize IEP or other instructional goals

we developed the IvySCIP strengths and needs assessment, and aligned it with the five key social domains identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible social decision-making.

As we shared the IvySCIP strengths and needs assessment with more and more educators throughout the U.S., it became clear we were not alone in our desire for data-driven SEL resources for our autistic students. Teachers and related service providers – especially those new to the field - consistently reported feeling overwhelmed by the questions of how to assess students' SEL skills, minimize "guess work" when identifying instructional priorities, and track progress over time. Consequently, our goal shifted from creating a tool exclusively for "in-house" use, to developing something for sharing with the field more broadly. We received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to further develop and test IvySCIP in collaboration with 3C Institute of Durham, North Carolina (our software developer). Together we developed, IvySCIP, an online tool that would automatically link students' SEL assessment scores to a wide

Starting with AHRC NYC Program, Student with Autism Earns Bachelor's Degree From Hunter College

A First for AHRC NYC's Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program

By Lynn Uhlfelder Berman
AHRC New York City

Sam Wilkinson always knew he would go to college. However, he recalled having some doubts after enrolling in AHRC New York City's Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program (MHREP) at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

The program provides a fully inclusive higher education experience for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. With the support of peer mentors, MRHEP students attend college classes. Peer mentors help students manage their workload, take notes in class, attend study sessions, and much more.

Wilkinson, who has autism, was struggling with writing papers. Wilkinson said he could read and knew the words he wanted to write but added his "brain froze" when it came to putting them on paper.

His peer mentor at MRHEP worked with him one sentence at a time, and eventually Wilkinson could write papers again. The problem stemmed, he said, from when a teacher he had as a child used writing as

Sam Wilkerson graduating with an Associate's Degree from the Borough of Manhattan College

punishment. He'd have to write what he did wrong and apologize. "With my mentor's help, I was getting back the most important ability for a college student," Wilkinson said.

First MRHEP Student to Earn Associate's and Bachelor's Degrees

Wilkinson was the first person from AHRC NYC's MRHEP to earn a bach-

elor's degree from Hunter College. He knows it was quite the accomplishment and he said his parents are beyond proud of him.

"We couldn't be prouder," said Sara Barrett, Wilkinson's mother. "He works so hard. The things that he has accomplished have been difficult for him. He doesn't give up. He sees the goal and wills himself to achieve it."

However, he feels the pandemic robbed him of a proper graduation, like the huge ceremony at Madison Square Garden he enjoyed when he matriculated while receiving support at the MRHEP at the BMCC when he earned his Associates Degree. Last year, Hunter College's graduation was done via Zoom; department heads read off names and a month or two later Wilkinson received his diploma in the mail. "I felt like I did all this work and it just ended," he said.

Sam was not alone in his pursuit of higher education. Graduating from college is becoming a goal for many young adults with autism, according to several studies.

Wilkinson thrived in art (especially drawing), photography, and sculpture at Hunter and BMCC.

Forbes Lists AHRC New York City as One of America's Best Employers

By Lynn Uhlfelder Berman
AHRC New York City

AHRC New York City was recently named one of Forbes America's Best Midsize Employers for a second consecutive year. Founded in 1949, AHRC NYC has grown into the state's largest nonprofit organization supporting children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. AHRC NYC was the only organization in the field named to the Forbes list.

AHRC NYC ranked 217 of 500 companies on this year's list, which was released on Feb. 10, 2022, and 7th in the healthcare and social industry. In 2021, AHRC NYC ranked 462.

"As president of the Board of Directors, I am affirmed by the recognition of AHRC NYC on the Forbes List of America's Best Midsize Employers 2022," Raymond Ferrigno said. "It is especially important to me that staff think highly of their employer. The pride and dedication of the staff are what ensure that AHRC NYC provides quality services to children and adults throughout New York City. This has been a foundational principle expected by both families and the board."

"We are proud of the Forbes Best Midsize Employer recognition. I believe it is

truly a testament to our dedicated workforce, especially during the two years of the pandemic," said Marco Damiani, CEO of AHRC NYC. "Nearly 5,000 people have chosen this as their workplace, and we always welcome new, passionate and talented colleagues to join us in our mission. While I consider this a well-deserved recognition, I know we can always do better. There are still significant challenges facing us in our work, and we will always aim to improve the quality of the supports we provide every day and the vital impact on people with disabilities and our staff who support them."

America's Best Employers 2022 were identified through an independent survey taken by approximately 60,000 American

A Constructive Approach to Conflict for Better Educational Outcomes

By Tara C. Fappiano, Esq.
Advocate, Mediator, and Litigator

Whether you are a parent, guardian, or educator, you have likely faced some sort of conflict involving a student. Conflicts took many shapes and sizes during my son's special education school experience, and now as he attends college. Sometimes conflicts are with the people involved, other times they involve the task. Sometimes conflicts are real, other times perceived. Resolving conflict constructively undoubtedly leads to better educational outcomes for students.

Facing Conflict

Conflicts arise in many ways, but most can be categorized as "relationship" or "task-related." With a relationship conflict, the persons involved are incompatible somehow. In a school environment, it is not necessarily realistic to change the players, nor does doing so always resolve the conflict. Focusing on a relationship conflict may seem easier than addressing what might be a task-related, or cognitive, conflict. In education, that might be when the work styles, or perhaps the student's cognitive or learning abilities, conflict with the expectations or means of accessing education in the classroom. Avoiding conflict because of fear of another's emotional response, or engaging in conflict to try to trigger an emotional response, are two ends of a spectrum. Neither choice best serves students in the classroom. Both choices tend to lead to the same result - a worsening of the situation for the student.

To face conflict constructively, consider some factors:

Who will you approach? With a classroom conflict, it is likely better for a parent to speak to the teacher, at least initially. Saying nothing for fear of being perceived as a complaining parent may mean no one addresses the problem. Alternatively, going over a teacher's head to an administrator who does not have personal knowledge of the situation may delay resolution and create an emotional response in the teacher.

Who is going to engage? Consider a situation in which a parent and teacher have had several conflicts during one schoolyear. It may be that there is a relationship conflict which makes constructive conversation difficult. Deciding to bring a new voice or perspective into the discussion may help bring about resolution. It may bring different solutions to the table. It may allow presentation of issues so the parties might be more receptive to a different approach.

How might you approach the conflict? The way that one approaches a conflict sets the stage. Today, educators and parents are reachable in a myriad of ways - email, text, Google classrooms, phone calls, and others. Choosing how to initiate discussion and in how much detail should be intentional. For example, expect a very different reaction to a brief email asking that you make some time to talk than the reaction to a 10-page, single-spaced, detailed email offering one solution you have decided is the only correct one. Similarly, dropping a bomb on a parent at pick up/drop off time, in person, may create anxiety, stress, fear, and urgency; all heightened when not discussed in more detail soon thereafter. I also try to discourage any long email discussions, which rarely lead to resolution. In-person meetings, once an issue is introduced and the right people are involved, tend to be more productive.

Other Obstacles? There are a great many other factors, ranging from language barriers to family dynamics to historical experiences with prior conflicts to cultural/social concerns to others, that might stand in the way of resolution. Considering whether there may be other obstacles, then trying to understand and work through them, shows respect for the other party from the first interaction. That respect builds trust, an important component of resolution.

Breaking Down the Conflict

In virtually every conflict, there are several stages or parts.[1] Here, I am focusing on the story and the emotion.

What happened? Maybe this is simple - most of the time it is not. There may be different versions of what occurred or opinions about why. As the issue is discussed, different or new details arise. Others may join the conversation and add information. Everything that is said is relevant to some degree. Some details are facts. Other statements may signal an underlying bias, emotion, opinion, or perspective driving the person's decision making. I always encourage an initial period in which both sides can share. This creates an environment of mutual respect and understanding. I also find it helpful to let the person attending the meeting know that they will have this chance to share, so they can prepare. Then they tend to come to the meeting with a more constructive mindset.

How you say something is often more important than what you say. For example, using hyperbolic phrases like "you always" or "you never" signal drama, emotion, exaggeration - all burying the real issue. This language may cause the other person to tune out, or the issue is too expansive for there to be meaningful discussion. If you are on the receiving end, the discussion of the things you "always" or "never" do, while hard to hear, may mean there is a larger issue below the surface standing in the way of resolution.

Phrases like "I want" or "I need" or "you have to" also do not lead to constructive discussion. First, what a parent or an educator wants or needs is not necessarily what the student needs. The statement, "I need you to email me every day about Johnny," may generate a very different reaction than: "It would be helpful for you to email me about Johnny's progress on that topic because during my workday, your school day, I cannot connect. Then, I can discuss that topic with Johnny each evening. If I have questions or concerns, we can plan next steps."

There is also a tendency in a conflict to want to blame someone for the problem. An analysis of the factors that may be contributing to a situation is more constructive. For example, blaming a teacher for having 30 students in a classroom without help is not constructive. But that situation may explain why the student is having difficulty attending to a task, or why the student performs differently when at their own quiet desk at home.

How Do We Feel? It is natural for parents to feel significant emotion when speaking about their child's performance, behaviors, challenges, and inconsistencies in the classroom. They will feel, and want to express, emotion in these discussions. Some of those emotions may be quite strong, even unexpected. I have come to realize that my reactions to my son's autism diagnosis were akin to the stages of grief. I grieved the loss of the educational journey I expected for him, while struggling with how to make the best choices, when I barely understood what it all meant. As time

Supporting the College-Bound Autistic Student: A Need for Better Transition Planning

By Kara Constantine, PhD, NCSP, BCBA,
Kate Langston Rooney, MEd, BCBA, LBS,
Jennifer Dawson, PhD, BCBA, LBS,
Richard Allen, PsyD, NCSP, BCBA-D,
and Todd Harris, PhD
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health

For autistic individuals, success in college lies in an effective transition plan that acknowledges and addresses the increased challenges they will face as college students. According to a national study, 34% of autistic students who qualified for a post-secondary education program attended such a program and fewer than 40% completed their degree (Shattuck, 2012). For college-capable autistic students, academic challenges alone do not present the greatest barrier to success. Rather, it is the balancing act of the college setting that demands skills across the areas of education, socialization, and independent living (Van Hees et al., 2018). While many students report feeling academically supported in college, they indicate a lack of support in other non-academic areas (e.g., socially, emotionally) that impede their overall success (Cai & Richdale, 2016; Van Hees et al., 2015).

As autistic students pursue higher education, instruction needs to be designed to teach the specific skills they will need to be

Students enrolled in West Chester University's Dub-C Autism Program (D-CAP) provide peer mentoring for HYPE

successful in college, including the following recommendations:

1. **Teach Self-Determination Skills:** As early as possible, students should learn to be actively engaged in their own Individualized Education Plan process to foster self-advocacy skills. In college, access to support is dependent on students disclosing their diagnosis, registering with disability services, and communicating with instructors to ensure access to necessary accommodations. Many autistic students do not proactively link with supports or only disclose when their stress exceeds their ability to cope (Cai & Richdale, 2016).

2. **Take a Collaborative Approach:** Transition planning requires a collaborative approach between students, families, schools, and other supports (Nuske et al., 2019). Person-centered futures planning processes (Schall et al., 2014) can help teams create a systematic plan to assist students in identifying their own goals and then develop comprehensive and individualized supports.

3. **Think Beyond Academics:** Autistic college students especially struggle with skills related to executive functioning, social communication, sensory processing, independent living skills, and the need for structure and routine (Cai & Richdale, 2016; Van Hees et al., 2015). School transition teams must assess and teach these critical skills to better prepare autistic students for holistic college success.

4. **Support Health and Wellness:** Autistic students often face increased mental health concerns (e.g., anxiety, depression, loneliness) while trying to meet college demands (Cai & Richdale, 2016). Students need support in linking to healthcare and mental health services (Fernandes et al., 2021). Teams should identify and plan for barriers in accessing these supports and help the student create a plan for how to cope with stress.

5. **Identify a Coach:** Many students preferred one designated person to support them across life domains and to provide individualized coaching (Van Hees et al., 2015). Coaches can provide more immediate and individualized performance feedback as students learn skills in naturally occurring routines and environments.

6. **Provide Families with Information:** Caregivers often report barriers with privacy legislation and institutional polices at college, even when student's welcome caregiver support (Nuske et al., 2019). Caregivers and students need guidance surrounding the changes in regulation between high school and college (e.g., IDEA versus ADA, FERPA). Caregivers also need education surrounding common challenges of the autistic college student that may lead to struggles for even the most academically advanced individual.

7. **Teach Independence:** Parents and students often experience tension during transition years as families navigate how to provide enough support while also promoting independence and autonomy (Van Hees et al., 2018). Families should be prepared to cope with their own discomfort during this time in lieu of denying their child of critical learning experiences (e.g., spending the night away from home, taking public transportation, etc.). It is important that families safely support their children in learning these skills independently through relatively low-risk opportunities beginning in childhood to introduce the natural consequences of choices.

8. **Find a Good College Fit:** Students and their teams should consider a wide variety of college characteristics (e.g., size, location, campus support programs, accepting community, etc.) (Zeedyk et al., 2016). Students should be exposed to college experiences early so that they can identify an environment that best fits their needs.

Transition teams can also support students in enrolling in comprehensive transition programs for the college-bound autistic student. For example, the High School Youth Preparation for Higher Education program (HYPE), a partnership between Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health and West Chester University, enhances traditional transition services that may not include a college prep track. HYPE optimizes college-oriented autistic students' preparation for university life through a two-year program that begins in the fall of the student's junior year and concludes in the summer following high school graduation. The program includes after-school classes with hands-on learning experiences during the school year; peer mentoring with autistic college students; parent education and support; and a summer program that includes overnight campus experiences.

While it is impossible to eliminate all of the challenges that are part of any young adult's college experience, team collaboration can increase the quality of transition planning and better equip autistic students to meet the demands of higher education. Plans need to be individualized and comprehensive in order to incorporate a wide range of non-academic skills and should serve as a platform for students to identify

Enabling Smart Technologies to Improve Individuals' Lives

By Matthew Cerasaro
Technology Inclusion Coordinator
Greystone Programs, Inc.

The COVID-19 pandemic moved us into a digital space and opened up the world of smart technologies. It challenged us to ask ourselves, "How can we integrate advances in technology into the lives of our individuals to promote independence, lessen the dependency on staff, and move away from a prompt dependent environment?" At Greystone Programs Inc., we are leveraging the power of smart technologies to increase health & wellness, promote independence, and increase autonomy to improve the quality of life of the individuals we support. We believe we can utilize the current technologies by building upon what exists and being involved in future developments to assist our individuals. Our agency is transforming into a Technology First organization to make this change. Given the rapid pace at which our technology is evolving, agencies will be better positioned to support the varied needs of the individuals they support by adopting a Technology First approach sooner rather than later.

A guide published by the Tennessee Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities titled *Agency Transformation to a Technology First Organization* defines transformation as "more than offering Enabling Technology, adding it as a support option, or supplementing other options. Transformation requires a change in culture, a new approach to workforce development, a new perspective on the complementary relationship between Enabling Technology and in-person supports. It is a whole-life approach to the potential role of Enabling Technology in creating opportunities for greater independence. It means that paid supports promote independence through technology in their interactions."

To be a Technology First organization, an organization embraces technology as the first source of support when addressing outcomes in service planning. SimplyHome (2019) describes a Technology First approach as "the desire for people to learn more about how to use technology to improve their quality of life at home, at work, and in the community." This transformation is a crucial step to developing a culture of technology inclusion. When we look at the power of technology inclusion, we see the possibilities that it can bring to the individuals we support. Technology can cue independence and daily routines, counteract risks, provide positive reinforcement, provide non-verbal avenues for communication, help support and teach new skills, advance skill sets, build and establish routines. It can expose individuals and staff members to technologies they may never have or may not engage with or be able to access otherwise. More importantly, the impact that technology inclusion brings to people who historically do not get the same exposure to technology as the mainstream public is transformative in and of itself.

Consider your access and use of the internet and how important that is to your daily functioning. Now consider this: "According to Pew Research, a quarter of people with disabilities say they never go online, and more than half say they do not have a home broadband subscription (American Association of People with Disabilities)" (Bisaillon, 2022). There is a whole world-wide-web of experiences and opportunities that are going unexplored. Because of this fact, it is why technology inclusion is vitally important and why your organization should adopt a Technology First approach. In an article titled *Connectivity and Assistive Technology can Equalize Opportunity for People with Disabilities,* Bisaillon (2022) notes that "assistive technology, internet access, and funding for training empowers people with disabilities to do things that they never imagined. It allows us, as service providers, to know that we have done more than provide care – we have provided inspiration, challenge, and change."

In every case, putting technology into the hands of the individuals we support starts with the individual. Whether it be an intrinsic desire to seek out technology or an identified area of need that technology can meet, the individuals and their needs guide the technology selection. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to technology inclusion. The individuals we support are unique, so their technological solutions must also be unique. The process should start with assessing the individual's needs and abilities to engage with their environment and future technologies. The assessment should also identify if the individual requires a modification to the technology, an assistive device, or an accessibility feature to be enabled. The University of Pittsburgh's Human Engineering Research Laboratories is developing and evaluating a comprehensive technology-based assessment called ASSIST – Autonomy, Safety, and Social Integration via Smart Technologies, from which they've created the AS-SIST Functional Performance Index. Using assessments like ASSIST ensures that you are evaluating the needs of the individual and matching them with the technology that is the best fit for them. This research is still ongoing, but an assessment is the starting point for getting technology into the hands of the individuals we support in a data-driven way.

Once an assessment or an area of need is identified, the research can begin to match the individual with a piece of smart technology. Today's technologies have a low bar to interact with them, meaning the learning curve is not as demanding as before. Today, most smart technologies can be automated or operated remotely or via a Smart hub like Amazon Alexa or Google Home. Once a piece of technology is selected, the next step is to trial the technology and gather data. A data-driven approach ensures that the technology is adequate for meeting that individual's needs. At Greystone Programs, we combine the efforts of technology inclusion with the science of Applied Behavior Analysis, a type of therapy that improves specific behaviors and adaptive learning skills that can gradually and permanently alter individuals' behaviors. Through pairing and reinforcement procedures, individuals are introduced to new technologies. As a result, human prompts can be slowly faded and replaced with technological ones so that our individuals can live their most independent lives.

The technology that Greystone deploys improves the lives of the individuals we support in the following domains: physical, communication, leisure/social, and health. Examples include an Amazon Alexa programmed to provide a fun and engaging movement prompt (e.g., queuing an announcement and song to get up and exercise). While a smartwatch might send a vibration alert at the same time that lights

A young man at Greystone Programs Amenia residence works with Robokind's Milo to engage in social skill development

Are Autistic Students Traumatized in Schools?

By Marcia Eckerd, PhD
Diagnostician, Therapist,
Writer, and Speaker

According to a 2017 study, "77% of autistic high school students play a very limited role or no role at all in post-secondary planning compared to 47 % of students with intellectual disabilities and 27% of students with all other disabilities" (Gillespie-Lynch, K. et al., 2017). Why do so few autistic students play a role in their own planning?

For many autistic children, school can be a toxic environment. Working on the advice of experts, school staff aim to have autistic children's behavior conform to neurotypical expectations. The more a child is indistinguishable from mainstream peers, the more successful the school intervention is believed to be.

Disruptive or atypical behavior is labeled oppositional, avoidant, attention-seeking, or inappropriate. Children who don't cooperate (meaning engage in and respond) to school-led, behavioral interventions are often called non-compliant. The issue is seen to be the child, not the intervention itself. Autistic children are often taught that what they feel, think, or do is wrong and they should do what they are told instead. This can have a life-long impact on self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-advocacy.

Quoting a student on a Stanford University panel, "It kills my soul."

Many interventions treat behavior perceived from the outside, without understanding the meaning or necessity for the child. The behavior is the tip of an iceberg that goes down to sensory, social, emotional, motoric, and cognitive issues the child experiences. A child whose behavior is viewed as problematic may be responding to internal frustration, overstimulation, anxiety, or some other distress. Plans often focus on eliminating the nonconforming or "acting out" behavior instead of trying to understand the experience of the child. We need to support children, not just focus on correcting behavior.

As an example, sometimes autistic children refuse to do work even if they successfully completed a similar assignment before. Autistic children's productivity can be variable. A majority have sleep disorders, sensory issues and are bullied (Posar & Visconti, 2020, Tomchek et al., 2014; Hoover & Kaufman 2018). If children are tired, hungry, not feeling well, are over-stimulated, or stressed, they might not be able to access the skills necessary to work. In a worst-case scenario, this can become a traumatic experience.

This is a slightly altered transcript of an interview with Steph, a British autistic adult recalling life in primary school:

"I would say, 'I cannot do this. I can't do it.' They put a math worksheet in front of me and said, here, do this. It's like, I can't do it. They try and make me do it, like, just get it over with.

It's not that I'm being lazy or objectionable. It's not that I don't want to do it. It's that I... I just didn't feel able to do it. Them trying to force the issue would then mean that I got more and more upset and annoyed and angry. At that age, around six or seven, I really didn't express myself well.

I'd just be like, 'No. Piss off, *I can't do it!*' And then I would get violent. I just struggled and I didn't feel that they were listening to me. I would start throwing things, flip tables over and then the teachers would drag me to my seat.

I would lash out at them, and they'd physically restrain me. That was the worst time of my life when I was in primary school.

It's likely that if the teacher had allowed the child to do something else or take a break, none of this trauma would have happened. There can be the same failure

Guidelines for a More Neurodiversity-Affirming Practice for Autism

By Rebecca Rosenzweig
Autism Self-Advocate
and Barry M. Prizant, PhD, CCC-SLP
Visiting Scholar, Brown University

This article came out of discussions between the authors about guidelines for a more neurodiversity-affirming practice for autism. The training that is discussed in this article was developed by the first author (Rebecca Rosenzweig).

Authors' note: As an autistic person working in a program that offers ABA, my goal is to change some common practices to better reflect evolving research. ABA practices are controversial in the autistic community. However, ABA is currently the most common approach experienced by autistic people in the United States. My goal is to help autistic people currently receiving ABA services, or other related services, to be better understood and supported. It is not the purpose of this article to debate whether ABA should receive support by the progressive autistic community. Many professionals "don't know what they don't know." We need to help service providers to be informed by those who know best, autistic people.

ABA programming is often not aligned with what the autistic self-advocate community believes is helpful for autistic people. ABA programs can be counter-productive and can cause harm in the long run

Rebecca Rosenzweig

Barry M. Prizant, PhD, CCC-SLP
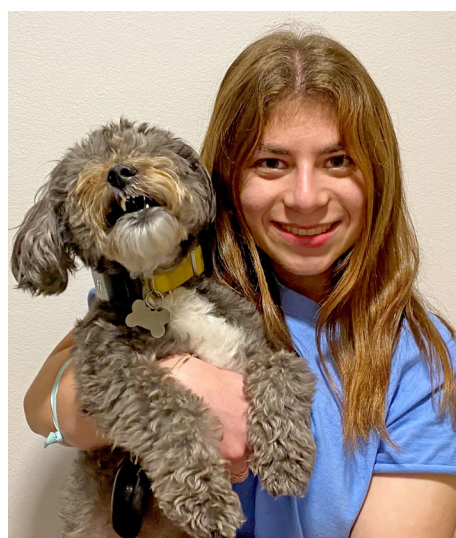
when they are not informed by research (Kupferstein, 2018) and reports of autistic individuals (Price, 2022). Commonly, ABA goals intend to change behavior to reflect neurotypical norms and standards. I believe we must change our focus from "How can this child blend in seamlessly with society?" to "What tools does this child need to thrive in a society with social and behavioral expectations and sensory environments that were not created for them?" Autism is a lifelong condition. We must find ways to live in harmony with the neurotypical world despite our neurological differences.

Examples of common practices of concern include eye contact training and eliminating stimming and scripting. The justification is that such behavior makes a person look different. However, the problem with training an autistic person to mimic neurotypical ways is that often it is not their authentic way of responding due to their neurological differences. Often, it sends the message that the child is behaving badly, and the "problem" must be fixed. Eventually, the need to mask, that is, to suppress natural reactions and autistic characteristics, gets so strong that we lose who we are in the process (Price, 2022). By changing practices to be more respectful of differences between the autistic and neurotypical experience, we can improve the lives of autistic people.

While I worked with autistic clients and staff, I reflected on what did not feel right in observing ABA practices. Then, I created an autism sensitivity and awareness training for my coworkers and supervisors, based on my personal experiences, those of autistic friends, and literature written by autistic authors.

This training focuses on ways to make practices I observed to be more respectful and more neurodiversity-affirming. I focus on critical areas for change, the most important being for staff to understand the autistic experience. I found that staff, even with years of experience, were not aware of many of these issues. They were open to learning.

Sensory Processing Differences, Dysregulation, and Anxiety

Most autistic people have sensory processing differences. We have eight sensory systems: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, vestibular, proprioception, and interoception. Any type of sensory input can be magnified (e.g., the lights are too bright), minimized (e.g., oblivious to a skinned knee) or cross-modal, also known as synesthesia (e.g., the sounds are too

Autism and Education: One Size Does Not Fit All

By Karl Wittig, PE
Advisory Board Chair
Aspies For Social Success (AFSS)

Having attended many talks, workshops, and education-related autism community events, I often hear the expression "one size does not fit all" used by teachers and other professionals who work with students on the spectrum. It is always gratifying for me to hear people having the most experience with differences in the needs of students whose learning styles vary (sometimes greatly) from those of typical students express this sentiment, which is certainly true for all neurodiverse students, and especially for those on the autism spectrum. For me, it is a confirmation of what I experienced as an undiagnosed autistic going through the educational system many years ago.

I recall to this day that, at parent-teacher meetings and similar events, the most frequent complaint that teachers had about me was that I should participate more in class. At the time, I was considered a gifted student, and today I would be evaluated as "twice-exceptional" once my ASD was identified. As it happens, however, my lack of class participation was attributed to shyness by the teachers and by my family, so not much was done to address it. This is just as well because my reluctant participation had less to do with shyness and much more to do with my not caring about what was being taught, which hardly ever coincided with my specialized interests. On the rare occasions when they did, I suddenly became a very eager participant, raising my hand in class to the point where I can remember coming home with an aching shoulder – so much for shyness! The point here is that, when the material involved one of my interests, I quickly became much more enthusiastic than I usually was. This is now recognized as a classic autistic trait, but at the time (about a half-century ago) was not at all understood.

My classification as a "gifted" student was largely based on standardized test results, and on my prolific ability to remember facts – whenever they involved anything of interest to me, my knowledge of such was virtually encyclopedic. This was further complicated by the fact that my interests, which largely involved any-thing electrical, mechanical, or electronic and, more generally, things that are today classified as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), are considered exceedingly difficult by many. Once again, it is now evident that I had the common autistic trait of strong "splinter skills" which, fortuitously, coincided with those the educational system evaluated me for. Although I was always successful as a student, due to the lofty expectations and demands of family, teachers, and others authority figures, this was often with great reluctance on my part, as I was neither interested in nor cared about much of what was being taught in school.

Although I am regarded as a "success story," the truth is that, had just a few things gone differently for me, my life could easily have been quite different indeed. Also, even as my experiences, let alone my outcomes, are not especially common within the autism community, they still serve to illustrate many of the issues that often concern students on the autism spectrum. While I have no formal background in education, I am nevertheless very aware, because of my own experiences, of the fact that students have different learning styles, and best respond to different teaching methods. Once again, this is especially true for those on the autism spectrum.

Student with Autism Proposes Colleges Provide More Support Enabling People with Disabilities to Earn a Degree

AHRC NYC Program Fuels Desire to Help Others Pursue Higher Education

By Lynn Uhlfelder Berman
AHRC New York City

Meghan Mattei models herself after pioneers such as Erin Brockovich and Temple Grandin. "I want to be a self-advocate and advocate for children and adults with disabilities," she says. "I will fight for our rights."

At 25, Mattei is in her senior year at AHRC New York City's Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program (MRHEP) at the College of Staten Island (CSI). AHRC NYC has partnered with The City University of New York and the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities fully inclusive higher education program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in New York City. The program prepares young adults with intellectual disabilities for adult life through higher education coursework, campus life, civic engagement, self-advocacy curriculum, and career development.

Students are fully included in college courses. Peer mentors help them manage their workload, attend study sessions, make appointments with professors, take notes during classes, and much more. The MRHEP experience is empowering; however, the students don't earn a degree, and that bothers Mattei.

More College Supports Could Ease Matriculation

"Four years is not enough," she said, referring to the program. For her senior project, Mattei is focusing on colleges providing more opportunities for students with disabilities, if they wish, to be fully matriculated so they can earn a degree. Colleges also should provide supports, setting up students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) for success, she said. The idea came to Mattei during the pandemic, when she was forced to take virtual classes in her sophomore and junior year.

Mattei is on the right track, according to a recent article, "Advancing Access to Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disability in the United States."[1]

Currently, over 6,000 students with I/DD are enrolled in 310 colleges and universities. The impact of higher education on employment and earnings is forecasted to remain strong, with the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce predicting 70 percent of all jobs will require some education beyond high school by 2027.[2] Yet, the current special education system ends for most people with I/DD by age 21. How can better for students with disabilities be expected if their learning ends after high school?

Participation in post-secondary education has several benefits beyond employment and social integration. Students with I/DD enrolled in post-secondary education reported better physical health, healthier relationships, and higher rates of volunteerism as compared to a control group not enrolled in higher education.[3]

Jessica Giorgio, MRHEP Program Director for CSI and the Borough of Manhattan College, said Mattei has taken steps toward her goal. She recently presented with Giorgio to a group of students applying for MRHEP. "Meghan has a star quality," Giorgio said. She takes her studies seriously and has an interest in psychology, child development and language development, Giorgio added. "She takes advantage of campus life, going to the library, going to the gym to work out and the cafeteria."

Mattei was diagnosed with autism at age two-and-a-half. With in-home early intervention supports, she began to speak about a year later. Her spontaneous language started around age five.

As an educator, Mattei's mother, Mia, struggled with the diagnosis. "We really did think she was hearing impaired because she wouldn't answer us or respond to loud noises around her," Mia said. Her daughter was diagnosed with a hearing loss on her left side. She responded with the use of hearing aids. Mattei also benefited from Applied Behavioral Analysis.

Mattei struggled with language and communicating appropriately, Mia said. "School gave her the skills she needed to communicate, and she learned to use language appropriately," she said.

While attending Eden II in Staten Island, Mattei said she learned to speak, read, write, make friends and care about others and her community. She had an internship at Alice Austen House, where she took photographs, developed them in the dark room, and did office work.

Meghan Mattei enjoys attending classes and the social aspects of attending college that AHRC New York City's Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program offers. She says she and other students with disabilities would like to earn a college degree.

A Defining Moment

When Mattei's school was robbed, she knew she had to do something. It marked the start of her interest in advocacy and fundraising. Thieves made off with toys, teaching materials, video consoles and even the class hamster. She started fundraising for the school to replace the stolen items, she said. The manager of Learning Express Toys was so impressed these efforts that she offered Mattei a job and a discount on any toys she purchased for the school. She stocked the shelves and

Meghan Mattei, in her final year of AHRC New York City's Melissa Riggio Higher Education Program, is proud to intern at Sensory Studio in Staten Island

opened packages. Mattei donated her first paycheck to the school. She held the job, which she got on her own, for three years.

"When she likes to do something and feels a purpose for doing something, she pursues it," Mia said. Her daughter held yard sales to raise funds for the school.

Shortly after starting in MRHEP at the College of Staten Island, the pandemic forced classes to go remote.

"During COVID, we saw a lot of regression," Mia said. "She lost a lot of social skills and eye contact."

Mattei missed attending classes in person. In September 2020 she started an internship with The Sensory Studio in Staten Island, which provides developmental services to improve communicative, fine and gross motor skills. It was the breakthrough she needed and got her out of the house. "That was a true blessing," Mia said. "When she walked in those doors, she walked into a professional setting with people her own age."

"It changed my life," Mattei said. "I regained my social skills and it made me feel part of a team."

Alexa DeVito, Practice Manager at The Sensory Studio's Southshore location, calls Mattei a "bright light." "She brings in so much good energy," she said.

Mattei is the first person with a disability to join the Sensory Studio team. DeVito was so impressed with Mattei during the interview, that she spent longer than usual with her. Initially, Mattei was nervous around the children, DeVito recalled, adding that today Mattei excels with them. As the co-intern manager, Mattei is DeVito's assistant. Mattei and her professional approach to the position, could lead to a paying job, DeVito said.

"With every new thing, she amazes me," Mia said. "We give her opportunities to do things she wants to do."

For more information, please visit www.ahrcnyc.org.

Footnotes

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Innovations in Scaling Up the Use of Evidence-Based Practices in Public Schools

By Jessica Suhrheinrich, PhD,
Patricia Schetter, MA, BCBA,
Melina Melgarejo, PhD,
Yue Yu, PhD,
Elizabeth McGhee Hassrick, PhD,
and Aubyn C. Stahmer, PhD, BCBA

High quality implementation of evidence-based instructional and intervention strategies has been identified as critical for educators supporting autistic students. Using evidence-based practices (EBP) is required by policy (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act [IDEA], 2004) and leads to better student outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). At least 28 well-defined EBP have been identified based on research demonstrating improved outcomes in autistic students (Steinbrenner et al., 2020), but they are not consistently used within school programs. Multiple barriers to school-based scale up and implementation limit autistic students' access to EBP and best outcomes, especially in schools with limited resources. Effective EBP use and sustainment can be improved with provision of supports at multiple levels, including support for providers and school district leaders, and changes at the higher system level. This paper describes barriers and supports identified as part of a systematic state-wide effort to improve scale up and implementation of autism EBP in schools.

California Autism Professional Training and Information Network

CAPTAIN (California Autism Professional Training and Information Network; Suhrheinrich et al., 2020) is a statewide multi-agency collaborative network focused on dissemination and implementation of EBP for autistic individuals across service systems. CAPTAIN uses an implementation science framework and quality improvement cycles to guide member training and use of implementation strategies. For example, to ensure organizational support and resources, key drivers of strong implementation (Aarons et al., 2017), agency leaders nominate staff to participate in CAPTAIN and provide protected time to attend events.

CAPTAIN is organized into 17 regional teams across the state that develop regional plans for information dissemination about autism and EBPs, promoting effective EBP implementation and cross-agency regional collaboration and coordination. CAPTAIN currently has over 400 members representing special education, developmental disabilities, family support services and university programs.

Because access to high quality training and coaching increases high quality EBP use, CAPTAIN members are expected to provide to at least 3 educators annually at least a) 1 awareness training about autism and EBPs, b) 3 trainings on specific EBPs, and c) EBP-specific coaching. Data collection and monitoring has been shown to improve use of EBP (Aarons et al., 2017), CAPTAIN members use research-supported strategies such as pre/post knowledge assessments, EBP fidelity monitoring and child outcome data collection to support practice sustainment. Last year CAPTAIN members who work in schools (n=333) provided EBP training to almost 20,000 people (including teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and parents) and individualized coaching to over 6,500 educators, showing considerable reach. A recent study published in *Autism* found that CAPTAIN-trained educators reported more positive attitudes toward using EBP, were more likely to use the strategies correctly and more often with students

Accessing Accommodations and Resources to Achieve Academic Success

By Bree Tungate, MA
Academic Coordinator
The College Internship Program

As students with learning differences transition into college, one of the most important things they can do to set themselves up for success is to understand how to access support, services, and accommodations in college. Whether they are at the community college or university level, students must initiate the process to receive accommodations. This process can be very daunting for many but it is the first and most important step to achieving academic success and a positive college experience. At the College Internship Program (CIP), the academic team helps students navigate the transition from high school to college and understand how to receive, utilize, and maintain their accommodations and use resources as they begin navigating all that is college. CIP is a national transition program for students with autism and other learning differences.

Initiating the Process

Once a student has been admitted into college, it is up to the student whether or not they want to disclose their disability and receive accommodations (Abreu et al., 2017). For those that are interested in

CIP Long Beach students visit California State University Long Beach to learn more about accessing key academic accommodations

receiving accommodations, the first steps include completing an orientation and submitting documentation such as their most recent Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or testing. What follows next is an intake appointment with a disability counselor to review and explain to the student the accommodations available based on their documentation and discussion. From there, the student's accommodation plan is created. Students are asked to review the college's disability handbook prior to the meeting to increase their knowledge

and awareness of what is available and the rights they have as a student registered with disability services (White et al., 2017).

Most of the time, students with learning differences are unaware of what accommodations they are able to obtain and may only receive common accommodations such as additional time on exams, a note-taker, and priority registration. Other accommodations students can qualify for include frequent breaks, preferential seating, double time on exams, campus liaison, peer mentor, and more (Gelbar

et al., 2015). It is also important to note that students should ask their counselor how to utilize their accommodations such as a note-taker (e.g., What is the process to get a note-taker? Where do I check my notes?). To assist with being overloaded with information during the appointment, students may request a summary email from their disability counselor as a resource.

Requesting and Utilizing Accommodations

After students have registered and received their accommodation plan, they have to request their own accommodations at the beginning of the term for each of their courses. In college, students are put in situations where they must practice their self-advocacy skills. Even though the accommodation letter has been sent to the professor, it is up to the student to follow up throughout the term and ensure they have their accommodations secured in their classes. Some professors are not as familiar with how the process works regarding implementing the student's accommodations. When this happens, it is important for the student to contact their disability office for assistance in the process of helping the professor understand how the accommodations work and make sure protocols are being adhered to (Elias & White, 2018).

The Do's and Don'ts of Supporting Autistic Students in Schools

By Cynthia Wen
Speaker Coordinator
Network for K-12 Neurodiversity
Education and Advocacy (NNEA)
Stanford Neurodiversity Project

As an autistic high school senior, I've spent my time in high school juggling 12 AP and IB classes while being a campus leader, whether it be as Vice President of the 60-member club I co-founded or as a cabinet member in an award-winning Science Olympiad team. I've also deeply invested myself in autism advocacy, reaching about 2 million people through social media content creation on my Instagram account @m.intymatcha, and working with the Stanford Neurodiversity Project as speaker coordinator for one of its initiatives. Just four months ago, I was given the opportunity to speak on my experiences as an autistic student in front of hundreds at the 2021 Stanford Neurodiversity Summit. For my autism advocacy, I won the Digital 4 Good award, where I'll give a pitch to the CEO's of prestigious Silicon Valley tech companies like TikTok and Intel and compete for mentorship to help me further my work towards improving the lives of autistic individuals.

From the plethora of accomplishments I've listed above, it would seem like my educational journey has been all sunshine

Representing the 60-member club Cynthia Wen co-founded for her school's Club Rush

and rainbows. Despite this, it definitely hasn't been and excelling academically hasn't always been easy for me. There have been times when school faculty have supported me, and there have been times when school has been a barrier to my academic potential. In this article, I'll discuss both of these times, in the hopes that it reaches a larger audience of educators, parents, and students, looking to advocate for a more inclusive educational environment.

The Don'ts

Don't give meaningless punishments. In preschool, I was often lectured for talking solely about my special interests, and in elementary, I would have to write "I will not forget my homework" hundreds of times on a piece of paper during recess if I did not remember to bring an assignment. These punishments did nothing but confuse me and make me see the punishment admin-

istrator as an enemy. Sometimes, children need to be disciplined, but making them do tasks like these likely won't do anything except make them dislike you, Since many autistic students aren't acclimated to social norms, make sure they know *why* the action they performed was wrong and focus discipline on reflection.

Don't ban sensory items. When sensory items like fidget spinners and slime became mainstream, public schools like mine rushed to ban them from classrooms as they would be "distracting." Many autistic students rely on these sensory toys to regulate themselves and taking them away isn't going to do much except cause meltdowns and force students who are not openly autistic to out themselves should they need the accommodation.

Don't focus presentation grading on "social cues" such as eye contact, tone of voice, etc. Many autistics struggle with social cues, and something like eye contact can make us very uncomfortable, especially if you have to look at a room with 30 other students staring back! If you're grading a presentation, focus on the content itself - it's what matters more than these cues regardless.

Don't refuse to give accommodations. I've heard of teachers who have refused to give disabled students accommodations in the name of "fairness," which is ridiculous

Building Mutual Understanding

By Josias Liam Reynoso
MOVIA Robotics

Education is a tool to create responsible members of society and teachers have the duty to create an equitable learning environment to enable these students to reach that point. The challenge that many students on the autism spectrum face in the classroom is with social participation and collaboration, ostracization, and potential need of accommodations. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) program exists to develop a suitable and accommodating educational plan for a child but even with academic accommodation through graduation from high school, autistic students face unemployment after high school at higher rates than their neurotypical peers. Studies have shown that a very high percentage of adults with autism find it difficult to gain full-time employment. If autistic people can have challenges with social ability, why can't we create a culture of mutual understanding between neurotypical and autistic people and enable both to grow?

I am autistic and am currently studying Technology and Engineering. I am also an intern at MOVIA Robotics and am knowledgeable in its Robot-Assisted Instruction (RAI) system. In addition, I have worked at the Boys & Girls Club for five years as a youth development professional teaching
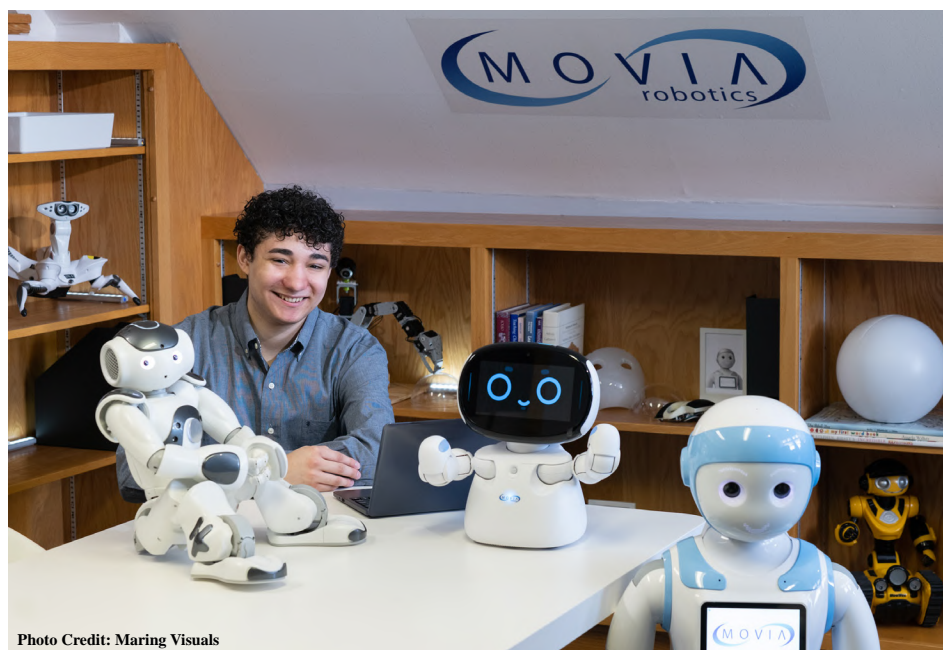
Photo Credit: Maring Visuals

Josias Liam Reynoso at MOVIA Robotics headquarters in Bristol, CT

technology course such as robotics, coding, and Computer Aided Design (CAD). I was named National Youth of the Year for Boys & Girls Clubs of America in 2020 and have advocated for autistic youth with that platform. As a technology educator, I aim to facilitate collaboration in the classroom and my model of technology education is one in which educators enable neurotypical and neurodivergent students to cooperatively ideate solutions while respecting each other's individuality.

People often sense differences between each other and someone on the spectrum may face a snap situation or confrontation from a misunderstanding of mixed signals more often than their neurotypical peers. More conflicts between people or awkward social situations can separate a person from the group. As a child and even as an adult,

I recall oftentimes being singled out in a group conversation. People would group into their own conversation, and I would only be in the conversation if I asserted myself to be forced into it. This leaves a sort of jagged conversation in which some people synergize, and one may be ignored.

Integration between neurodivergent and neurotypical people is necessary to reduce the divide between the two and reduce unemployment in autistic individuals. One reason why autistic people are hired less than neurodivergent people is simple. While an autistic individual may be professional, reliable, or fit for a position, they may be perceived or come across as different to the prospective employer when being themselves and not masking their autism resulting in a potential denied position. Everyday scenarios such as this set a precedent on autistic workers to mask their autism and conform to what neurodivergent people expect.

In a technical education class, for example, every creation made offers an opportunity for collaboration. Different students from different backgrounds are given tools to use to complete a task and must work together to find a solution. Take, for example, an arm on a robot. One student may want to use a claw with two appendages to pick something up and the other may insist on scooping up something from

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employees working for companies with more than 1,000 workers in the United States. In total, 1,000 employers were recognized across 25 different industry sectors. The list is divided into two rankings: 500 large and 500 midsize employers.

Employees Feel Honored and Proud

Denise Polanco-Nieves, Principal of AHRC NYC's Brooklyn Blue Feather Elementary School has worked with our organization for 25 years. "I am very proud to be a part of this well-balanced organization that does such important work to benefit people with disabilities in an ethically re-

sponsible manner and that treats them with great dignity and respect," she said. "I am also proud of the ongoing support and the resources that AHRC NYC provides to its employees to ensure that we successfully fulfill our mission. In my eyes, we are an organization with processes and practices that are indisputably best-in-class."

Shadae Young planned to go into teaching when she took a seven-year detour to AHRC NYC. A Community Support Professional with Day Habilitation Without Walls, Young enjoys taking the people she supports out in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn or Manhattan. "For me, the recognition feels good because I'm part of this," she said. "It's very fulfilling work knowing that you can help someone. This job is for

people with patience, can be mentally prepared and you have to have a lot of love."

During the height of the pandemic, Sohail Peter, DSP, shifted from our Cyril Weinberg day program to our Fresh Meadows home in Queens, where he knew many of the residents. He didn't want to leave and the supervisor at the home hired him. Peter says his teaching background has helped him in both positions. "I love working over here as a team," he said, adding how important it was for staff to bring several residents to Camp Anne, which was closed during the summer of 2020. "This little thing was a big deal for them," Peter said. Today's recognition "gives me a great feeling and the energy to do even better."

Having started a DSP in AHRC NYC's Home Care division and in our Bloomberg Apartments in Queens, Therese Williams-Wiggins was recently promoted to Manager at Bloomberg Apartment 3C. "I'm honored to be a part of a company where hard work and dedication is appreciated and rewarded," said Williams-Wiggins, "Being a part of the AHRC NYC family, and this recognition gives me unimaginable pleasure and only serves as a catalyst in driving my co-workers and I to strive for even greater excellence."

Hear from more AHRC NYC staff. Learn more about career opportunities with AHRC NYC. For more information, please visit www.ahrcnyc.org.

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went on, when we were seemingly on track, there would be some new situation with a whole new set of challenges and frustrations. I now know this is a lifelong journey for my son and for me as a parent - it does not change my emotions. But how I now express and manage those emotions when resolving conflict has led to the best results for my son.

If possible, give the decision-making process some time. That time spent processing emotions probably will lead to a more sustainable resolution. If high emotions are impeding your ability to make clear decisions, try to sleep on it. Educators are also better served when they allow parents time to process. Resolution always leads to better educational outcomes.

Tara C. Fappiano is an advocate, mediator, conflict resolution coach, and attorney. Using conflict resolution techniques and collaborative dispute resolution practices, she works with the special needs community to help with issues that arise with special education and other services. She also offers conflict management coaching and mediation for organizations, non-profits, businesses, school districts and related entities. For more information, email tcf@tarafappiano.com, call (917) 923-2330, and visit www.tarafappiano.com.

Footnotes

1. Patton, Stone, Heen, "Difficult Conversations-How to Discuss What Matters Most" (conversations three parts: 1) what happened? 2) feelings/emotions, and 3) identity).

Assessing Readiness for Transition to College and College Support Services

By Sarah Larmann, BS,
Jamie Argento, BS,
Sydni Verbridge, BA,
Caitlin DiBattista, BA,
Rachel DeHond, BA,
and Caroline I. Magyar, PhD, BCBA
School Psychology Program
Rochester Institute of Technology

High school students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), without intellectual or language impairment (ASD-WoILI), are attending college at rates higher than previously reported, but research indicates they may not be receiving the services they need (Kuder & Accardo, 2017). While federal and state laws provide general guidance related to transition planning and preparation for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), students without IEPs do not receive formal planning or preparation. Moreover, research has shown that students with ASD-WoILI may not possess the skills of self-determination, self-advocacy, and self-management by their mid-late teen years; skills needed to improve their adjustment to college, to aid in the completion of their program of study, and to promote their independent living (Ames et al., 2016; White et al., 2017).

Self-determination requires the individual to identify a goal and to develop a plan for achieving it. *Self-advocacy* requires

Left to right: (front) Rachel Dehond, Sarah Larmann,
(back) Caitlin Dibattisa, Sydni Verbridge, Caroline Magyar, Jamie Argento

knowledge of one's condition/disability and communicating what accommodations are needed to reduce handicap. *Self-management* requires executive functioning and emotion regulation skills in order to be self-sufficient (White et al., 2017). The

neurodevelopmental nature of ASD can delay or preclude development of these skills, thereby diminishing the student's ability to be personally and socially self-sufficient (White et al., 2017). Therefore, assessing a student's readiness for transition to college

and identifying what support/services may be needed is essential to all involved in the student's success.

Student assessment using interviews and rating scales should occur about a year prior to the end of the senior year. For students with ASD-WoILI and without an IEP, assessment can be completed by a community-based licensed psychologist who has expertise in adolescents with ASD. Areas to assess include:

- ASD symptom profile and current levels (e.g., Social Responsiveness Scale-Second Edition (2012); Repetitive Behavior Scale-Revised (1999))

- The presence of co-occurring medical, emotional, and behavioral health conditions (e.g., medical record review, clinical interview)

- Current school participation (i.e., type, frequency, duration) (e.g., teacher reports, report cards, attendance records, discipline records)

- Adaptive performance (e.g., Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales-Third Edition, Comprehensive Interview (2016))

- Sources of stress and current coping skill repertoire (e.g., interview, Stress Survey

Foundational Strategies to Develop Independence

By Becky Lipnick
Communications Lead
Vista Life Innovations

For individuals with a disability like autism, developing skills that foster independence is a critical part of one's education. Yet, young adults looking to transition into adult life and their families may not know how to advance the process. Vista Life Innovations, a nonprofit along the Connecticut shoreline dedicated to providing individualized supports for neurodiverse adults, has identified several strategies to support personal success from its over thirty-year history. Using strategies like the identification of direct prompts, the development of alternative supportive tools and the use of engagement with the community can all play a role in fostering the independence and corresponding skillset of a young adult.

Often, the first step towards the development of skills that foster independence is recognizing the direct prompts an individual is receiving on a regular basis. Direct prompts such as verbal reminders can be helpful, but it is important to reflect on if these prompts are preventing growth. Suzanne Gregory, Vista's Admissions Manager, explains:

"Families often have established routines that incorporate prompts into their young adult's life. During Vista's admissions pro-

Students from Vista utilizing their crosswalk
safety training in the local community

cess, we ask about this because some families lose sight of how routinized prompts can be a hindrance to independence. For instance, I remember a family that assured me that their son was completely independent with getting dressed but overlooked that they selected and laid out his clothes every morning. Accordingly, their son had never thought about how to select his clothing or had the opportunity to choose his own outfit."

For the family Suzanne references, selecting the clothing for their son was preventing an educational conversation about how to choose an outfit based on important factors like the weather and social expectations. These factors impact one's safety out in the community (such as being warm enough in winter weather) and the ability to maintain paid employment (by matching a workplace dress code). Once a family recognizes the prompts that occur, it is pos-

sible to find alternatives to them.

The next step in developing skills is to identify support tools that can replace prompts, foster personal growth, and are a good fit for the individual. Advocating for these strategies in a student's high school IEP can be a part of this future planning process. At Vista, students work with their team to find individualized systems to increase their independence in real life settings. A popular strategy is creating checklists for tasks like getting ready in the morning or being prepared for work. Often, a new support strategy will take more time to complete and is a collaborative effort between the student and the staff member. It allows "mistakes" to happen, but it is important to value these as a part of the learning process in a supportive setting. When choosing a support tool, it is important to select one that meets the individual's specific needs. For example, James, a young adult enrolled in Vista's Discover Program, struggles with short term memory. By working with staff, James learned to use cell phone reminders to complete tasks like laundry and planning his trips to work on public transportation. This system is great for James but would not be a good fit for everyone. For instance, Penny, a woman with autism who receives select services through Vista's Engage Program while living independently, has a precise memory and easily remembers her schedule.

Special Education Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Emily Furar, BS, BA,
Idil Memis, MD,
Daniel W. Hennelly,
Rahul Mittal, PhD,
Michael Alessandri, PhD,
and Adrien A. Eshraghi, MD, MSc, FACS
University of Miami

The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges and obstacles for many individuals and families, including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related developmental disabilities (Eshraghi et al., 2020; Eshraghi et al., 2022). Children with ASD often depend on a combination of services ranging from applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy (OT) to school-based special education services. Given the established benefits of both early and intensive intervention for these individuals in order to ensure more positive outcomes and increase independence throughout adulthood (Fuller & Kaiser, 2020; Koegel et al., 2014), the availability of and access to these services for children with ASD is vital. With the elevated stress levels and disruptions to routine that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in (White et al., 2021), it was perhaps even more important in this context to provide continuous access to evidence-based services and supports to bolster ongoing developmental gains. Disruptions in such access to care certainly would be expected to negatively impact social, academic, and overall life outcomes. Unfortunately, but somewhat expectedly, disruptions in schooling and therapy were widespread for many children with ASD.

Despite disruptions in physical attendance at school during the height of the pandemic, the education of students continued in various formats. Remote learning through virtual formats, for example, was widely deployed across school districts in the United States. These efforts, while admirable and necessary, have not been widely studied among learners with autism or other unique learning needs, thus the impact, both short- and long-term, remain largely unknown. A common concern within school districts across the country was the ability to safely provide all students with disabilities "the free appropriate public education (FAPE) to which they are legally entitled under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA, 2004; Lund & Gabrielli, 2021). This, of course, involves access to the special education services these students have become accustomed to. While many students with autism and related disabilities in our state of Florida, in addition to many other states, are generally permitted to have their ABA therapists in school with them, many of these therapists were no longer permitted in the classroom due to school and district COVID-19 regulations, which further impacted the education of these students. Special educators are thus forced to face the issue of maintaining the health and well-being of their students and the general public, while simultaneously ensuring the availability of these specialized services for those who are unable to connect and engage in them remotely (Lund & Gabrielli, 2021). For those with access, remote learning is beneficial for both safety and continuity, as it provokes the least risk for immunocompromised students as

(Suhrheinrich et al., 2022). They had more in-depth knowledge of their primary EBP and reported higher classroom quality than educators who did not get CAPTAIN training. These findings show great promise for CAPTAIN as a model to support statewide use of EBPs for autism.

Factors Impacting EBP Scale-up

Although results indicate good reach and training quality based on educator report, CAPTAIN members differ in their completion of training and coaching requirements. A recent project (IES R324A170063) leveraged the CAPTAIN network to identify factors that support the success of members getting EBP into schools.

Social Networks and EBP Knowledge - Considerable evidence indicates social networks improve EBP practices in education (Frank et al., 2004). Additionally, knowledgeable coaches tend to be better at disseminating EBP than those with limited knowledge (Rodway, 2019). In a recent study (Hassrick et al., 2021), we examined the relationship between CAPTAIN member social networks around EBP knowledge, coaching support and financial resources and the quality of coaching provided by 228 CAPTAIN members. Results confirmed that EBP knowledge was key to increased quality of coaching practices, while job position and years of experience were not. Additionally, CAPTAIN members with larger EBP coaching networks had better training outcomes. Networks appeared more important than location (rural, urban) or organizational structures (serving single vs. multiple school districts).

Leadership & Organizational Support - Positive implementation climate (or the extent EBPs are expected, supported, and rewarded) has been linked to better EBP sustainment, improved child outcomes and decreased staff burnout (Novins et al., 2013). Implementation leadership, or leader readiness and support for using EBP, also drives the success of EBP use and improves climate (Aarons et al., 2017; Melgarejo et al., 2020). We examined ratings of implementation leadership and climate through surveys with 656 educators and focus groups with 30 CAPTAIN members in 28 regions across California (Melgarejo et al., in review). Generally, implementation climate is low in schools. Schools have relative strengths in their focus on EBP in planning and meetings and hiring educators open to EBP use but rarely provide rewards for EBP use. These findings align with school mental health literature (Lyon et al., 2018). Implementation leadership was also rated in the low to moderate range, suggesting this as an area for potential growth. School leaders were seen as supportive of EBP use however, had a weakness in their ability to be proactive in planning for EBP implementation.

Implications

Scaling up the use of EBP regionally or state-wide is challenging. Educational programs that use implementation strategies

7 Things Students with Disabilities Should Do When Starting College

By Eric Endlich, PhD
Founder
Top College Consultants

Students with disabilities may have tremendous potential as well as exceptional needs. But to fulfill that potential in college, they need to be sufficiently prepared, because the transition from high school involves a huge increase in independence. Here are seven key strategies and mindsets that can help set students up for success.

1. Get an early start planning your accommodations and services.

During the college search process, high school students should research what documentation they will need for disability accommodations in college, as well as what accommodations are offered at each school. Susan Smythe, Americans With Disabilities Act Program Manager/Senior Project Manager at Swarthmore College, recommends students "reach out to the admissions and disability services offices at the schools you are interested in ahead of time to see what services they offer/how the campus is set up, and plan ahead. In addition, many students who may not have needed accommodations in high school start to struggle in college. Reach out early and register with the office, and at least

have an initial intake/conversation - even if you feel you might not need it. Accommodations are never retroactive, so don't wait until you're really struggling to start the process."

Kelsey Bohlke, Assistant Director of the Office of Accessible Education at Agnes Scott College, likewise observes, "You're going to be so much more successful if you proactively put supports in place (even if you never use them!) than waiting until an academic or mental health crisis occurs

and you're scrambling at the last minute."

2. Be prepared to advocate for yourself.

"Once you get to college, you will be expected to self-advocate for essentially all of your needs," Bohlke notes. "Whether it is to discuss a grade, find a counselor or set up accommodations, the expectation is that you, the student, take the lead on all of this rather than a parent or teacher. An important precursor to being able to advocate for your-

self is self-awareness. If you know yourself and what you need, you will be better able to advocate for those needs to others."

Of course, students aren't born with these skills. Allyson Hyland, Assistant Director of Disability Services at UMass Boston, encourages teens to develop self-advocacy while still in high school. "You will greatly benefit from making the shift in your mind, behavior, and choices toward increased independence and self-advocacy; begin taking on more responsibilities at home and have more control over your own needs and care. Start small if it feels overwhelming and gradually add things in. Specifically, you will benefit from knowing your diagnosis, treatment plan, and the ways in which your disability affects various aspects of your life. Unlike high school, college is going to require that you approach the accessibility office on your own, submit documentation, and have a registration meeting where you are able to describe what you think will help support you in school, and what has worked well in the past. You are expected to work independently with the accessibility office to come up with an accommodation plan. This is a very empowering step! The accommodations process in an employment situation mirrors that of the college process, so navigating this in college is good practice for the work world."

Reflection of a Former Defiant Preschooler

By Daniel Crofts
Direct Support Professional
Arc GLOW

I was once an impudent preschooler who ignored clear directions. Or so I must have seemed to my teacher. My classmates and I were gathered around for an activity, the nature of which I cannot recall. I do remember that it involved the children being asked, one at a time and more or less at random, to present themselves for individual participation.

Imagine being the teacher in this situation. You make eye contact with a little boy at the front of the group and ask him to take his turn. His response, if you can call it that, is to sit tight and stare at you blankly. You politely repeat the same directive, hoping this will clear up any confusion. Still nothing. "Let's go," you say, snapping your fingers. "Today!" Your pupil at last responds to your command, and you are happy to have avoided any further embarrassment.

Before explaining my behavior, I should mention an important detail I left out: The teacher had already called upon me for this same activity, and I *had* responded.

At that point in my life, I had internalized a basic rule - namely, that everyone must learn to take turns. If someone else's turn comes first, we must wait. Once our turn comes and goes, we must move aside and let others have theirs. Even the rules sur-

Daniel Crofts

rounding eye contact could not supersede this rule. Though it looked like the teacher was addressing me, surely, she must have been looking at the peer sitting next to me, or perhaps the peer behind me.

Most people might respond with an admonition to the effect that even for a five-year-old, common sense ought to have kicked in at that point. Maybe so. But the matter was in doubt, so I went with what seemed the safest rule applicable.

Chances are that most teachers with students on the autism spectrum have experienced something similar. Out of respect to them, I must concede before proceeding

any further that I have never been an educator - at least, not in the formal sense. Far be it for me to make any presumption of telling teachers how to do their jobs. But I hope to offer, based on my own experience as well as on my study of subjects providing a variety of perspectives, some general principles educators can use and adapt as they see fit.

An important consideration in any substantive discussion of how human beings learn, and how they receive and communicate information, is the age-old philosophical differentiation of *form* and *matter*.

Matter is the material with which one works (the oils used in an eagle painting, for example); the form is what is done with the material (the eagle itself). The two are closely intertwined in our experience: Matter becomes known to us when presented under a certain form, and form becomes known when individualized in particular matter.

Another way to think of it is that *form* regards *universals*, whereas *matter* involves *particulars*. Both come to us through sensory experience.

A look at early childhood may prove helpful. As children develop, they move gradually from the concrete to the abstract. A child with a dog name Rusty will know for the rest of her life that *the dog* (form) is an existing creature, because from her earliest years she has known Rusty (matter). Likewise, she knows the general concepts

of *mother* and *father* because she has her own mother and father.

Here we have a quite literal understanding of *in-formation*, or the internalization of forms from sensory experience. It is important to remember that this does not merely involve learning facts. Rather, it is about how we relate to the things and people in the world around us, and even to ourselves. And as with most of what transpires in the world we live in and move through, there tends to be an emotional component in the process.

Now consider the experience of a child with autism, which is often enough marked by sensory dysregulation. Out of this are born negative emotional responses to various sensory stimuli. Given the sense-based origin of human knowledge alluded to above, I would submit that the inability to take in sensory information beyond a certain point provides fertile ground for similar difficulties with processing and organizing intellectual information.

Just as a child on the spectrum will seek shelter from an overwhelming sensory environment through withdrawal into confined quarters, solitary activities, etc., so s/he might seek to navigate the often confusing world of ideas, social norms, and "common sense" rules by holding onto such over-generalizations as the one I had adopted, albeit unconsciously, as a preschooler.

The School Consultation Project:
An Avenue to Support Autistic Students and Empower Educators

By Krista Drapalik, BA,
Erica Davis, LMSW,
Jane Ann Worlock, MS Ed,
and Kristin Christodulu, PhD
University at Albany Center for
Autism and Related Disabilities

Autistic individuals who exhibit challenging behaviors are increasingly likely to hold communication deficits, require supports in daily routines, and are less likely to be placed in inclusive school settings (Lory et al., 2020; Iadarola et al., 2017). As such, challenging behaviors pose a significant impediment on children's academic progress by decreasing learning opportunities and positive social interactions (Lory et al., 2020). Moreover, educational settings become the primary service provider for Autistic children once children enter elementary school (Brookman-Frazee et al., 2009). As such, it is necessary to train educators and school professionals in evidence-based interventions as an avenue to support Autistic students and imbue increased self-efficacy in school professionals (Corona et al., 2016).

The School Consultation Project (SCP) at the University at Albany Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) is a grant-funded series of trainings developed by educational consultants, working to provide instruction and resources in evidence-based practices at no cost to educators and school professionals statewide. Utilizing a train-the-trainer model, the goal of the SCP is to help school districts meet the needs and increase their capacity to service Autistic students by assisting school districts in developing their own in-house Autism Resource Team. These core teams emphasize the importance of a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to support students and are composed of special education teachers, general education teachers, paraprofessionals, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, social workers, as well as school administrators. Our intent is for each Autism Resource Team to be willing to serve as a resource and mentor for their colleagues after the training is over, disseminating and adapting their knowledge to new contexts and future students.

The SCP employs a Prevent-Teach-Reinforce model (PTR; Dunlap et al., 2010) to address challenging behaviors among Autistic students. The PTR model is an evidence-based intervention model that is aligned with Positive Behavior Support (PBS; Carr et al., 2002) and draws upon principles of Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA; Sugai et al., 2000) where challenging behaviors are addressed by understanding the purpose of the behaviors in order to appropriately modify the child's environment and effectively reinforce desired behaviors (Dunlap et al., 2010). The PTR model has three main components: "Prevent" strategies work to change the environment, events, or interactions that may influence or provoke the challenging behavior; "Teach" strategies focus on teaching students the skills or replacement behaviors that serve in place of their challenging behaviors; "Reinforce" strategies emphasize the importance of consistently reinforcing desired behaviors to increase their frequency (Dunlap et al., 2010). A student-centered, flexible format is used to design meaningful strategies and interventions to build the capacity of the teams

Preparing School-Age Students for Post-Secondary Education

By Randy Horowitz, MSEd, SAS
Associate Executive Director for
Educational and Adult Services
Eden II

Preparing school-age students with autism for the transition into post-secondary education is perhaps as challenging for teachers as it is daunting for parents. According to a National Autism Indicators Report, "Young adults with autism have a difficult time following high school for almost any outcome you choose – working, continuing school, living independently, socializing and participating in the community, and staying healthy and safe" (Roux et al., 2015).

Post-secondary options are varied and may include colleges and universities, career/technical schools, vocational/trade schools, campus transition programs, and day habilitation programs. These options look different from student to student and are based on needs and preferences. The unique language, social and behavioral characteristics associated with autism combined with insufficient funding for post-secondary education (and appropriate supports) make customizing programs solely based on an individual's wants and needs practically impossible.

Regardless of the placement, it is critical to teach skills and provide supports that increase the likelihood of good outcomes. This can and should begin as early as preschool and throughout the school years by looking ahead. Parents as well as the child with autism (whenever possible) should think about where they would like to be in five, ten and even 15 years, and then teach accordingly (Gerhardt, 2018).

Designing and implementing instruction is dependent on staff and available resources (e.g., parental support, community access, monetary funds, etc.). Because there are significant changes in available resources in post-secondary education options, there is a critical need to fade supports (behavioral and personnel) and to increase student independence during the school age years. While the 1:1 staffing available for students with autism during the preschool and early childhood years is often essential for skill acquisition, it can become a hindrance to independence in the later years

Increased independence and fading of support staff can potentially lead to risk in the community. There are studies demonstrating that through the use of technology, individuals with autism can learn safety repertoires. Taylor, Hughes, and Richard (2004) taught teenagers with autism to respond to a vibrating pager when lost by going to the nearest adult and handing over a card requesting assistance. Other researchers taught individuals with autism to use mobile phones to get assistance when lost (Hoch, Taylor, & Rodriguez, 2009). The use of mobile applications (e.g., FaceTime, GPS, and Share My Location) is becoming increasingly common in programming for students with autism.

The notion of "natural supports" is frequently referenced in the context of using co-workers and managers as trainers for individuals with autism (Wehman, 2001). The concept of natural supports can also be referenced in the context of using teachers/instructors. Selecting the teacher / instructor that is the best match for the student will lead to better outcomes. Such teachers will take time to break down tasks, make modifications to assignments, adjust expectations, and allow partial participation. Lastly, the notion of natural supports can also be applied to teaching the easiest, most efficient way to accomplish a task. For example, when teaching shopping and meal preparation, food delivery services like Instacart and HelloFresh can be appropriate. The goal is to teach the student to do the skill without reminders and assistance from teachers or parents.

There are technical skills needed for successful participation in all post-secondary education options. For example, an

Finding the Right College for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

By Melanie L. Conley, MS
Director, McDaniel College Student
Accessibility and Support Services (SASS)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 44 children in the United States is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) by age 8 (Maenner, Shaw, Bakian, et. al.), but as these students progress through their academic career, it is known that they are less likely to go to college.

While many of these students are as academically talented as their peers, their potential often goes unrealized. Many are fully capable of college level academics but require the appropriate environment and support structure. Again, the critical component for success for these students really depends on finding the college that best fits each student's needs.

So, the question is how do you find the right college for a student who falls on the autism spectrum? While the answer is as unique as the individual, there are ways to determine the best fit. It really just requires an intensive look into the individual strengths and needs of each student.

During my time as the director of Student Accessibility and Support Services (SASS) at McDaniel College, I have found that there are really three key areas to assess for each student, which are

Graduate Assistant Maggie Miller assists student Mason White

actually not much different than what is required for all students planning to attend college. These include academic skills, independence skills, and self-advocacy skills.

I believe that students need to self-identify their strengths and challenges when it comes to academic skills. They need to be able to develop study skills that best support their individual learning preference and identify key points from lectures and readings. They also need to be able to express ideas both verbally and in writing.

Independence skills requires students to be able to work and study at least 15-20 hours independently each week. They need to be able to take care of themselves, which includes taking any required medications and self-care. Students also need to be able to independently get themselves to class and find ways to balance schoolwork and relaxation.

Lastly, these students need to be able to advocate for themselves. They need to be able to recognize and articulate if they need help and ask questions of their professors and peers. Students should also be able to identify the accommodations and services on campus that are available to provide assistance.

After taking the time to review these three areas, the next step is to locate a college with the appropriate resources and services in place that best meets the needs of the individual student. It is important to be truthful about what the most important areas are for a student when they are looking at various colleges. Resources that exist on many college campuses that make college a possibility include academic and mental health counseling, tutoring, and the ability to provide appropriate accommodations. Some schools may also have special residential options and life coaching available for students. Again, take the time to identify what the highest priorities and needs are for the student and make sure that the college has these resources in place.

Here are some questions to ask when considering potential resources:

- Is there a disability support office and does the office have adequate staffing to support student needs?

Supporting Caregivers During the Pandemic

By Alyssa SooHoo, PhD
Assistant Professor
St Joseph's College

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the lives of many. Beginning in March 2020, many became immediately isolated, experiencing increased stress and anxiety. Parents caring for children of all ages were impacted by these variables the most. It is already known that parenting is a stressful endeavor that is even more difficult for parents of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) (Phelps, 2009). The health of these caregivers is just as imperative as that of the individual with special needs. A caregiver must be physically and mentally healthy to effectively care for another individual.

The COVID-19 pandemic weighed upon caregivers even more so. School closings imposed routine changes and sparked anxiety in individuals with ASD (Factor et al., 2016; van Steensel & Heeman, 2017).Caregivers of children with special needs reported that the changes they experienced when schools were closed during COVID-19 had a negative effect on their own mental health as well as the mental health of their child (Asbury et al., 2020). These caregivers have significant concern about their ability to home school their children, as these children often require complex educational support from a team

of trained educational professionals (Toseeb et al., 2020). Greater levels of parental stress during COVID-19 were mainly linked to child behavioral characteristics rather than parental sense of competence in parents of children affected by a disability in comparison to children with typical development (Siracusano et al., 2021). The study's findings emphasize the need to support not only individuals with special needs but also their own caregivers. Results of a study investigating the influence of parental stress, social support, and oth-

er related variables on the anxiety of parents during the pandemic show that these caregivers suffered mental and behavioral problems, together parenting stress and social support, which influenced their anxiety (Ren et al., 2020) The results of this study encourage the development of psychological interventions to improve the mental health of this caregiver population (Ren et al., 2020).

The literature review suggests that parents best learn the information they need to cope with the emotional challenges of

raising a child with special needs with support from other parents with children with special needs. Online social support has been shown to be especially supportive in recent years (DeHoff et al., 2016). Other literature suggests formal and informal support are beneficial in decreasing stress for parents of children with special needs, however, few studies have also indicated that formal support may add stress to caregivers (Ault et al., 2021).

As a veteran special education teacher having completed my dissertation study on the well-being of caregivers, my heart ached for these families. Together with my colleague, Alley Mayernick, BCBA, we founded *Helping Hands for Exceptional Families, A Virtual Initiative*, which was started in order to help alleviate the increased difficulty that caregivers of children with special needs may be facing during the pandemic. As a behavioral therapist and a special educator, we have extensive backgrounds working with individuals in the home, community, and educational setting. We conducted a needs assessment to better understand the challenges. On the electronic survey, the following services were offered as options (all virtual):

- At-Home Activity Lists/Sensory Break Ideas

- Social Interaction (1:1 or Group)

Implementing Peer Support Arrangements in Schools

By Alyssa Balzarotti, MEd, RBT,
Christina Wood, MEd, BCBA,
and Elise Settanni, MEd, BCBA, LBS
Lehigh University Autism Services

Students with autism often require support in developing communication, social, and academic skills (Chan et al., 2009). One treatment approach, peer-mediated intervention (PMI), utilizes neurotypical peers to support students with autism in building these skills (Laushey & Heflin, 2000). Though PMI can take different forms, it generally involves teaching neurotypical peers to perform a variety of tasks, such as modeling, prompting, and reinforcing appropriate behavior across social (e.g., lunch time) or academic (e.g., classroom) contexts. PMI is an established evidence-based practice for children with autism from three- to 18-years-old (National Autism Center, 2015; Steinbrenner et al., 2020). They have repeatedly shown to be effective for increasing both social and academic skills. Incorporating intervention into inclusion settings (e.g., general education classrooms) through PMIs allows for more opportunities for generalization of functional skills, as well as increased independence, community participation, and opportunities to build relationships with peers.

One variation on PMIs that can be easily incorporated into classrooms is peer support arrangements. Peer support arrangements involve one-to-one tutoring between a student with autism and a neurotypical peer with the goal of increasing the focus student's access to the general education curriculum while also facilitating effective social interactions within these settings (Carter & Kennedy, 2006). While most research focuses on PMIs for the development of social skills, the literature on peer support arrangements is particularly rich in its focus on academic skills. For instance, Carter and colleagues (2016) found that compared to students in the control group who received exclusively adult support, students in the peer support arrangement intervention showed significant increases in academic engagement. Moreover, they found increases in active participation and decreases in the amount of time students spent pulled out of the classroom. In another study by Carter and colleagues (2005), researchers examined differences in active academic engagement (e.g., taking notes, reading, or completing an assignment) between students with autism who had one typically developing peer and those that had two typically developing peers in their peer support arrangements. Results demonstrated that those with two typically developing peers in their peer support arrangement had the greatest increases in the time they spent actively engaged in instructional activities. Taken together, these studies demonstrated that (a) peer support arrangements are effective in promoting academic engagement and (b) the efficacy of peer support arrangements for the promotion of academic skills can even be enhanced by adding another typically developing peer.

As stated earlier, in peer support arrangements, peers serve as the primary interventionists. They are taught to implement a peer support plan and promote participation and social interaction. Academically, this includes duties such as encouraging student engagement, praising participation, and helping with tasks related to class such as discussing assignments, brainstorming ideas, scribing responses, reviewing work, and asking comprehension questions (Schaefer et al., 2018). These supports are individually tailored and evaluated regularly using systematic data collection. This shifts the adult role from one-on-one

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Development from page 1

development is understood as a transactional process in which there is a constant interplay between an individual's learning style and environmental influences in the context of relationships, with social experience being of primary significance in development (Prizant et al,, 2006; Laurent, Rubin & Prizant, 2021).

In developmental approaches, observable patterns of behavior are always considered within the context of research-based knowledge of human development, and unique differences observed in autistic individuals. In contrast to behavioral approaches, unobservable factors such as differences in learning style, emotional experience, communicative intent, and the development of trusting relationships are considered valid and essential areas of inquiry. The focus of education/treatment is to enhance progress, mitigate areas of challenge, and put development "back on track" by supporting individuals' abilities in communication and emotional regulation, the foundations of learning and relationships (Prizant et al., 2006).

The elements that are definitive of developmental approaches are:

1. Sequences of developmental milestones in child development guide practices, including selection of developmentally appropriate goals and objectives

2. Programming in more natural social contexts, activities, and routines, in order to build on a child's intent, interests, and motivations

3. Respect for and integration of perspectives of autistic individuals, and their unique learning styles and insights

Perhaps the most recognized aspect of thinking developmentally is that of being mindful of developmental sequences in a range of developmental domains. Despite the availability of an extensive research literature in all developmental domains - including some differences that have been documented in ASD - it is not uncommon to observe violations of developmental thinking in ABA programs. A few simple examples include:

1. Focusing on compliance training and not responding to the intentional use of communicative gestures and vocalizations

2. Prompting students to say whole sentences even though the student's spontaneous language level is at an earlier stage

3. Utilizing "planned ignoring" or other behavior reduction measures when students are distressed (i.e., emotionally dysregulated), even though developmentally, they do not yet have the emotional regulatory strategies to maintain a well-regulated state (Prizant & Laurent, 2016)

Extensive use of developmentally appropriate supports, including the use of interpersonal and learning supports (Prizant et al., 2006) is another imperative when thinking developmentally. Interpersonal supports include how partners flexibly adjust their behavior in order to be responsive, to model appropriate language and provide developmental support to foster initiation and support self-esteem, self-confidence and self-awareness. Learning supports include how activities are structured in a predictable manner to support learning, the use of visual and organizational supports, and how partners modify activities and the learning environment. Learning supports are calibrated to a child's developmental needs and therefore evolve over time as child progresses.

Thinking developmentally also entails thinking from the child's or person's perspective. The most talented teachers and therapists, and the most successful parents attempt to understand a child's experience in order to guide their own actions and reactions. Traditional ABA approaches consider it "unscientific" - indeed an anathema - to take into account unobservable variables or personal experience, holding instead to the premise that observable behavior is the only legitimate source of inquiry. In contrast, thinking developmentally requires that in order to respond appropriately, partners must attempt to read communicative intent, be cognizant of an individual's interests and attentional focus, and attempt to understand his or her emotional experience and emotional regulatory state. Certainly, examining observable behavior plays an essential role, but interpreting what is observed requires a developmental perspective. For example, the behavioral pattern of leaving a desk and bolting out of the classroom may be categorized behaviorally as "escape-motivated" behavior. With developmental thinking, we must go beyond the strictly observable and ask: "Given the child's developmental status, what is the child's developmental needs, and WHY is the child trying to "escape," and what are the developmentally appropriate supports that are needed to help the child remain engaged?" Thus, an important consideration is that a child's behavior and needs are reflective of his/her stage of development, and knowing this guides adults in using appropriate teaching strategies.

In summary, thinking developmentally is an essential perspective in supporting autistic individuals. With research documenting the effectiveness of developmental approaches, training for educators and therapists must incorporate a strong developmental perspective.

Dr. Barry M. Prizant is a research and clinical scholar on the topic of ASD. He is also a faculty member at Brown University.

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The Benefits of Postsecondary Transition Programs for Young Adults with Autism

By Laura J. Albee, DSW, LCSW, BCBA
and Carly Savanna Hodorski
Post University Pathways Program

Despite the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensuring every learner with a disability a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), and The No Child Left Behind Act holding schools accountable for their students' academic achievement based on how they learn (The National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014), postsecondary readiness has continued to decline impacting a wide breathe of learners socially, emotionally, and academically (Adelman, 2004; Conley, 2010; Gothberg et al., 2015). As such, many school districts across America are struggling to accommodate the educational needs of their students including those with a well-documented psychosocial, somatic, and learning difference.

Postsecondary Supports

In an attempt to enrich a student's first year experience, postsecondary institutions are taking the necessary steps towards addressing college readiness. Many are utilizing empirically-based strategies to appeal to a much broader and more diversified student body (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Such offerings include Title IX and Disabilities coordinators, academic support centers, student affairs, foundation level courses including *adulting*, and increased access to on-campus mental health clinicians to address the growing psychosocial concerns challenging young adults. Students with an existing Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan are encouraged to contact their university's respective disabilities coordinator to ensure they receive all necessary accommodations. However, colleges will not reduce or modify the academic rigor required of every learner. Moreorever, unlike their formative years in which students were reliant on their parents to serve as their primary advocate, decision-maker, organizer, and laisse, post-secondary institutions typically discourage parents from stepping in and acting on their child's behalf (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014).

ASD and the Postsecondary Transition Advantage

Students on the autism spectrum are often challenged with acute anxiety, emotionality, depression, and co-occurring and related disorders. Sometimes these symptoms can go untreated or require routine support (Roux et al., 2015; Capriola-Hall et al., 2021). Moreover, many students with ASD struggle to harness their emotionality, pivot to unexpected changes, disclose their disability, and advocate for what they truly need (Anderson et al., 2018; Elias & White, 2018; Jackson et al., 2018; Capriola-Hall et al., 2021). Not only does research suggest students with ASD require psychosocial supports that align with their unique and variant profile (Van Hees et al., 2015), with the right support including access to transition coordinators, special educators, social workers, board-certified behavior analysts, community coaches, and peer mentors who are well-educated and experienced working with spectrum related disorders, these same students can demonstrate improved scholastic performance, emotional regulation, critical thinking, problem-solving, self-efficacy, independence, and psychosocial well-being (Mayhew et al., 2016; Hendrickson & colleagues, 2017). As such, many school districts are approving students who have an IEP and an established transition plan in place to participate in dual enrollment transition programs (Gaumer, Morningstar, & Clark, 2004; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Hart et al., 2004; Gigal et al., 2012).

The Classroom as a Collective

One feature of classroom education, probably for as long as it has existed, is that it is a shared experience. Even as individual effort is demanded of each student, great emphasis is nevertheless placed on the collective experience of the class. Students are expected to be part of this collective and treat their individual efforts as such. For the autistic student, who is often oblivious to many aspects of their social environment, this can be exceedingly difficult if at all possible, and they are poorly served by such expectations.

More specifically, the same curriculum is assigned for all students, and taught to all in the same manner; in other words, "one size fits all." Autistic students are often characterized by widely divergent abilities in different areas and, of course, by very intense, focused, and specialized interests. When I was a student, I recall that great emphasis was placed on the ideal of "well-roundedness" – in other words, that knowledge and abilities should be equally well-developed in many diverse areas. While this may be a desirable goal in principle, it is, for the autistic student, at best a very unpleasant experience and unrealistic expectation, and at worst a recipe for disaster. For such students, the fact that they will always be significantly stronger, and reach higher attainments, in some areas than in others, should be taken as a given and not as something to be overcome at all costs.

The situation is further complicated by

Karl Wittig, PE

the fact that learning styles of autistics differ not only from those of typical peers, but often from those of other autistics. A substantial amount of individual consideration must be given to autistic students if they are to succeed in the classroom. Also, the expectation that autistic students attain comparable achievement in different areas or subjects needs to be completely discarded.

Setting Appropriate Goals

Once a student is identified as on the spectrum (or having learning differences), expectations must be adjusted accordingly. Intelligence and ability can no longer be treated as having just one dimension, and ASD students need to be evaluated for individual talents as well as deficits. Instruction should be tailored to ability in each specific area, and objectives set accordingly. The advent of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) has made this more feasible than it was in the past, and the learning differences of autistic students must be understood and used to develop plans that take these into account.

A common preconception that I have frequently encountered, and that I personally faced during much of my life, is the notion that certain areas or subjects are inherently more difficult than others, and that this must be true for everyone. While such may be the case for much of the typical population (even then, I have my doubts), it is especially not true for the ASD population. I have on numerous occasions heard a teacher or education professional express exasperation with a student on the autism spectrum who had phenomenal talent in one area (usually considered difficult or unusual) yet had substantial deficits in skills that are so basic and fundamental as to usually be mastered at a significantly younger age than that of the student.

This is certainly true of my own experience. In high school, my favorite (and, more significantly, easiest) subjects were physics and trigonometry. Many people consider these to be the most difficult subjects they ever encounter and are shocked when I tell them that such things as literature and poetry (much easier in their estimation) were completely over my head. I regard it as a miracle that I was able to somehow pass and even excel in classes involving material that I had no real understanding of but was able to learn (with much unpleasantness) well enough to get through the coursework. I have long advocated for the use of widely varying levels of instruction in different areas for ASD students. In the lower grades, this can be done using IEPs and, in the higher grades, by assigning the same student to honors classes (or even at a local college) in areas of high ability, and remedial classes in very deficient areas. In other words, "one size does not fit all."

What You Don't Learn in School

Of course, the areas of greatest deficit for many autistics involve social skills and daily living skills. Interestingly, both are considered so basic that they were (and are) rarely taught in school – you are expected to somehow learn these on your own. While most of the typical population manages to do so, such is not the case for many autistics. They need to be taught these skills in an explicit manner, just as they are instructed in the traditional ones of reading, writing, arithmetic, and other academic subjects. Additionally, there is the problem of "hidden curricula" that everyone is expected to learn but are not officially or formally stated; these are found within the school environment and in almost every other aspect of or setting in life and continue to proliferate. It is interesting to observe that many of the areas where

Advice for Parents with Children Entering Post-Secondary Education

By Diane Adreon, EdD
University of Miami
and Jennifer Feinstein
UM-NSU CARD

The transition from high school to post-secondary education can be overwhelming. There are several different pathways to success for your loved one, including a specialized post-secondary experience for non-degree seeking students to provide them with a college campus experience, programs that focus primarily on life skills, certificate programs, technical schools, community colleges, or a four-year university. Success after high school for some students might include going straight to supported or customized employment.

In order to decide what post-secondary options would be best for your child, it is important to carefully analyze your child's functioning in a variety of areas. As you do this, think about the extent to which your child does these activities independently (without reminders or prompts). You will also want to keep in mind the setting(s) in which he/she is able to perform these skills. How many students are in his/her current class(es)? Are there additional assistants in the class or is your child assigned a para-professional? What are you child's academic skills? Can he/she keep up with the pace in a general education classroom or does he/she require content presented at a slower pace? Do you need to help your child remember to turn in assignments, assist them in completing homework, remind them to brush their teeth, shower, or change into clean clothing? Is your child able to independently make doctor's appointments, take their medication without reminders, wake up and get ready for school without your assistance? Keep in mind that the adaptive behavior (independent living skills) of individuals with autism spectrum disorder is lower than their intelligence quotient (IQ) scores in adolescence and adulthood (Viezel, Free, & Morgan, 2022; Widman & Lopez-Reyna, 2020). Then assess the demands of the next environment as well as the available supports. Be careful not to make assumptions about supports because in adulthood there is no entitlement to enough supports to ensure an individual's success. Once you have assessed your child's current support needs you can use them as a guide to select the appropriate pathway as an adult.

High school graduates who are fairly independent and possess the cognitive and adaptive skills may consider attaining a college degree, whether two or four years. Most colleges have a disabilities department which can provide accommodations for disabled students. If you are thinking of transitioning to college, keep in mind that organizational and time management skills are probably as important for success as academic skills. In addition, colleges require for the student to self-advocate, access disability services and provide professors with documentation regarding their accommodations. Students who possess the academic skills to attend college but need more support might consider looking for a college with a specific autism support program that can support organizational skills and bridge the gap between the student and the school faculty.

In general, community colleges are a good stepping stone for those who want to go to college. Often the classes are relatively small, community colleges tend to be accommodating and, in general, serve a lot of students who have challenges adjusting to the changes in college expectations to those in high school.

Another educational option that might be appropriate would be the certificate or technical school. Some certificate programs

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he was increasingly using functional communication to ask for things like to be left alone, and he began to safely navigate his frustrations.

However, while Bob was showing increasing success at school, he continued to have significant challenges at home. It all came to head after a particularly dangerous episode when Bob became aggressive and ran away. He was hospitalized again and the doctors finally stated he should have NO access to technology in any setting at any time. Their stance was that trying to take the technology from Bob was simply too dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. The Melmark team spoke with the doctors and discussed the issues of bankruptcy and the ubiquitous presence of technology in society. We also reported Bob's success at school with the use of technology as a structured reinforcer. The doctors remained unwavering in their recommendation: no access to technology in any setting at any time.

We felt we were at a crossroads. We were confident that if Bob could participate in some similar, structured access to technology at home he could be successful. However, there was a major barrier. We needed to find a way to support Bob and his family through the challenging times as he adjusts to the structure. Who would terminate his access when the time was up, because that could be dangerous? Also, even if they managed to get the technology away from him, he would often argue with and push the person who controls the access. At school, we were trained specifically to address these issues, but it was unrealistic to expect a family to do this and be able to maintain everyone's safety. Something else was needed.

Melmark and the family collaborated to develop a different plan for Bob at home. We researched parental control options for a range of gaming systems, specifically, parental controls that could be managed via an app on a phone. The idea was that if we could remove the need to physically take the technology from Bob, this would remove one of his largest, most dangerous triggers. Instead of physically taking the technology from Bob, the software would simply turn off after a specified amount of time. Bob could physically keep the game system and earn access to gaming again later. The solution to our technology needs was to purchase Bob a Nintendo Switch and install the Switch Parental Controls app. This app allowed us to provide Bob with limited amounts of time in 15-minute increments throughout the day. It also gave us the ability to head off other potential problems by restricting online communication and mature-rated games that were inappropriate for him.

With one barrier down, there was one more to go. If Bob knew that his family controlled access to his game system, he would confront them, insisting they turn it on. This would lead to dangerous behaviors if they did not. This is where support from school personnel became critical. School personnel had already developed a strong rapport with Bob, so we simply took the family out of the equation. Melmark staff downloaded the Switch Parental Control app on our phones. We then checked in with Bob's family at frequent, predetermined intervals. If he stayed safe at home and completed a simple routine of age and skill appropriate activities (e.g., cleaning his room), we remotely provided access to technology. If Bob had not met the criteria we would not. If he wanted to talk about it, his family was coached to simply say, "This is between you and Melmark. I couldn't give you screen time even if I wanted to. You're welcome to call them." Since we had already had those conversations at school so many times, we were set up for success. Bob knew that if he did not hold up his end of the contract, we would not grant him access to technology. However, more importantly, he trusted that if he got back on track, we would hold up our end of the bargain and grant access at the next opportunity.

We started the plan early in 2020. As expected, there were some initial bumps in the road. Bob would not earn time on the Switch occasionally. He would pressure his family to just give him the screen time. However, just as they were coached, they would simply call us and put it on speakerphone. We would calmly explain that he did not earn it this time. Then we would pivot to say, "But if you stay safe and get your chores done, we can give you time in just an hour."

We are now going on 16 months with this program in place. Bob has had no hospitalizations since implementing the Switch program. He still gets into occasional arguments with his family, as teenagers do, but the dangerous behaviors are gone. Also gone are the days when foremost experts in the region were recommending removal of all electronics completely, the thing Bob loves most in the world. Now, Bob has access to electronics in moderation on a regular schedule. Additionally, the presence of computers, televisions, and game systems in his school and home setting are no longer the source of dangerous behaviors. In fact, he just started an internship as an electronics repair technician and his first job was to dissemble and repair an Xbox. He is now on a track to have a life working on the things he loves most.

Bradley S. Stevenson, PhD, BCBA-D, is the Director of Program Administration and Clinical Services and Keri Bethune, PhD, BCBA-D, is the Director of Educational Services at Melmark Carolinas.

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10 Tips to Help Autistic Kids Transition Back to In-Person School

By UC Davis Health

Transitions are tough. As many schools make plans to shift from distance learning to in-person instruction, families, students, and educators face an adjustment period. That's especially true for students with autism spectrum disorder, because transitions can be particularly stressful and challenging for them.

"The pandemic has been disruptive for children across the board," said Patricia Schetter, a board-certified behavior analyst who coordinates the Autism Education Initiatives for the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at the UC Davis MIND Institute. "Especially for children with autism and their families, so many aspects of their education have been affected, including access to therapies as well as educational and social interactions."

Schetter noted that the pandemic forced everyone to learn new routines and new ways of working, learning, and recreating. "Now, there will be a new period of learning, because in-person school won't look like it did a year ago. There will be masks, distancing, and hybrid schedules to get used to," she explained.

Since the pandemic began, Schetter's work has focused largely on supporting families and educators with the adjustment to online learning. Now, parents and teachers are asking for resources and supports to help children with autism return to the classroom. Click here for a handy guide.

She offers some tips that her team has collected:

1. Help them get comfortable again with the building and school grounds before in-person instruction begins. Visit on a weekend day and walk around if possible, helping the student to reacclimate. Another way to do this is to use a social story like this one from Autism Little Learners, which illustrates the changes students may experience, like the teacher wearing a mask or desks being farther apart.

2. Practice wearing a mask. Many kids will not be used to wearing a mask for hours, and it may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Have the student wear one at home for short periods and gradually increase it to get them used to keeping it on for a significant time. Click here to see a social story about wearing masks from the MIND Institute. Or try this handy guide for helping kids get comfortable with masks.

3. Begin reinstating some of the nighttime routines and morning routines that will need to be in place when school starts. Use visual supports, like photos or checklists, if needed, so children know what the steps of the routine are.

4. Establishing a new school routine is also really important. Setting a schedule and daily expectations is key to helping kids feel safe and secure at school. "Students must be comfortable in order to re-engage and connect, and that will enable them to be ready to learn, noted Schetter. "That will also help teachers recognize their strengths and interests and increase motivation."

5. Be patient. There will be a period of acclimation, and educators and therapists will first need to make sure the student is stabilized. "It will be really important not to push too hard, too fast as it might overwhelm and discourage many students as they readjust to being at school," said Schetter.

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or double room to best meet their needs. They may also have the option of choosing a dormitory with suites or a hallway with rooms opening into the hall, such as found in hotels.

Among the above-mentioned considerations, students on the autism spectrum need to be sure the college they choose can appropriately support them. Research identifies key needs for colleges to support students with ASD. How a college addresses these needs should be considered by students with ASD and their families. These supports should include social and emotional skills, executive functioning skills, functional life skills, residential life supports, academic supports, family involvement, vocational training, communication development, and transition need (Widman & Lopez-Reyna, 2020; Lubin & Brooks, 2021; Sefotho & Onyishi 2021).

For students with ASD, finding a college that provides the supports they need is vital to their success. All post-secondary institutions in the United States are required to provide reasonable accommodations for students with any diagnosed disability when the students disclose a diagnosis (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Students must self-disclose and provide documentation of their disability to the Office of Student Accessibility (Note: these offices are called different names in various institutions.). These accommodations can include additional time on tests, taking tests in an alternate location, note-takers, professor lecture notes provided to the student, and text readers, among others. It is important for students to meet with the

Ruby L. Owiny, PhD

personnel in charge of reasonable accommodations to discuss what has been helpful for the student's success in the past. In addition to reasonable accommodations, the success of a student with ASD in successfully earning a bachelor's degree depends on individual needs. Some of the supports a student may need include social skills groups, mentoring, training for resident assistants in the dormitories, tutoring, assistance in finding an internship, vocational training, and ongoing support during the internships. These features of an autism support program can provide what a student needs to have a successful and enjoyable post-secondary experience.

An Autism Spectrum Support Program

One such program exists at Trinity International University in Deerfield, IL, north of Chicago. The Access Program provides extended supports beyond what the college already offers. All students have access to reasonable accommodations with documentation of a disability. They can request a tutor for their classes in the tutoring center and, as needed, a mentor to help them with executive functioning skills, such as organization. Students also have the opportunity to get assistance with resume building and career coaching. Furthermore, the campus counseling center provides mental health counseling to the campus community, as well. The small student body size assists professors in knowing their students well which allows for opportunities for mentoring in their chosen major and receiving more personalized support during internships. A key feature of Trinity's mission is a commitment to faith integration and developing men and women to integrate their faith into their lives. University personnel (e.g., residence life staff, professors) mentor students in their spiritual growth as well. There are opportunities through weekly chapel services and other groups for students to deepen their faith and develop friendships through those opportunities.

The Access Program extends these services to also provide social support through social skills training from the Graduate Assistant while also providing study tables for academic support. Study tables also include further development of executive functioning skills. The Access Program personnel work with each student to individualize supports needed for each student's success. There is a minimum hour requirement for study tables per week for students to get support with executive functioning skills and academics. The hours required are scaled up or down depending on the needs of the student.

Peer mentors come alongside students in the program to eat meals, go to college events, run errands, etc. Mentors also frequently check in on students to ensure they are doing their laundry, keeping their dorm room clean, and monitoring their mental health as well as mentoring them in social skills and good academic study skills. Mentors frequently attend chapel with their student and provide rides to Sunday morning worship services in the broader community around the university. In sum, mentors essentially serve as a reliable friend to their student.

The Access program graduate assistant (GA) leads study tables for students to ensure they are keeping up with their assignments. The GA also meets regularly one-on-one with students to troubleshoot challenges they may be facing. This could be providing advice on a romantic relationship or helping to craft an email to a professor. It can also include helping the student to navigate a conflict with a roommate. The GA checks daily planners to make sure students have appointments, classes, assignments, and other necessary information recorded to help them plan and remember those tasks and activities. The GA follows up on issues that arise and serves as a liaison between students, their RAs, the director of the program, and other relevant campus personnel as needs arise.

Students are strongly encouraged to provide FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) permission for Access personnel to speak with parents when the

Handwriting and the Autism Spectrum

By Kate Gladstone, MLS
CEO, Handwriting Repair
Handwriting That Works

Handwriting matters. Even those who never write must decipher others' handwriting (many of us autistics never managed to read cursive: even if drilled intensively in copying it). Although handwriting intervention efforts and studies typically focus on output, a larger problem (especially with cursive) may be input. While writing by hand may be avoided, reading cursive is sometimes unavoidable: yet few resources (and no current studies) address this issue, despite growing research on handwriting issues among autistic children, adolescents, and adults (Fuentes, Mostofsky, & Bastian, 2009; Fuentes, Mostofsky, & Bastian, 2010; Godde et al., 2018). Similarly, among current handwriting materials, only one textbook (Gladstone, 2021) and one set of handouts (Getty-Dubay, 2020) focus on cursive reading.

Traditionally, educators have expected cursive reading to emerge by hand-copying cursive, writing in cursive, and/or memorizing the many cursive letter-shapes which differ greatly (in conventional North American cursive styles) from printed letter-shapes. These approaches may not serve many autistic learners for the following reasons:

Figure 1: Illustration from Gladstone, 2021, p. 92

- Most autistics have motor issues that impede and/or distort handwritten output (Fuentes, Mostofsky, & Bastian, 2009; Fuentes, Mostofsky, & Bastian, 2010), often with perceptual issues which affect processing both the presented input and the expected output (Godde et al., 2018). Expecting cursive reading to arise from cursive writing may therefore be unrealistic for autistics.

- Autistics often do not generalize from known material to new material (De Marchena, Eigsti, & Yerys, 2015), so memorizing one cursive model does not guarantee recognizing letters in other cursive styles - or in real life handwritings: which differ, not only from textbook examples, but from one another.

These issues may be bypassed by techniques using pattern recognition, which is widely documented as an autistic strength (e.g., by Crespi (2021)). Such techniques (used in the two cursive reading resources cited above) teach shared design-features across numerous variants for each letter.

Though research has yet to be done, such techniques reportedly "have worked successfully with children, teens, and adults with and without disabilities" (National Autism Resources, 2021), suggesting universal design/mainstreaming applicability.

What about handwritten output? Despite electronics, handwriting is regaining attention, as research finds some cognitive advantages (e.g., literacy acquisition and factual retention) versus keyboarding (Harman-James, 2017; Peverly, 2006).

Although handwriting proficiency is often popularly equated with cursive, research since the 1980s suggests that most people (even most handwriting teachers) no longer write cursive but combine elements of manuscript and cursive. (Duvall, 1985; College Board, 2006; Zaner-Bloser, 2012), Later observations (Bara and Morin, 2013; Graham, Berninger and Weintraub, 1998) noted that the fastest, clearest hand writers typically join some (not all) letters (apparently avoiding motorically difficult joins) often producing print-like letters where these are motorically and/or visually simpler than their cursive counterparts. Similar features, interestingly, characterized the earliest published handwriting instruction in Western civilization 500 years ago (Arrighi, 1522) and are revised today in a category of handwriting model called "italic handwriting (Getty-Dubay, 2021; Barchowsky, 1999, Bennett, 2019).

At least two italic handwriting teachers and/or resource creators have self-disclosed as autistic (Gladstone, 2022; J. Bennett; 2022, personal communication), suggesting that italic may be worth researching as an adaptive handwriting approach. The fact that Bennett additionally authored a best-selling calligraphy textbook (Bennet, 2007) suggests that autistics may not only succeed but excel in this area.

Join Autism Spectrum News on Social Media!

- Locating Preferred Items

- Picture Schedule

- Social Story

- Parent/Caregiver Meet Up (1:1 or Group)

- Parent Training

After analysis of the needs assessment, we decided to offer the following complimentary services:

- At-Home Activity Lists/ Sensory Break Ideas

- Social Interaction (1:1 and Group)

- Parent/Caregiver Meet Up (1:1 and Group)

The most popular services were the parent group meetings and social groups. During social groups, individuals were grouped together and the cofounders of the company facilitated games such as Wheel of Fortune, Trivia, Bingo, and other games. During parent meet-ups, the conversations were initiated by the cofounders. However, parents mostly used the virtual space to find commonalities and lean on one another for social support. Although the co-founders did offer advice for challenging behaviors/ problems that may arise in the household when directly asked, parents were also comfortable in sharing their own ideas and support. Caregivers even continued to host meetings when the cofounders were not available or no longer offered the services. Cofounders purposefully tried to facilitate a more informal structure, allowing caregivers to speak freely but just providing the actual virtual space for caregivers to meet and exchange information. For this particular initiative, caregivers from all over the United States were invited to attend through Facebook. Ultimately parents from New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Texas, Connecticut, Florida, and New Jersey regularly participated

Upon analysis of our services, while virtual meet-ups were desirable during the COVID-19 pandemic, they remain a good option for parents who are busy and may not have an alternative caregiver to watch their child. Virtual meet-ups allow caregiver couples to join and allow everyone to feel comfortable in their own home. Formal structures are necessary, as they allow caregivers to find a mutual safe meeting spot. However, it has been found to be most effective if these formal structures dissolve once the meeting is in progress. After a few weeks, when caregivers get comfortable with one another, it is beneficial if the facilitator drops back and allows caregivers to exchange information and set up their own meetings to continue without the facilitator. It is my hope that more programs consider the structural stress that they may place on caregivers and help facilitate only until caregivers feel comfortable hosting the group themselves. On a virtual platform, space is free, and the pressure of hosting duties is non-existent. I hope to further examine the formal and informal structures of caregiver groups in hopes of implementing social support that will be most effective in decreasing caregiver stress, strain, and increasing quality of life.

Alyssa SooHoo, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at St. Joseph's College in Patchogue, New York. She can be reached at asoohoo@sjcny.edu.

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Why I Made the Difficult Decision to Not Have Children

By Angela Chapes
Autistic Self-Advocate

In the last year, I have accomplished a lot. More than I used to think I could do in my life. I made a life decision never to have kids. I underwent a procedure to keep from getting pregnant. I have become a confident woman. I know what I want in my life. My decision is based on childhood experiences and what I think I can handle as an adult. It is a decision that I am proud to have made.

I look back to when I was a child; I was a handful. I was a nightmare. I am very proud to be who I am. If I ever had a child I would not handle parenting well. I am afraid that I would be a bad mother. Children, when they are very young, require round-the-clock care. I have learned patience but I am not sure I would be patient enough to raise a child. I also have anger issues and I don't want to lose my anger towards an innocent child. I am afraid that I might hurt or abuse a child. I don't ever want to hurt a child. Anybody could become abusive or violent. I want my freedom and sanity which I might lose if I had a child. I am not a good cook and I wouldn't want a child to starve or be unhealthy. I don't want to be pregnant or go through the pain of labor.

Another reason I don't want a child is genetics. I have autism but I don't let it define me. I have depression, anxiety, and OCD.

Angela Chapes with Sami

Schizophrenia runs in our family. I don't want to pass any of that to another person. I don't want a child that I would bring into this world to struggle as they grow up and try to understand themselves. I guess the only positive is that I would have gone through the experience and I would understand. My dad had a difficult time with me. He did his best and he doesn't have mental illness or autism. His mother had Schizophrenia and she was mean to him. My dad kept us kids away from her because of what she was like so I never met her. He believes he made the right decision. I wish I could have met her. My behavior as a child reminded him of her. That is why he had a difficult time with me. My dad was tough on me. His parenting and my behavior as a child were not a great mix. I was very difficult. Right now, I love my dad because he did his very best in the most challenging situations. He saw me at my worst. He and my mom still raised me right. I am glad I don't resemble my dad's mom today.

The last reason I don't want to have a child is money. If I had a special needs child I might not have the tools or resources my child would need. I read on the internet that only 20% of special needs children get the care they need. I find that sad. My mom told me that one of her friends had to give up her child so the child could get help. If I had a child and I had to give it up due to not having enough resources that would break my heart. Choosing not to have a child is the best option for this kind of situation.

These are reasons why my cat is the only child I will have. My family considers me a good cat mom. I consider myself a good cat mom. Her name is Sami. She may be a pet but I consider her my baby. Cats don't require around-the-clock care. She trusts me because I rescued her when she was not wanted. I wanted her, so I took her home to love. She is very independent. She is very sweet and patient with me. I am patient with her too. I have never heard her hiss.

If she were a real child and she yelled at me I am afraid I would yell back. Sami has taught me to be a responsible adult who has an animal/child depending on me. I depend on her because she will be there to make me feel better when I am sad or angry. This is a big achievement.

As a family, we had several pets. We had a cat when I was much younger and I did not treat it nicely. I did have a dog when I was a child, but my mom took care of her the most. Sami is thriving and she loves me. I love her back. I am not alone because she is with me when I am at my apartment. In my mind, she is my child and I am glad to have her. She is mine. I am her mother. This is the only way I am called a mother. She is what I can handle in my life. She along with my family, friends, and job makes my life meaningful.

My name is Angela Chapes and I am an autistic adult with anxiety and OCD. I have had depression in the past. I am 39 years old. I was not diagnosed with autism until my late 20's. It was years later that I started to figure out who I was. Thanks to the positive and supportive people in my life. I have a very encouraging job. I am transforming and growing at lightning speed. Learning all I can about leadership, advocacy, and other organizations that can help shape my future. I want to be a voice for individuals with autism and mental illness. I love being busy, writing, and speaking.

For more information, you can email Angela at aechapes@yahoo.com.

- Schedule For Individuals with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities (1998))

Assessment of the support and services provided by a college should also be assessed and a determination made about the relative 'fit' between the identified student need(s) and the support/services provided by the college. A review of the programs listed on the College Autism Spectrum website indicated there are 76 college support service programs (CSSP) for students with ASD in the United States; 11 are in the Tri-State area. The majority of CSSP offered "generic" *academic* support services such as extra time on tests, extended deadlines for assignments, copies of instructor or peer notes, and separate testing location for exams. These accommodations are available to all students with an identified disability and not specific to students with ASD (Kuder & Accardo, 2018). *Non-academic* support services such as peer mentors or counselors were also offered by many programs.

CSSP varied in their admission criteria. Some programs do not require documentation to apply, while others require documentation such as recent psychoeducational or neuropsychological reports, copies of the IEP or 504 Plan (if applicable), official high school attendance report, and high school transcripts through 11th grade. Costs for services ranged from free

to $9,180 per year.

To assist students and their parents with selecting a college, student assessment data on readiness may help with determining which college offers a majority or all of the support/services to address the majority of identified needs. Ideally, assessment data should be integrated and summarized into a report with recommendations specifying the support/services that are likely to benefit the student. A copy of this report should be provided, by the student, to the assigned representative of the college's Disability/Student Support Office (D/SSO) or CSSP for collaborative determination of what accommodations and services will be provided, which may include establishing linkages within the broader college infrastructure (e.g., counseling center, academic support center) and the community (e.g., psychiatric practices, psychotherapy practices) for the student.

For those interested in colleges that advertise ASD-specific support services, visit this website. You are encouraged to review the support/services prior to college application to ensure they align with the majority of identified needs. Questions to ask of a representative from the program and then determining the likely 'fit' include:

- What services are offered?

- Are the services individualized?

- How accessible are the services (e.g., availability, response time)

- Do faculty understand and support the services?

- What is the cost of the program?

- How long has the program been in place?

- How many staff are a part of the program?

- Is there data on the program's impact on student outcomes?

Assessing both student readiness levels and college ASD support services is critical to improving the individual outcomes of students with ASD who are attending college.

The primary authors are graduate students and the last author is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the School Psychology Program at Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY. The graduate students provide support services to undergraduate students with ASD through the college's Spectrum Support Program.

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Starting College from

3. Think beyond disability services.

The student disability/accessibility office is the ideal place to start for obtaining accommodations. However, as Jeff Edelstein, Student Advocacy Coordinator for the National Center for College Students with Disabilities, reports, "students who struggle to register with their campuses' offices should know that this is not the only way to secure assistance in their courses. Many faculty feel comfortable working out accommodations on an individual basis."

Annie Tulkin, Founder and Director of Accessible College, LLC, similarly advises students to "Talk to their professors, connect with their RA, and take advantage of any academic support the college offers, like the writing center, academic coaches, and tutors." Tulkin also points out that accommodations can extend beyond the classroom: "accommodations apply to all areas on campus, including housing and recreation. Students should consider their needs holistically, especially if they plan to live on campus."

Moreover, there are many services available throughout the university, such as academic advising and career counseling. Elizabeth C. Hamblet, college learning disabilities specialist, reminds students, "Most colleges have tutoring centers where they can get help with a variety of subjects, and some now offer workshops on time management, organization, etc. Some even offer peer mentors or academic coaching. And there may be a writing center and a math help room. Many colleges also offer mental health counseling, and they may have small groups for students with eating disorders or other issues."

4. Accept that it's hard sometimes.

Students "should remember that their

Eric Endlich, PhD

classmates are likely feeling a bit insecure and tentative in this new environment, so they're not alone if they feel that way," adds Hamblet. "They should be aware that the environment at college is meant to be different and challenging, so if they're struggling, it's not because they don't belong there. It just means they should seek out some of the supports put in place to help them. They should also avoid falling into a mindset that they're supposed to be able to do everything on their own without help. Colleges wouldn't provide all of the supports they do if they didn't expect students to need them."

5. Embrace who you are.

Students who have received special education services throughout childhood sometimes feel stigmatized or excluded. They harbor fantasies of a fresh start in college, where they hope to blend in or assimilate. L. Scott Lissner, Americans With Disabilities Act Coordinator & Section 504 Compliance Officer at The Ohio State University, says, "College offers an opportunity to remake yourself. Many students want to put special education behind them, often for good reasons. The college experience of disability is different; don't avoid it. Talk to the disability office early, explore disability as part of diversity, as part of identity, as a strength."

Likewise, Edelstein cautions, "Students may hesitate to register with their disability service offices, even if they had an IEP or similar supports in K-12. Don't! Even if you don't think you'll need them if you have the resources to register with your institution's office, make sure to do so. For students who feel bad or guilty about accommodations, treat it like insurance; you hope you don't need them, but you'd rather have them just in case. Students should also know that use of accommodations is not a personal failure!"

6. Create a community.

Edelstein also emphasizes the importance of building a community: "Despite the widespread presence of disability services offices, colleges have remarkably few opportunities for students to develop a sense of disabled identity and community. That's not to say they shouldn't register with disability services offices - they absolutely should if they can, even as a proactive measure - but being accommodated is different than being accepted. Students should look into clubs, classes on disability studies, or local centers for independent living (or online!) for community. They should also be aware of online communities found on social media like Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook where communal knowledge about disabled experiences in college can be shared widely."

Likewise, Hyland urges students to connect with others. "I strongly encourage students to attend as much as they can various events and sessions around campus, from orientation to information sessions about student groups, etc. Finding a friend group or even one other person who knows you can provide comfort, a resource, and friendship. Don't count out what you offer, too! You are also a resource for other students who are experiencing college for the first time and could use a friend and classmate to support them."

7. Step out of your comfort zone.

Hyland further advises, "Walk around; get a feel for your new learning environment. Some ways to feel confident include preparing well, practicing independence, meeting new people, and knowing that you are a resource and an important part of the campus community, too. You have a unique perspective and life experience - your community benefits from you sharing it!

Finally, confidence grows as you widen your perspective on yourself and on the world around you, and one way to do that is practice seeing things with a fresh lens. Try something new, give yourself a chance to develop parts of yourself, put yourself out there, and know that you are a person of great value."

The transition to college is undeniably a huge step. But with careful planning, students can build a social and academic support system that will help make college a successful and fulfilling experience.

Eric Endlich, PhD, is Founder of Top College Consultants. This article has been reprinted with permission from Top College Consultants. You may view the original article, published by Exceptional Needs Today, here.

Accommodations from

Maintaining Accommodations and Resources

As the term progresses, students who stay in communication with their professors and disability office have shared having positive experiences in the college classroom (Petcu et al., 2021). In order to maintain accommodations, students can schedule meetings with their disability counselor in alignment with their college academic calendar. Many students schedule meetings with their counselor at least three times per term (beginning, middle, and end of the term). The check-ins throughout the term can benefit the student as they stay on track with their academic path. This will also assist in building the student's confidence in using other resources outside of disability services such as tutoring for writing and math.

Students can also break down the sections of the syllabi to understand the structure of the course and highlight areas like exam and project due dates, email policies, and office hours. At CIP, students learn to insert professor's office hours into their calendar, write down their exam dates and place reminders in their planner a week prior to the exam to know when to put in the request for additional time for exams. While also looking through the syllabi, students may want to consider adding and altering accommodations based on the course

Bree Tungate, MA

structure (e.g., 1.5x to 2x time). Outside of accommodations, many colleges also offer other resources such as career workshops and supplemental learning activities for various subjects from Reading to Math where students can receive additional assistance and participate in activities with other peers. Students who have been a part of these activities in tandem with utilizing their accommodations consistently have reported having higher engagement in college and grade point averages (GPA) (Abreu et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Although the process of obtaining and using accommodations can seem tedious, it serves as a good starting point for students with learning differences to familiarize themselves with their college campus until they feel confident to begin using other resources the college offers and find what resources work best for them.

Bree Tungate, MA, is an Academic Coordinator at The College Internship Program (CIP). She supports students in building the skills and confidence necessary to be successful in their courses and thrive academically. Bree has earned a Bachelor's Degree in Family and Human Development from Arizona State University and a Master's Degree in Child Development from California State University of Los Angeles.

The College Internship Program is a comprehensive transition program for young adults on the Autism Spectrum and with Learning Differences. Our Mission is to inspire independence and expand the foundation on which young adults with Autism, ADHD, and other Learning Differences can build happy and productive lives. For further information, visit www. cipworldwide.org.

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Smart Technologies from *page 13*

might turn on to encourage individuals to get up and move to other areas of the home. Smart water bottles might remind individuals to drink and stay hydrated. Smart toothbrushes increase oral hygiene by providing a visual prompt for proper toothbrushing. All the while, these devices gather important passive data and vitals in the background that we can then use to make informed decisions about their care and well-being. Smart devices like iPads can make communication more fluid and robust. Technologies like Tobii Dynavoxx's TDPilot now allow you to interact with your iPad with just your eyes. Visual schedules like those provided by Routine Factory help individuals plan their days ahead. Smartboards in the classroom make learning more engaging and interactive.

Keeping connected during the lockdowns and quarantines was especially an area of concern, so Greystone Programs utilized technologies like Facebook Portal and Zoom to support individuals and their

Matthew Cerasaro

families and friends to stay connected. Robots like RoboKind's Milo help individuals improve their social skills with a novel friend. Smart devices can monitor for safety risks like falls, heart rates, low or high respiration rates, seizures, movement, and sleep. Smart plugs turn appliances into smart appliances. Video game systems like the Nintendo Wii and Microsoft Xbox support fitness and leisure. These technologies combined will move individuals towards less reliance on human staff, a greater sense of autonomy, and a more enjoyable life. As our CEO, Skip Pryce, says, "Innovation does not happen by itself; there must be a conscious effort," at Greystone Programs Inc., we are making that conscious effort to be more technologically inclusive.

Matthew Cerasaro is the Technology Inclusion Coordinator at Greystone Programs, Inc. supporting the agency transformation to a Technology First organization. For over 40 years Greystone Programs, Inc. has been dedicated to supporting children, adults and families living with autism and other developmental disabilities by enriching lives one person at a time. For more information, contact Mathew Cerasaro at mcerasaro@greystoneprograms.org or 845-309-7068.

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Bachelor's Degree from *page 10*

"This felt like the right step, and it looks good on the resume," he said. "I need every little edge I can get."

MRHEP Provides Foundation for Success

Attending MRHEP with peer mentors to help him in a variety of ways provided a solid foundation for him. "MRHEP allowed me to acquire the skills, such as certain social skills, I needed to survive the college life without having to pick them up hard way," he said. The program also helped Wilkinson learn to navigate the complexities of a community college and other parts of academic life he had never experienced, Barrett added.

While earning his bachelor and associate degrees, Wilkinson had to advocate for himself. "There's a reason why one of the non-college classes a MRHEP is a self-advocacy course," he said.

Wilkinson said without the support of a team - AHRC NYC staff members at MRHEP, his family and friends - he never could have accomplished what he had in higher education.

"Despite being intellectually capable, students with ASD often do not make it to graduation. Only 44% of college students with ASD receive their degree - significantly less than the 60% graduation rate for all disability groups and the 67% rate for the general population."[1]

Multiple studies suggest that support, such as peer mentors used at MRHEP, and special accommodations on exams and papers, are keys to success for college students with disabilities.

Social integration struggles appear to be a hallmark of the college experience for students with ASD, with 50 percent of students reporting difficulties not only obtaining and maintaining friendships, but also participating in college social events, which are often overstimulating.[2]

Once Wilkinson matriculated as a full-time student at BMCC and later at Hunter, he needed only minimal accommodation, said Jessica Giorgio, Director at MRHEP at BMCC and the College of Staten Island. "He was able to manage it," she said. Wilkinson's work ethic wasn't lost on Giorgio. "Sam shows you that anything is possible with hard work. He makes you want to be a better person and never gives up."

Wilkinson has spent much of the pandemic in upstate New York with his parents.

He's been looking for potential jobs, but it's difficult when he's not home in New York City, where he can be more independent. He's spent the last six months studying to become certified as a teaching assis-

tant, an idea he considered since his days at Rebecca School. He'd prefer to work with elementary or lower middle school students. "Just before you have to learn all the complicated stuff," Wilkinson said.

He offered plenty of advice for students with autism who join the MRHEP or wish to attend another college program.

"Even if you're on the spectrum, it doesn't mean your life has to be a downhill slope," Wilkinson said. "There are a lot of people who have made disparaging comments to me in the past, such as 'if you're on the spectrum in any way you don't have prospects for the future.' You were believed to be headed for one of the most dead-end jobs in the world." He said people with autism could run the paper shredder in the office, but not the copy machine, because that was too complex, requiring more than three steps.

"I just hope I'm not the last person to prove these people wrong," he added.

A Real Transition Period

Sam's parents continue to hold high expectations for their son. Research has shown that families of youth with disabilities who keep higher expectations will see their child achieve greater academic success.

"People often underestimate him," Barrett said. "Often they see his difficulties before they see the person he really is. We see all that he has within him and what potential there is. We don't want him to stop aiming high. We don't want him to give up. We want him to have a full and rich life and have the life that he wants. We want to help him get there."

Barrett is uncertain what the future looks like for Sam. "For us, this is a real transition period, like it is for all students who have graduated and look for the next step," she said. "We feel like there are lots of possibilities. He's open to our suggestions, but Sam is very clear about what he wants to do or doesn't want to do. We have to let him make those choices himself."

For more information, please visit www.ahrcnyc.org.

Footnotes

1. Van Hees, V., Moyson, T., & Roeyers, H. (2015). Higher Education Experiences of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Challenges, Benefits and Support Needs. Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 45, 1673-1688.

2. Jennifer C. Sarrett, Autism and Accommodations in Higher Education: Insights from the Autism Community, 48 J. Autism & Dev. Disorders 679, 680 (2018)

10 Tips from *page 28*

1. Reconnecting with kids and helping them to feel safe and secure at school will be key, and the best way to do that is to establish clear expectations, schedules and routines and to focus on children's strengths and interests. This will help kids be available to learn, and when their strengths are recognized and their interests are incorporated into learning, they will be more motivated to engage.

2. Keep your expectations reasonable. "Some kids may require more intensive or individualized instruction to regain skills," she said. Educators and families should work together to develop an individualized plan that will meet the needs of the child.

3. Be open to nontraditional methods for addressing learning loss. "Things like summer school, before or after school interventions, small groups of individualized instruction may all be on the table, so parents should work really closely with their educational teams to determine what the best fit is for their child," noted Schetter.

4. Stick to what works. The use of evidence-based practices by teachers and therapists is the best way to help kids regain lost skills and acquire new ones. "Things like visual supports, positive behavior supports, and social skills teaching have all been proven to be highly effective," she said. These Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules provide training for educators and parents.

5. Remember that what works for your child may not work for others. Schetter noted that many kids are benefiting from online learning and may experience less social anxiety at home, while many students with autism benefit more from face-to-face instruction and live social interactions.

Schetter's team at the California Autism professional training and information network (CAPTAIN) put together an excellent list of resources for educators and families.

"Families have had to adopt many roles during the pandemic: surrogate teacher, therapist and primary social partners for their kids," explained Schetter. "As we transition back to in-person instruction, I expect everyone will benefit from the increased understanding and collaboration that distance learning necessitated."

At the UC Davis MIND Institute, world-renowned scientists engage in collaborative, interdisciplinary research to find the causes of and develop treatments for the disabilities that can be associated with autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), fragile X syndrome, 22q11.2 deletion syndrome, Down syndrome, and other neurodevelopmental disorders. For more information, visit mindinstitute.ucdavis.edu.

This article has been republished with permission from UC Davis Health. You may view the original article, published on March 9, 2022, at https://health.ucdavis.edu/news/headlines/helping-kids-with-autism-transition-back-to-in-person-school-10-tips/2021/03.

of understanding in responding to children with sensory or social overload."

The story below is excerpted from a story by Lisa Morgan (Lisa Morgan Consulting, LLC), an autism advocate, professional trainer, consultant, and life coach.

An autistic student arrived at class finding the desks rearranged.

"Standing in the doorway, I tune into the sounds of students talking at different speeds, at different decibels, changing topics with a squeal or two thrown in along with an argument here and there. It's so hard to think. I panic. There are at least 22 desk chairs squeaking on the floor, pencils being sharpened, the teacher giving directions, students finding new seats. I focus on a spot on the floor, completely overwhelmed. I'm rooted by panic from the change, the noise, and the confusion about where to sit. I can't find words to explain.

The teacher tells me she wants me to move. Will she touch me? I don't want to be touched. The teacher warns me again to get ready. I need to move. The teacher's voice is rising. She sounds angry. Is it me? I'm trying so hard. I move towards a desk, heart pounding, a strong perfume smell making it hard to breathe, a student bumps into me and I stop. My panic rises again. I finally find a desk with my name on it. My head hurts from the smells; I'm overstimulated and overwhelmed, so I sit and rock back and forth to calm myself. The teacher walks over and says, 'See how easy that was? Now sit up straight and stop rocking.'"

These examples are in the classroom, a relatively "safe," structured, supervised space. The "no man's land" of the hallway, recess yard, or cafeteria can be even more problematic.

What can be done? This is taken from a viral Facebook post by a teacher named Karen Blacher in October 2020:

"All of my students are neurotypical, but my classroom looks very much like a special education classroom. I teach mindfulness and emotional literacy. I have a calm corner and use it to teach self-regulation. I

Marcia Eckerd, PhD

provide fidgets and sensory toys. My students are thriving. And that made me realize something.

When we treat autistic children the way the world tells us to treat neurotypical children, they suffer. But I have never encountered a child of any age or neurotype who doesn't thrive when treated like an autistic person should be treated, with open communication, adaptive expectations, and respect for self-advocacy and self-regulation. Maybe neurodiverse people aren't the only ones who've been misunderstood and mistreated all this time. They're just the ones who feel it most."

Accommodations necessary for the success of autistic students are covered by the ADA. Why can't a school have a separate lunchroom for a student of any neurotype who want to eat quietly? People can signal appreciation in other ways than clapping. Autistic students have better achievement in sound-proofed rooms (Bodison et al., 2018). Fluorescent lights are stressful for many and could be replaced.

Research has shown that inclusion improves academic success but not social acceptance. (Morrison et al., 2021) Damion Milton (2012) describes the problem of double empathy. Autistic students have difficulty understanding the perspective of

neurotypical students and adults, but neurotypical adults and students are no more proficient at understanding the perspective of autistic students (Crompton et al., 2020). Inclusion of itself doesn't teach neurotypical students understanding or acceptance of different neurotypes; autistic students are expected to fit in.

There's much that can be done. It's possible to create a sensory or adaptive profile predicting problems, to create more effective strategies and to educate neurotypical staff and students to understand and accept different neurotypes. What's necessary is open-mindedness and a willingness to consider systemic change. What's most important is to recognize that teaching neurodivergent children the same ways we teach neurotypical children is a recipe for failure, both for the school, and especially for the student.

Marcia Eckerd has worked with autistic individuals as a licensed psychologist for 30 years. She was appointed to the CT ASD Advisory Council and serves on the Clinical Advisory Group of the Asperger's Autism Network (AANE.org) and is on the Board of Directors of NeuroClastic.org, an autistic nonprofit.

As a prolific writer and lecturer, Marcia has written 3 professional journal articles on autism for the Journal of Health Services Psychology (JHSP), one focusing on diagnosing autistic adults and one specifically on diagnosing autistic women. She has numerous articles in Autism Spectrum News, Autism Parenting Magazine, SmartKidsWithLD.org as well as her blog on Psych Central f(2016- 2020) and her current blog on Psychology Today "Everyday Neurodiversity." She has presented many workshops on autism, including the "Learning and the Brain" conference co-sponsored by Harvard, MIT, Johns Hopkins, and Tufts, and an international conference, "Special Kids International Summit" co-sponsored by UNESCO.

Marcia graduated from Yale University Magna cum laude and with honors, received her PhD in clinical psychology from the City University of NY in 1982 and completed her internship and fellowship at NY Hospital-Cornell Medical Center (now NY Presbyterian Hospital).

For more information, please visit Dr. Eckerd's website www.marciaeckerd.com or email eckwestoff@gmail.com.

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and does much more harm than good. Accommodations exist to give us a level playing field in schools, not to provide them with advantages.

The Do's

Educate staff on autism and other neurodiverse conditions. So many autistic students are misunderstood and deprived of a positive educational experience because school staff aren't educated on their disability, and this can be applied to practically every disabled student. And if possible, have teachers teach lessons on neurodiversity (the concept that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are natural and should be embraced)! Bullying is an almost universal experience for any neurodiverse student, and lots of bullying can be reduced simply by educating the student population about people with differences. .

Do allow alternatives for presentations. Many autistic students struggle with social

Cynthia Wen

anxiety, and many of them aren't too great at speaking on the spot or presenting as opposed to their neurotypical peers. That doesn't mean they're incapable or process

information slower, though - we can be great writers. Teachers that provided alternatives (such as allowing me to write down a memorized text rather than recite it in front of the class) have been tremendously helpful for me. For my Stanford project, I was actually given the questions beforehand to prepare for the interview, which is also a technique that was super helpful!

Do be lenient on policies where you can and try your best to create an inclusive environment! Teachers can be strict with policies, enforcing rules like "No electronics" or "No bathroom breaks." Even with accommodations, these policies can hurt autistic students, because if they have accommodations, they are singled out and are basically forced to disclose their disability. This goes hand in hand with the "bans on sensory toys" in "Don'ts" - imagine your school having a ban on stress balls, and you use one during class to regulate. Now everyone will know you're autistic, and you may be more prone to bullying! For me personally, I did not embrace my disabilities until my junior year of high

school, so I typically did not use accommodations in class as I was often singled out and interrogated by my peers. Quite obviously, this made my academic performance not as ideal as I would've liked it to be. Create a classroom where your students follow your lead because of love or appreciation and not because of fear.

Conclusion

If, after reading this article, you only leave with one piece of wisdom, let it be this: Educate yourself on autism and other disabilities**.** Don't just look into medical journals or research papers; educate yourselves from real-life autistics; content creators, friends, family - people who have experienced being autistic firsthand. Autistic people know their needs best, and only with understanding and education on autism will schools become a safe place for autistic students.

For more information, please email Cynthia at cynthiiawen@gmail.com.

Keri Bethune, PhD, BCBA-D

Sharon Onda, MEd, BCBA

Silva Orchanian, MEd, BCBA, LABA

Erin Way, MS BCBA

Collaboration from [page 6](#)

1content specialists will communicate treatment plans with the other IEP team members, but assessments and treatment are provided without necessarily collaborating with other disciplines. While pull-out groups can be part of a comprehensive approach to continuous programming for students, it is typically not the sole intervention strategy for students with special needs (Mursky, 2011).

Consultation is an expert-driven model in which team members seek advice from someone with extensive knowledge of a particular subject (Bock, 2011; Zimmerman, 2011). It is important that the consultant does not dominate conversations but that the team works cooperatively towards a common goal (School Psychologist Files, 2022). For instance, an IEP team may seek consultation from a BCBA when a student starts to engage in a new challenging behavior. Although the BCBA would be the expert in assessment of and interventions for said challenging behaviors, input from other team members is still crucial to the development of a program (e.g., speech and language pathologist's input on teaching strategies for a communication response suggested by the BCBA). Respect for each person and their assigned role in

the group is another essential trait of effective consultation. Consultation allows each expert to complement each other to provide evidence-based, effective treatment to individuals requiring a multitude of services.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is a comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing a student's needs (Boivin, 2015). Typically, this involves experts from different disciplines or skill areas coming together to discuss the needs of a student, and to engage in shared decision making to create a comprehensive plan that addresses the student's specific needs. Unlike a pull-out or consultative model, interdisciplinary collaboration does not involve unilateral decision making, or "siloed" decision making, from any one team member. In order for interdisciplinary collaboration to be successful, there should be a foundational understanding of one another's roles, as well as the scope and boundaries of each member's skill set (Boivin, 2015). An understanding of the interplay or carryover effects from one setting or situation to another across disciplines should also be discussed during interdisciplinary collaboration. Finally, to be most successful, collaboration should span from admission to discharge, and be utilized across all facets of an individual's educational plan.

Key Ingredients for Successful Collaboration

Ultimately, there is no one "right" way to collaborate for students with autism or other special needs. There are, however, a few key ingredients when determining when and how to collaborate with other disciplines for your student:

- Provide rationale for decision making (Boivin, 2015).

- Understand one another's roles, as well as the scope and boundaries of each member's skill set (Boivin, 2015).

- Be aware of decision making across disciplines and how treatments may interact across disciplines for an individual (Newhouse-Oisten, 2017).

- Consistently meet to evaluate assessments, treatment plans, student progress, and need for treatment plan changes for your student

Keri Bethune, PhD, BCBA-D, is the Director of Educational Services at [Melmark Carolinas](#). Sharon Onda, MEd., BCBA, is the Co-Director of Educational Services at [Melmark Pennsylvania](#). Silva Orchanian, Med, BCBA, LABA is the Senior Director of Day Services at [Melmark New England](#). Erin Way, MS BCBA, is the Co-Director of Edu-

cational Services at [Melmark Pennsylvania](#).

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College-Bound from [page 12](#)

their own goals and learn to be independent and effective self-advocates. While it is critical for planning teams to better prepare autistic students to transition to the college setting, their work is only a bridge to the equal responsibility of higher institutions to make college campuses more accessible to diverse learners. Professional development for college staff is also critical to better support neurodiverse students and is essential in ensuring that the autistic perspective is involved in decision-making and service delivery on campus.

Kara Constantine, PhD, NCSP, BCBA, is a Psychologist and Kate Langston Rooney, MEd, BCBA, LBS, is the Clinical Coordinator at [Devereux CAAPP](#). Jennifer Dawson, PhD, BCBA, LBS, is the Director at [Devereux SPARC](#). Richard Allen, PsyD, NCSP, BCBA-D, is an Assistant Professor

and Director of the Educational Specialist Program in the Department of School Psychology at [Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine](#). Todd Harris, PhD, is Executive Director of Autism Services and the National Autism Consultant of [Devereux](#).

For any additional information about the content of this article, please feel free to contact Dr. Kara Constantine at [kconsta2@devereux.org](#) or 610-688-4981 or visit [devereux.org](#).

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Understanding from

underneath. This creates a conflict between the students, but that conflict is an opportunity for compromise. Ultimately, the students are working towards the same goal, but are finding different ways of getting to the solution. These social interactions are manufactured by the educator and their use of their classroom and tools. The same is true and evident for collaboration between neurotypical and neurodivergent students. Instead of finding ways to separate autistic children from the rest, an active pursuit of inter-neurotype collaboration is needed.

Children start to pick up crucial job skills early in life, even if they don't realize it. Engaging a child in formal settings like volunteering, church activities, museums, or Boy or Girl Scouts can give them experience with interpersonal communication, following directions, completing tasks, and managing time. Robots and RAI can be beneficial for developing social skills. As kids reach the age where social play becomes more important for social development, many children with

Photo Credit: Maring Visuals

Students collectively working together to engage with MOVIA's RAI systems in the classroom

autism struggle to keep up. Robots have been used to help kids with autism learn how to share, take turns, and build other crucial social skills.

Tools and resources to facilitate interactions between neurotypical and neurodivergent individuals are important as they help decrease the divide that causes

prejudice. Positive exposure to different people fosters acceptance of those people, but not all interactions between neurodivergent and neurotypical people are positive. Every child needs to learn these skills, but everyone learns at a different pace and benefits from different support. Children with autism often learn life skills best when they are explicitly taught about them. When one struggles with understanding social cues it can be challenging to decipher intent behind someone's gesture or tone of voice, and if someone does not recognize or acknowledge that a person may have those differences, they will be more inclined to dismiss rather than understand.

Teachers not only have the duty to educate on their subject, but they also have the duty to teach a culture of mutual understanding. Raw subjects matter less than the growth experience they create in their students to develop into responsible understanding members of society.

For more information about MOVIA Robotics' Robot-Assisted Intervention, please visit www.moviarobotics.com.

Employment from

on the spectrum and (2) the implementation of a strategic onboarding and ongoing support process by the businesses themselves that are tailored to the unique needs of their employees on the autism spectrum.

UM-NSU CARD's Job SEEKers (Seeking and Enhancing Employment Knowledge) program was developed to tackle step 1. Job SEEKers is an intensive employment readiness program designed to prepare adults with ASD for competitive and meaningful employment. The program teaches many employment skills that do not come naturally to individuals with ASD and are skills that are never explicitly taught. These skills are necessary for an employee to understand workplace expectations and are therefore critical for ongoing, successful employment.

The Job SEEKers program targets the following specific employment readiness skills: (1) drafting resumes; (2) disclosing your diagnosis (if/how); (3) dressing for success; (4) social skills for the workplace; (5) searching for jobs that match the individual's unique skills and abilities; and (6) navigating the interview process. A recent Job SEEKers graduate, who recently celebrated his one-year anniversary of employment, shares:

"I really credit Job SEEKers for helping me get the job and keeping it. That really helped me with communication and interpersonal skills I think in both getting the job and on the job."

For participants of Job SEEKers, graduation from the program is only the beginning of their journey. Once a participant completes the intensive program, UM NSU-CARD provides them with continuous monthly support through support groups and other programming. The employment support group (Job Club) is led by one of our UM NSU-CARD case managers and is comprised of adults either looking to gain employment or those looking for support

Jose Roman, co-author and Scan It Forward employee, is excited to highlight his new role and demonstrate successful employment when receiving the right accommodations and supports

in maintaining employment. The Job Club serves to provide continuous support and inspiration and to ensure that participants know they are never alone on their path to continued meaningful employment.

Adults with ASD have been significantly disadvantaged due to society's failure to embrace and understand their unique perspectives and thought processes. Since neurodiverse individuals may communicate and behave in atypical ways, it is important for businesses to understand and embrace neurodiverse individuals and foster a workplace environment and culture where all employees are valued and can succeed.

To provide these opportunities, it is imperative to offer support through training, implementation of accommodations, and ongoing technical assistance to create a neurodiverse workplace, which leads to step 2. Now is the time. During the global pandemic, individuals have been leaving their jobs in droves. You cannot take in the news without hearing or reading phrases such as "The Great Resignation" or "The

Employee Exodus." You also cannot drive around without seeing "for hire signs" everywhere. Fortunately for business owners, autistic adults are ready to work and are naturally suited to many jobs. There are also numerous benefits to hiring employees with autism. People on the spectrum often demonstrate honesty, high tolerance for repetitive tasks, loyalty, strong memories, dependability, and adherence to rules. These are the very qualities employers so often desire, and yet, adults on the spectrum continue to struggle to find the right employment fit. The possibilities can be endless when an inclusive workforce is created through ongoing training and support.

Jose Roman, co-author and Job SEEKers' graduate, has recently started working at Scan It Forward. Scan It Forward, a south Florida scanning business, was willing to open its doors to neurodiverse employees and recognized UM-NSU CARD as a valued partner. With UM-NSU CARD training, the development of individualized visual supports, and assistance with employee recruitment, Scan It Forward's business began to soar while creating a safe and accommodating workspace for several autistic adults. Jose Roman has the following to share about his experience as a Scan It Forward employee and Job SEEKers graduate:

"As an autistic adult, I never thought I would feel welcomed and accepted in the workplace. I struggled for years and was never able to pass an interview or even get a callback. Thanks to UM-NSU CARD for the support provided to me through Job Club and Job SEEKers. Through these programs, I learned about the job search process and how to navigate employment. When UM-NSU CARD shared about the opportunity at Scan It Forward, I was excited and nervous but my experience for the first time was amazing! I enjoy scanning and get to do my work in a quiet workspace. I am also grateful to have visuals to help me complete my work. I love our staff lunches when we all get together.

I love feeling like I belong and an impact at work."

Neurodiverse workplaces not only provide meaningful opportunities for inclusivity, but they are also clearly good for business. Owners, Pierre Smith and Chanell Solace share, "Our margin of error went from 15% to 0.5% after hiring autistic employees. Our neurodiverse staff members have brought a unique perspective to the workplace, are never late, and have proven to be valuable and reliable staff." With the right supports in place for our neurodiverse job seekers and our business partners, closing the employment gap for neurodiverse individuals has perhaps never been more achievable than this moment in our history.

Silvia Gil, MSEd, is Manager, The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation for Transition and Adult Programs, University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UM-NSU CARD). Jose Roman and an autistic self-advocate, Job SEEKers graduate, and an employee at Scan IT Forward.

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range of instructional resources, effectively answering the question of "Where do I begin?" when providing SEL instruction for autistic K-5 students.

IvySCIP Process Cycle

The IvySCIP process cycle (see graphic) illustrates the ongoing, iterative nature of the tool's intended flow from assessment, through identification of instructional priority areas, instructional goal development, selection of curricular resources, data tracking, and back to assessment again. Although components of the *IvySCIP* can be implemented at any time - e.g., the strengths and needs assessment can be administered at the beginning of the academic year or prior to a students' IEP meeting - the entire *IvySCIP* process cycle is designed to be completed once per year for each student. The strengths and needs assessment - as well as other components of the *IvySCIP* - can be used alone or in combination with other SEL interventions to improve students' SEL performance, as well as to provide a means of measuring students' progress over time. Completion of the strengths and needs assessment requires approximately 30 minutes per student.

Evaluating Strengths and Needs - At the heart of IvySCIP is the 113-item SEL strengths and needs assessment that allows educators to generate individualized SEL profiles for their students. The assessment should be completed by educators who have known and worked closely with students for at least three weeks and observed them interacting with their peers in a classroom or other instructional setting. Educators rate student mastery/need for coaching and support using a five-point scale from unable to demonstrate to fully independent. Many of the items include probes that can be used to ensure accurate assessment of students' skill levels. Upon completion of the strengths and needs assessment, several reporting options are available, including a color-coded SEL profile report that highlights areas of independence, emerging skill and critical need. Users are also able to generate a narrative report that summarizes performance implications of students' scores within each of the five domains (designed especially for sharing with parents and other members of students' IEP teams).

Identifying Instructional Priority Areas - Based on students' scores, IvySCIP automatically suggests several instructional priority areas, and educators can select one or more of these areas on which to

Eve Müller, PhD

focus or start instruction. They are able to view skills within each of these areas broken down by instructional sequence, as well as by the student's current level of mastery. The purpose of this step is to help educators make thoughtful, informed decisions as they prepare to set SEL IEP goals.

Developing IEP Goals - One of the primary functions of IvySCIP is to link educators to a customized IEP goal development tool. For each of the instructional priority areas selected, educators are directed to a list of possible SEL goals. Once educators have selected a goal they wish to include on a student's IEP, they are directed to a series of drop-down menus that allow them to customize the goal to include the following components: (a) givens (e.g., visuals, graphic organizers, social stories, scripts), (b) settings (e.g., one-to-one support, small group, large group, or community), and (c) performance targets (e.g., 80% of observed opportunities, across multiple settings, or across 10 days). Users also have the option of creating their own goals and customizing givens, settings, and performance targets to best match their students' needs.

Selecting Curricular Materials - A database of almost 200 lesson plans is available to educators, searchable by instructional priority area, as well as evidence-based tips and strategies that provide suggestions for "getting started" (e.g., brief modules on video modeling). When appropriate, resources are automatically flagged as a means of supporting mastery of specific IEP goals.

Tracking Progress - Once educators have developed an IEP goal, they are given the opportunity to select from several customizable data collection forms for use in

Lynn Cannon, MS

tracking students' progress toward individual goal mastery. These easy-to-use, online forms support educators in the systematic collection and evaluation of goal-related data. The *IvySCIP* also enables educators to track students' progress over time (e.g., comparing overall SEL performance from year to year).

A Focus on Building Social Cognitive Skills

Most assessment tools on the market take a deficit-based as opposed to a skills-based approach to evaluating students. This means they focus on assessing the presence of challenging behaviors, as opposed to the building of necessary awareness and skills. We take the opposite approach. We believe that challenging behaviors crop up when students lack the skills to engage more constructively with their social environments, and by teaching critical skills and developing students' social cognitive awareness, unwanted behaviors (e.g., self-injury and/or aggression) will naturally disappear.

IvySCIP also focuses on social cognition as opposed to social skills. This means we do not simply teach rote skills like "asking questions" or "greeting peers." Instead, we provide students with a toolbox of skills and teach them the how and why to flexibly apply these tools depending on social context and desired outcome. This means teaching our autistic students that greetings may look different when interacting with teachers (e.g., "Hello Ms. Cannon") as opposed to peers (e.g., "Hey dude! What's up?").

What Does the Research Say About IvySCIP?

We tested IvySCIP with 51 educator/student pairs (Müller et al., forthcoming), and found the following:

- Students' SEL skills grew significantly following introduction of IvySCIP as measured by a variety of assessment tools.

- IEP goal quality improved significantly.

- Educators appeared to devote more class time to SEL instruction following exposure to IvySCIP.

- Educators gave high marks to IvySCIP's effectiveness, innovation and value.

IvySCIP was also singled out in 2016 by the Obama White House as a model example of educational assessment technology.

Eve Müller, PhD, is Coordinator of Program Evaluation and Outcomes Research at Ivymount School and Programs. Lynn Cannon, MS, is Social Learning Coordinator at The Maddux School and The Ivymount School. For more information on IvySCIP, or to purchase licenses, see www.ivyscip.org.

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If Penny was told to follow the same reminder system as James, it would be jarring, unnecessary, and ignore her individual ability. For those with an IEP, it is important to ensure that the IEP aligns with their particular strengths and areas to develop, and that it is adjusted as the student gains more independence.

One area of daily life that families may struggle to reimagine is medication management. While intimidating, it is possible to teach medication independence with training and supervision that fades as the student demonstrates that they can reliably complete parts of the process. At Vista, a staff member works with an individual student to teach what each of their specific medications do and why it is important to take them. Students also learn to identify their medications, the quantities and when they need to take them. Dylan, a Vista student with autism, describes:

"The biggest skill I am working on at Vista is medication management. My old program didn't offer the same opportunities to become more independent with it. Here, I showed that I can take my medication independently because I know what it does. Then, I need to check in with a staff member to let them know that I've taken them. I'm proud that I've become this indepen-

Becky Lipnick

dent with my meds and I am working to become even more independent with them."

Not only does medication training empower students, it also enhances their safety as students learn to advocate for themselves. Caroline, another Vista student, was once reviewing her medication with a staff member and noticed that one of her supplements was a different color than usual. With some support, Caroline called and politely asked her pharmacist if the pill was the correct one. In this case the supplement had simply changed colors, but Caroline's awareness and self-advocacy will protect her from potential discrepancies in the future.

After taking the initial leap, it becomes clear that learning through real life experiences is a powerful way to develop independent living skills. The community is truly "the classroom" with individuals being able to learn skills like crosswalk safety, grocery shopping and banking by practicing in their local towns. At first, loved ones or staff can guide students through these real-world activities. If the individual becomes comfortable in a particular setting, it is important to test their skills in new environments. For example, someone may be completely at ease safely using the crosswalk on their street but lose confidence when in a less familiar area of town. By gaining independent living skills in different places, young adults become more comfortable, developing both their independence and a sense of belonging.

By routinely following these strategies, the need for prompts and direct support lessens. This is usually a gradual process where a young adult moves from receiving direct, one-to-one guidance to completing tasks by themselves. Warren, an individual with autism living independently along the shoreline, has been developing his growth steadily: "I work with a LSI [Vista Life Skills Instructor], but I am proud that I am slowly reducing the numbers of hours of support I receive. I can reduce my home hours because I have shown that I am good at cleaning, cooking, and speaking up for myself. I plan to keep building my independence and reducing my instructional hours." In addition to reducing his home support hours, Warren has been able to become fully independent at work and no longer pays for job coach services. No matter where someone's skillset begins, it is possible to teach independent living skills.

While strategies like these are meant to guide those on the path to independence, it is important to remember that the journey will not be a straight line - it will certainly involve getting out of one's comfort zone, overcoming hurdles and embracing the concept of "seeing challenges as opportunities to grow." It may not be easy, but the rewards of independence are worth it. We wish everyone support as they continue on their respective paths to greater independence!

Please note: The names of the referenced Vista students and members have been changed for privacy reasons.

Becky Lipnick is the Communications Lead at Vista Life Innovations. For over 30 years, Vista has supported individuals with disabilities achieve personal success. Learn more at www.VistaLifeInnovations. org or contact Becky at BLipnick@VistaLifeInnovations.org.

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well as being less likely to be interrupted compared to in-person education (Ullman, Shade & Ware, 2020). This is especially important as individuals with ASD frequently experience co-existing conditions that make them more medically vulnerable. Due to the low likelihood of cancellation or disruption, remote learning services can prove beneficial for children who do not react well to changes in routine (Ullman Shade & Ware, 2020).

On the other hand, however, school-based ABA therapy is frequently covered, at least partially, by families' private insurance. Although some insurances covered remote assessments and treatments for some time, insurances do not always cover online services despite recent increases in this type of service delivery during COVID-19 (Bellomo et al., 2020; Digitale, 2022). This can make the switch to online therapy an added financial burden, on top of the challenge of requiring student adjustment to the change in service modality. This can become especially challenging for individuals who are required to switch between in-person and online services, either due to COVID-19 infection or changes in regulations. Even for those insurances that do cover online therapy, obtaining approval may cause a delay in services. Remote services for children with ASD also often require parent or caregiver assistance in order to ensure proper effectiveness. While this can be difficult for parents/caregivers to manage in their already busy schedules, it also resulted in the improvement of teacher-caregiver relationships which can benefit the child's education. Studies have shown that communication between caregivers and schools tends to decrease as the students age, so this increased parent involvement and collaboration can help contribute to the child's continued progression (Hurwitz et al., 2021).

Caregivers globally have discussed receiving benefit from increased tele-education services, written educational materials or tips, and "tool kits with visual schedules, activities, and videos" (Jeste et al., 2020). Due to the reported advantages many have had from tele-education services, it is possible that digital services may continue after the pandemic (Holtz, 2021; Tenforde et al., 2020; Genova et al., 2021). However, as noted, we do not have adequate validation of these instructional practices in terms of skill acquisition of students with a range of special learning needs. It is likely that, while some students may have thrived remotely, others may have regressed as a result of reduced opportunities for social interaction, as well as a decrease in the dosage and intensity of direct instruction which is required to maintain existing skills or acquire new skills. This generation of students will likely be studied carefully over the next decades to gain a better understanding of the actual long-term impact of the pandemic and resulting changes in educational practices on school and life outcomes for students with autism spectrum disorder and other special educational needs.

Dr Michael Alessandri is the Executive Director of the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD). He is also a Clinical Professor in the Departments of Psychology and Pediatrics at the University of Miami, Florida. Dr. Alessandri also serves as the Department of Psychology's Assistant Chairman for Community Outreach and Engagement. Dr Adrien Eshraghi is a Professor in the Departments of Otolaryngology, Neurological Surgery, Biomedical Engineering and Pediatrics at the University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine, Florida. Please free to contact Dr Eshraghi at aeshraghi@med.miami.edu.

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Right College from

- What are the kinds of academic counseling and tutoring services available?

- Is there the opportunity to get more intensive support through the disability support office, such as an academic skills program? This level of service typically offers intensive weekly support from an academic counselor in areas such as executive functioning, academic skills and self-advocacy.

- Do students have access to social and communication focused programs, or targeted academic skill building programs?

- What type of evening study support may be available? At McDaniel, we offer PASS (Providing Academic Support for Success), which allows students a supported learning environment three evenings a week. Students have the ability to access assistance from a Graduate Assistant or use assistive technology available in the office while enjoying the structure of a quiet academic environment.

- Does the college provide any type of summer bridge opportunity to help orient and make a smooth transition for students into college level academics, campus resources, and the use of accommodations?

Melanie L. Conley, MS

- What kind of assistive technology is available to support academic skill development, executive functioning, and communication skills?

- What wellness and mental health counseling resources exist and is there an opportunity for more intensive support if needed? Is there a direct line of communication between that office and the disability support office to provide holistic support for the student?

- What resources are available beyond the campus to fill in any gaps of accommodations that might be needed, but are not offered by the college, such as life coaching or academic evaluations?

In addition, it is also important to have reasonable expectations. The goal really should be to ensure access to learning for the student. It is not possible at the college level to modify assignments, course requirements, or graduation requirements. And, while some colleges may be able to offer one-to-one assistance or provide special courses for students with ASD, this is not the norm. Again, these are the type of accommodations that should be considered when a student is selecting the type of institution to attend.

My advice is to always visit the disability support office at the college that a student is looking to attend. Do a campus visit. Talk with current students about the accommodations that are provided. Also, have a conversation with the faculty in the department of the student's intended major to discuss the requirements.

Keep in mind there is nothing wrong with looking into alternatives if after taking these steps, the college does not seem like a right fit. It might be as simple as seeking out different colleges, perhaps one that is specifically designed for students with disabilities, or it might be necessary

to reconsider whether going away to college is what is best for the student. In this case, community college or a local university where a student can live at home might be an option. There are also college readiness programs and internships programs for students with disabilities, like Broad Futures, that might be worth looking into.

Just because a student has ASD, does not mean that college is out of reach. The bottom line is that an assessment is required for each individual student to determine what will make that student successful in college and beyond.

Melanie is the Director for Student Accessibility and Support Services (SASS) at McDaniel College. She can be reached at 410-857-2504 or mconley@mcdaniel.edu. For information about Student Accessibility and Support Services (SASS) at McDaniel College, visit www.mcdaniel.edu/sass.

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Reflection from

Myles and Simpson (1998) comment on this phenomenon in relation to social skills among people with Asperger Syndrome: Indeed, many of these individuals attempt to rigidly and broadly follow universal social rules, because doing so provides structure to an otherwise confusing world. Unfortunately, this is often not a successful strategy because there are few, if any, universal and inflexible social rules (p. 4).

Yet there appears to be a contradiction, given that an aversion to generalization has been noted among the autism spectrum population:

Once an activity has been learned, children with Asperger's Syndrome can fail to transfer or generalize their learning to other situations. . . . Parents and teachers may have to teach and remind the child of the different circumstances relevant to a particular skill (Attwood, 1998, p. 118).

These observations are, however, compatible. What appear to be generalizations in autistic thought are indeed attempts to organize, or give *form*, to the material of one's experience. Yet they are on the nearer side of everyday experience, and do not take in the full picture; true formal generalizations are on the far side and are more all-encompassing. The former, while more restrictive and isolating, are often havens of security for children on the spectrum.

Consequent upon this reality are such scenarios as the one between me and my preschool teacher. For that reason, it is well to keep the form-matter relationship in mind in terms of how it relates not only to developmental experience, but also to instructional practice.

Form, for teachers, pertains to what they wish their students to learn; the matter consists of each child's latent potentiality, as well as any additional factors that will impact their learning one way or another.

All else being equal, children with autism are as capable as anyone of learning,

following instructions, and relating to their fellow human beings. The key is to understand the *matter* one is working with in their case, and to focus on building the trust needed to help them *want* to move beyond their safe havens.

This begins with being willing to meet these children where they are. One way to do this is to stay with the concrete, which is the overlap between the autistic child's safe havens and formal generalizations. While this includes being specific in one's instructions, I would extend its application to include attentiveness to the context in which instructions are given. In my case, it might have been better if my preschool teacher had said, "Dan, I'd like you to take *another* turn," or "Dan, how about you go again?"

Such measures sound rather simple, but I can appreciate the difficulty presented by the pressures of contemporary education. But even small movements in this direction can bring great dividends in the long run. In the meantime, it is important that

teachers have patience - not just with their students, but with themselves as well.

Take it from the defiant preschooler for whom patience with himself has been a lifelong necessity.

Daniel Crofts is a 37-year-old man with Asperger Syndrome. He has an MA in English/Literature from the State University of New York College at Brockport and experience in the fields of freelance journalism, substance abuse prevention, online higher education, and service to children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities. He may be contacted at danielcrofts31@yahoo.com.

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Choosing a College from

need arises and with the student's permission. Parent and family involvement has been identified as a key component to the postsecondary success of students with ASD (Widman & Lopez-Reyna, 2020), yet FERPA privacy rules can hinder that process. When students provide the permissions for university personnel to speak with parents on issues related to their academic and social success, this helps the Access team to provide improved services. Parents can often provide background information to help understand a situation or follow up with their child to help them be successful in navigating challenging situations or helping to hold them accountable to setting alarms for class or completing their tasks for the day.

Every student is different and brings gifts and talents as well as areas for growth

to a college campus. Families should consider the needs of their student and the level of support necessary for the success of their student in the college setting. Programs will be similar yet have unique qualities that provide the added supports a student needs. It is important for families, in partnership with their student, their school counselor, and the IEP team, to explore the offerings of prospective colleges to determine which one can best support their student, given the unique strengths and areas for growth of their child. These characteristics will help to determine what supports are required for their successful completion of a degree.

*Ruby L. Owiny, PhD, is Director, Access Program, Director, Division of Education, and Associate Professor of Education, at Trinity International University. For more information, contact Dr. Ruby Owiny at

(847 317-7166 or rowinyt@tiu.edu.*

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may be designed for students with special needs and go at a slower pace that allows students to master the curriculum. Certificate programs and technical schools often provide the majority of instruction in class and focus on one specific course or content area; therefore, the program might be more manageable for students with organizational and time management challenges (OAR, 2021).

Students who are not candidates for a college degree due to cognitive functioning but are able to navigate a college campus independently may be able to attend a special program for non-degree seeking students. Several universities have developed programs on their campuses that provide for students with special needs to audit classes, live on campus, and learn skills for independence, even if they are not pursuing a degree. Individuals who need higher levels of support might consider post-secondary day and residential programs that focus on independent living skills, recreational skills, work skills, social skills, and executive functioning skills. Finally, some individuals might opt to find a supported or customized

Diane Adreon, EdD

work experience with the help of their local Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Although parents often feel overwhelmed by the transition to adulthood, there are many different options to achieve a positive outcome. As a parent it is important to be realistic, objective, and flexible,

Jennifer Feinstein

and if you begin by understanding your child's abilities and their support needs you will find a pathway that will lead to success and happiness for your autistic adult.

Diane Adreon is an EdD at The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation for Transition and Adult Programs, University of Miami. For more information, contact Diane Adreon at dadreaon@miani.edu or (305) 284-6556.

Jennifer Feinstien is a caseworker at the Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UM-NSU CARD). For more information, contact Jennifer Feinstein at jfeinstein@miami.edu or (305)284-3734.

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Kate Gladstone offers handwriting instruction/remediation services at HandwritingThatWorks.com and cursive reading resources at ReadCursiveFast.com. Her default e-mail address is Kate@ReadCursiveFast.com, and she can also be reached at 518-928-8101 (texts and mobile phone) or 518-482-6763 (landline phone).

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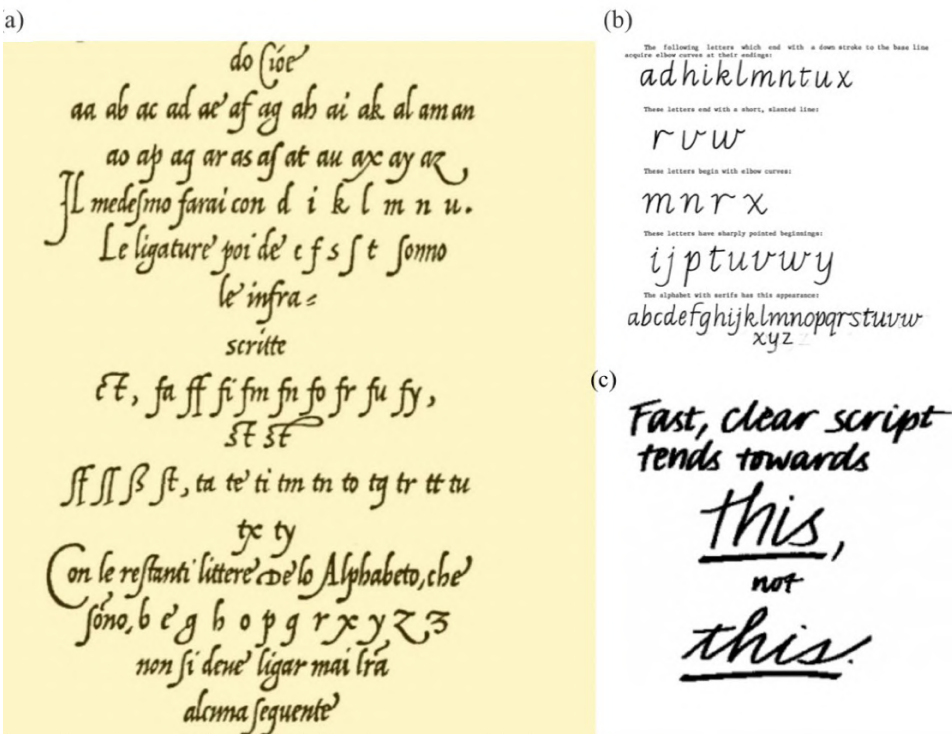
De Marchena, A.B., Eigsti, IM. & Yerys, B.E.

Figure 2: Image (a) is a page from the first published handwriting textbook in Western civilization (Arrighi, 1522) Images (b) and (c) are handwritten by two autistic adults who teach handwriting: (b) a teaching model (Bennett, 2019, p. 22) and (c) everyday rapid handwriting (Gladstone, 2022)

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involvement to a monitoring support role (e.g., offering feedback and monitoring peers). In addition to the academic benefits, this can help reduce autism stigma as well as promote independence and peer relationships. Further, there is evidence to indicate that peers who participate in these interventions may also reap academic benefits from their participation (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Shukla et al., 1998).

While peers deliver the intervention within peer support arrangements, teachers or paraprofessionals play an important role in facilitating the intervention (Brock and Carter, 2016; Brock et al., 2016). School personnel seeking to implement peer support arrangements should follow these steps:

Identify Peers: Selecting the appropriate peers is essential to the success of the intervention. Peers should be recruited from the same classroom as the focus student and should be willing participants. They can be recruited via announcements, service clubs, or teacher nominations. Selected peers should have good conversational skills and be willing to engage with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD; Bambara et al., 2018). It can also be beneficial to select peers with common interests to the focus student. There is emerging research focusing on the peers who serve as interventionists in these arrangements. Effective peers for this intervention often have higher levels of empathy, as well as a greater openness towards ASD (Laghi et al., 2018). Carter and colleagues (2001) also identified a significantly greater willingness to interact with people with disabilities in peers who volunteered, as well as those with more previous contact with students with disabilities.

Develop a Peer Support Plan: A peer support plan is individually designed to promote social and academic achievement and sets individualized student goals based on needs. Teachers collaborate with other school professionals to create the peer support plan. The peer support plan outlines the student's individual goal, as well as specific ways that peers can provide support in different kinds of classroom activities. Plans can include both social supports, such as modeling appropriate social skills or encouraging the student to talk with classmates, and academic supports. Academic supports include encouraging and praising engagement and participation, helping with class tasks, brainstorming, scribing, discussing, redirecting, or working jointly on tasks. The individualized plan is tailored to match needs of each student and defines the roles of both facilitating adults and specified peer support behaviors.

Train Peers: Prior to implementing the intervention, peers are oriented to the intervention and trained on the strategies they need to adapt class activities and instruction in action. This initial training involves an introduction to the intervention and rationale for the purpose of the peer support arrangement. Peers are oriented to their roles and the general goals of the intervention, and receive background information

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about each other and the focus student. Expectations inside and outside the classroom are discussed, as well as the specific support strategies outlined in the peer support plan. Modeling and role play are incorporated throughout the training and peers are given coaching and feedback on their implementation of the support strategies. Other topics of focus during this initial training include how to seek adult help, confidentiality and respectful language, and feedback.

Coach and Supervise Peers: Throughout the duration of the intervention, peers should be coached and supervised. In doing this, the adult transitions to the role of "hidden safety support." After each session, implementers meet with peers briefly (i.e., 5–10 min). If an observation or recording was done of the session, this can be reviewed with the peer. The teacher or paraprofessional responds to the peer's use of the goal-setting strategy, provides feedback on performance, and engages in any sort of role-play or modeling to remediate any difficulties observed. Further, this is an opportunity for peers to voice comments or concerns, and receive support from the adult. Data are collected throughout the intervention on the target behaviors outlined in the peer support plan and are reviewed with peers. Meetings are continued until a clear and consistent change in behavior (the target goal) is detected.

Peer support arrangements pose a practical and effective intervention to support students with autism in the natural environment. Following the steps outlined above, teachers and paraprofessionals can implement peer support arrangements in the general education classroom. By recruiting peers as interventionists in inclusive settings, PMIs, and peer support arrangements, provide increased opportunity for social interactions and generalization of skills.

Alyssa Balzarotti, MEd, RBT, and Christina Wood, MEd, BCBA, are Registered Behavior Technicians and Elise Settanni, MEd, BCBA, LBS, is a Behavior Analyst with Lehigh University Autism Services.
For information about Lehigh University Autism Services, please contact our office via phone at (610) 758-2441 or visit our website.

Christina Wood, MEd, BCBA

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academic skill is writing (your name or an essay), a social skill is greeting people (verbally or with a gesture), and a vocational skill is completing a task (sorting or filing). These are concrete skills that many students can learn; some more quickly than others. But these types of skills are the least of our worries. The "softer skills," or perhaps some of those intangible, seemingly difficult to quantify skills, are the ones that interfere with success for many students. Examples of such skills include, but are not limited to, interpersonal skills, work ethic, adaptability, dependability, cooperation, and problem solving. Once learned, these essential skills can be generalized across all environments (e.g., work, home, school, community), across all post-secondary education options, and can be utilized throughout the lifespan.

Below is an inventory of objectives that must be prioritized when preparing students for the transition to post-secondary education. This list is by no means exhaustive but is meant to provide suggestions and ideas.

Dependability and Accountability

- Follows a written schedule

- Inserts upcoming events/activities/tasks into digital calendar

- Makes and follows a to-do list (e.g., on phone, computer, paper)

- Meets deadlines / submits work on time

- Regularly checks and responds to texts, voicemails, and emails

Works Independently

- Remains engaged in activities and on task for increasing amounts of time

- Discriminates between when to work independently and when to depend on support (e.g., when receiving 1:1 support from a service provider). During independent work time, it may be appropriate to reach out to natural supports (e.g., teacher, peer)

Well-Being / Self-Manages Stress

- Exercises regularly

- Eats a well-balanced diet

- Gets a good night's sleep

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- Initiates and uses a problem-solving/ coping strategy (e.g., thought log, deep breathing, meditation app) to determine a solution for a concern

- Discriminates where and when certain behaviors are okay and not okay (e.g., okay to engage in self talk/non-contextual video scripting when alone, not okay when in the presence of others)

Manages Downtime

- Makes use of free time (e.g., studies, engages in novel activities, interacts with peers, joins a club / team, etc.)

- Increases repertoire of preferred activities, beyond iPad and apps

- Manages time before appointments (e.g., arrive on time to meetings, school, work, and other obligations.). If early, remains appropriately engaged without interrupting others

Social Awareness and Cooperation

- Analyzes a prior social situation and suggests things that could be done differently next time

- Makes and maintains friendships (e.g., sets and follows through with social plans with peers)

- Manages expectations. Understands when partial participation (e.g., observation) in a task is sufficient versus times when active engagement (e.g., responses

and initiations) is required

- Works on projects with others

Leadership / Community Service

- Organizes an event or activity (e.g., clothing drive, inclusion dance)

- Volunteers or gives back to the community (e.g., delivers Meals on Wheels)

Makes a Good Impression

- Wears appropriate attire for the occasion / situation

- Maintains personal hygiene

- Keeps personal belongings and work spaces clean and organized

- Arrives prepared

Advocacy

- Communicates needs and wants

- Seeks assistance / support

- Makes choices (e.g., selects classes and activities based on interests and preferences)

- Understands characteristics of autism and disclosure (by describing it to others). Makes decisions whether or not to disclose disability and identifies the pros and cons of disclosing in specific scenarios.

Whether the next environment after school is college, technical school, transition program or day habilitation, planning ahead and prioritizing skills that occur across multiple settings can ease the transition and lead to better outcomes.

Randy Horowitz, MSEd, SAS, is Associate Executive Director for Educational and Adult Services at Eden II. Any questions about the content of the article or the subject in general can be directed to Randy Horowitz at rhorowitz@eden2.org. Learn more about Eden II at www.eden2.org.

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colorful). This can feel confusing, overwhelming, painful, or pleasurable.

Sensory dysregulation can be a barrier to essential skills, such as paying attention, learning, emotional regulation, and behaving "appropriately." For example, if it is too loud, it is hard to focus. If you cannot focus, it is hard to learn. If you cannot learn, you feel anxious and frustrated. If you feel frustrated, you act frustrated and become dysregulated.

It can be difficult to explain sensory challenges, due to the specific nature of the sensory challenge(s), challenges in expressive language and communication,

and limitations in body awareness. Until I was a young adult, I assumed everyone processed sensory input in the same way. It was not until I read about sensory processing challenges that I had the words to articulate what I was feeling, and therefore get my needs met.

Many autistic people engage in self-stimulatory behavior to self-regulate. Stimming involves repetitive movements or vocalizations that increase sensory input and that many autistic people do to self-regulate. Some people have specific stims that communicate different states and serve different purposes. For example, rocking could be used to lessen anxiety due to sensory dysregulation or sadness, while hand flapping could be tied to excitement or anger. Observing stims can help staff to figure out how someone may feel. Unless a stim is harmful, staff should let it be. If it does not appear to help a person, other ways to regulate can be modeled or taught.

Sensory processing challenges can look like behavioral issues. For example, if a child is having a meltdown while waiting for his turn on the swing, perhaps he has a sensitive visual and/or vestibular system, and watching the swing go back and forth is making him feel extremely dysregulated. It is necessary to be informed about all eight of the sensory processing systems and how dysregulation looks and feels.

What may look like behavioral challenges can be understood more accurately, and autistic people can be better supported (Biel and Penske, 2018)

Staff Language and Communication

Word choices matter. They influence actions, expectations, clients' feelings, and how society views autism. For example, functioning labels should be eliminated (Prizant, 2012). "Low functioning" is often inaccurate, underestimates an individual's abilities, and dwindles parents' hope for

Krista Drapalik, BA

Erica Davis, LMSW

Jane Ann Worlock, MS Ed

Kristin Christodulu, PhD

that will be supporting all Autistic students with unique challenges in educational settings.

Prior to beginning the program, each Autism Resource Team is asked to provide one to two case examples of Autistic students in their program to focus on throughout the duration of the program. These students can either be a typical example of many students in the program or be a student who presents unique challenges to the staff working with them. The program is conducted over five training sessions spanning a duration of three months, with a total of 25 hours of training. The program utilizes two styles of instruction: didactic presentations and collaborative model application. Didactic presentations focus on topics such as characteristics of ASD, the PTR model, PBS principles, the FBA process, as well as strategies to create a behavior intervention plan. Case examples are utilized during model application for teams to problem solve and practice the skills learned during the didactic presentations, including defining target problem behaviors, collecting data on such behaviors, and implementing intervention

plans. These sessions provide school professionals an opportunity to hear perspectives from all members of their team and encourages open, honest discussions about every aspect of servicing Autistic students including personnel issues, leadership issues, policies and protocols, family issues, as well as systemic problems. Program facilitators provide real-time feedback and input to the school teams throughout the duration of the program.

The School Consultation Project at the University at Albany Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, funded by the New York State Education Department, has served 117 schools and approximately 1,170 school professionals in evidence-based interventions within New York State since 2008 and looks forward to doing so for many years to come.

Krista Drapalik, BA, is a Graduate Assistant, Erica Davis, LMSW, is a Training Program Coordinator, Jane Ann Worlock, MS Ed, is a Senior Trainer, and Kristin V. Christodulu, PhD, is Director at the University at Albany Center for Autism and Related Disabilities. For more information about the School Consultation Project, please contact Erica Davis at 518-442-5414 or ejdavis@albany.edu or visit our website.

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their child. "High functioning" may minimize the challenges and support needs. In either case, the autistic person is misunderstood. Instead, refer objectively to specific strengths, challenges, and types of support needs.

Additionally, it is important to be mindful of ambiguity in language. Most autistic people interpret words literally, often resulting in misunderstanding. For example, if you say, "Grab a seat." We may think, "You want me to pick up a chair? Why?" Instead, try "Sit on your chair." Saying something like "Sit still while you eat," can immediately cause panic. In our mind, we are not allowed to move at all.

Understanding Autistic Communication

Many autistic people communicate through echolalia. This is often a strategy to communicate intentionally and meaningfully. It is important to "play detective" and

decipher patterns and purposes for echoing until the client is understood (Prizant, 2022). Additionally, expressive language does not equal receptive language. Always assume comprehension, regardless of the person's language and communication complexity. Many people who are non-speaking or who communicate minimally through speech often understand much more than it may appear. It may be necessary to adjust language complexity, but comprehension abilities should not be underestimated.

Communicative Gaze (Eye Contact)

For many autistic people, it is challenging to look at people's faces when they are speaking. It can be difficult to listen, respond, and self-regulate while looking at others. Studies suggest that eye contact programs are not helpful and often increase anxiety (Hadjikhani et al., 2017). Instead, practice alternative ways with clients to show that they are attending, including vocalizing (e.g., uh huh), or brief glances.

Conclusion

Our knowledge about autism is constantly evolving. Misinformation and old myths are being put to rest, as autistic people share new insights based on research and their life stories. In order to best support autistic people, it is necessary to adapt current practices, and abandon ineffective and harmful practices, to fit what we now know about autism. I have addressed only a few aspects of common practices of concern. It is essential that we continue to monitor research and listen to autistic voices and to be vigilant about further changes that may be needed.

If you are interested in the training, contact Rebecca Rosenzweig at Rebecca.rosenzweig@gmail.com.

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Dual enrollment, a.k.a., concurrent enrollment, or pathways program invites those students who remain eligible for special education services to refrain from accepting their high school diploma and instead, opt to attain their social, emotional, and independent living goals while earning their high school and college credits. Postsecondary transition programs are highly specialized instructional packages typically supported by three distinct pillars: academics, vocation and employment, and community/independent living. Each pillar is individualized to meet the needs of each student via their precise stage of developmental readiness (Hart, Grigal, & Weir, 2010; Neubert & Redd, 2008; Hendrickson et al., 2017). In fact, many transition programs offer students an opportunity to earn college credit(s) that can be transferred to another academic institution of their choosing.

What sets postsecondary transition programs apart is their provision of well-specialized networks of support on a rich and diversified college campus essential for promoting skill acquisition and generalization. Many students on the spectrum have led restrictive and insular lives. Unlike their neurotypical peers who gained much of their knowledge through peer engagement in naturalistic settings, students on the spectrum were oftentimes socially excluded due to their needs and eccentricities. Thus, there is no guarantee that the skills learned in previous settings can be organically applied and generalized across a range of individuals, environments, and circumstances.

"Hello, my name is Carly. I am currently a student enrolled in a transition program. I love to draw, I am extremely artistic, and I hope to use my talents in computer science so I can help make video games. Before I came to college, I overcame a lot of challenges involving Autism. During my elementary, middle, and high school years I had difficulties that might relate to Autism. Elementary school was challenging for me. I had trouble expressing myself, my temper, and I had a hard time reading. I would often cry, get loud and yell at people and that was not the best way to deal with it.

During my time in middle school, I worked on improving my reading skills. But I started to realize I had anxiety issues. I started doing things to improve my reading skills like reading for someone and doing activities online. It was a little challenging when doing online activities and I had trouble at times, but it later proved to be worth it. I got my black belt in karate and I was recognized as being Gifted in art class. However, something I didn't like kept happening. My anxiety was often overwhelming me in class. This made it difficult to get work done at times. Despite my issues, I started to learn more about myself.

When I was in high school, my anxiety increased. As I went through my high school years, I got better at reading but my
anxiety took a turn for the worse. I tried taking medicine to help me control it, but one type made me even more stressed out. It took a long time to find the right medicine to help me. My classes were getting more difficult, my stress increased, and my social interactions started getting worse. It wasn't until my senior year of high school that I became aware that I had something called Autism. I have been going to see the school psychologist not just to learn more about Autism, but to find ways on how to control my emotions."

Discussion

By nature of their autism, many will encounter fewer opportunities for social engagement, postsecondary academics, and vocational advancement. Many were educated in smaller and more specialized classrooms that typically reduced, if not removed the aversive and/or demands that fueled their frustration. Consequently, few students were reintroduced to these same stressors and triggers that elicited their emotionality. Perhaps the most compelling offering that a postsecondary transition program can provide is helping a student learn to manage their emotions, sit in the uncomfortable, and accept the unpleasant. All while learning to independently navigate their schedule and manage their course work, submission dates, and work experiences. Conversely, postsecondary transition teams will work with campus staff and faculty to provide them with understanding, teaching strategies, reassurance, and encouragement.

Lessons Learned

"My time in high school, middle school, and elementary school may have been challenging, but I got through despite the obstacles. I really need to work on controlling my temper and my emotions. I take special medicines now to help me to keep my emotions under control. I also have plenty of people to talk to about Autism. I also have my parents to turn to for advice about this sort of thing. I am hoping that if I can know more about Autism, I can use that to my advantage. I have learned an important lesson from this: having Autism can't define who you are, it is just part of who you are. I am hoping to learn more about this disorder so I can handle my emotions better. Right now, I am doing my best to work on my issues. One day I will be able to handle tricky emotions on my own, but until I can, I need to work with folks like Kara and Laura to help me manage. However, I recently learned that there are good things that can come out of having Autism. Like being able to see things differently. I'm sure I will succeed in life, but for now, I just have to keep on learning so I can get closer to achieving my goals."

As a program chair for a postsecondary transition program, our team has recognized several crucial attributes that foster student success. These hallmarks include
motivation, self-determination, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and the ability to disclose. Transition programs are not only crucial for learners with a documented disability, they are pivotal for enhancing their overall life trajectory as self-determined, accountable, and future-thinking adults (Hendrickson et al., 2017).

Laura J. Albee, DSW, LCSW, BCBA, LBA, is the Program Chair for the Post University Pathways Program. She is a part time faculty instructor at Southern Connecticut State University's (SCSU) Department of Social Work. Carly Savanna Hodorski is a University Pathways Student at Post University.

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at both the organizational and the individual provider level report greater success than those who do not have clear implementation plans (Fixsen et al., 2007). Our statewide data indicate a need for improvement in setting the context for successful implementation through improving implementation climate and leadership, trainer and provider EBP knowledge, and increasing communities of practice or networks to support for EBP training and use. CAPTAIN has utilized data to promote improvements in knowledge, leadership support and networks, and the encouraging outcomes suggest several policy and practice implications.

Support is needed at the organizational level to set the context for successful EBP implementation. Educational systems need to improve the resources, supports and recognition provided to facilitate high quality EBP use. Training is required for leaders at all levels to increase knowledge of implementation and improvement sciences and to understand the change process and the supports required for sustainment of quality EBP use. Simply sending educators to workshops or trainings will not translate into better practices. Educators require training accompanied by ongoing coaching and support from an individual knowledgeable about EBP and recognition and support from their leaders. Technical assistance and training providers should be hired based on their knowledge and expertise with the EBP rather than overall years of experience or job position. Communities of practice can facilitate social networks which provide advice and support to both trainers and educators implementing EBP. These networks can improve high quality EBP use, better coaching and training, and improve teacher attitudes toward EBP which, when accompanied by access

to high quality training and coaching, improves EBP fidelity and frequency of use. Schools require a stronger focus on implementation climate. Currently educators receive very little incentive to go through the challenge of implementing complex EBP in classrooms.

Currently, many EBP implementation efforts are initiated reactively to solve a problem such as compliance violation or legal issues rather than *proactively* through needs assessments or improvement processes. Although event-driven reactivity provides opportunities to secure needed resources, it also makes EBP implementation susceptible to short-term planning and quick initiation, which can negatively impact quality and sustainment (Rubin et al., 2016). Proactive planning across levels, appropriate allocation of resources and involvement of an implementation plan for leaders, trainers and educators will facilitate effective use of EBP and improve student outcomes.

Jessica Suhrheinrich is an Associate Professor of Special Education at San Diego State University. Patricia Schetter is a project coordinator at the UC Davis MIND Institute. Melina Melgarejo is a Research Scientist at San Diego State University. Yue Yu is a post-doctoral fellow at the UC Davis MIND Institute. Elizabeth McGhee Hassrick is an Assistant Professor at the Drexel University, AJ Drexel Autism Institute. Aubyn Stahmer is a Professor of Psychology and Behavioral Science at the UC Davis MIND Institute. For more information, please contact jsuhrheinrich@sdsu.edu.

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autistics are deficient are precisely those that are not taught in schools.

This suggests both the nature of and the solution to such challenges: autistics, regardless of cognitive intelligence or academic talent, need to be instructed in these areas, which must become as integral a part of their education as any academic subject. Also, other non-school deficits that may occur in individual autistics need to be identified and dealt with as appropriate. Going even further, some of these may turn out to be shared challenges that have yet to be identified, let alone recognized, for large numbers of autistics.

Powerful Motivators

I have long believed that the specialized interests of an autistic person constitute what is probably the most powerful motivational tool for education in existence anywhere. Consequently, these intense and focused interests, rather than being discouraged as they were during the early

history of autism, need to be capitalized on as much as possible. This is especially true if the interest is one that can lead to a profession or occupation, or to more advanced academic studies. Given the difficulty that so many autistics encounter with finding employment, these interests often constitute the best if not the only hope for gainful employment and even a productive and rewarding career that they have.

With many autistics, however, the interest, impressive though attainments in it may be, is of little or no practical value apart from its own sake. In such cases, though, it can be used as a motivational tool in educational settings. A simple example involves a child with a strong interest in trains – a common autistic interest if there ever was one! For such an individual, math examples can be presented using trains, which can also be used for assigned problems. The same can be done with science, using trains to illustrate mechanical principles and even the operation of an engine. It can also be done for history, explaining the role that railroads played in the settlement of the American frontier, as well as other

examples. The use of such, if nothing else, may make for the student more palatable a subject in which they would otherwise have little or no interest, and thereby help motivate them to learn it. In some cases, this exposure to other material might even result in their developing a new interest – a truly positive outcome indeed.

In cases where the interest is of dubious value, it may nevertheless entail skills that can be of use in more productive pursuits. For example, having an extensive knowledge of trivia that is of no practical use implies an immense capacity for factual knowledge. If such an ability can be generalized to a field of greater importance or practical value, it can lead to academic and perhaps subsequently to employment success.

In my own experience, I was always good at math, but not particularly interested in it until I learned of its use in electronics and physics (both of which were special interests), after which I became a "math fiend" and devoured the advanced courses which I needed to become an engineer. Clearly, the road to educational and employment success for autistics, when

attainable, often begins with their specialized interests.

The Value of Education

The importance of education has long been observed to lie not merely in the specific knowledge and skills that are acquired, but in the development of the mind to address the numerous and diverse challenges that the student will subsequently face in life. In other words, the subjects that are taught in school may not be of much (if any) significance to a person's life, but the process of learning them will impart ways of thinking that may later be of immense value. This should, we hope, be as true for autistics as for the typical population. While the fundamental goals may be the same for everyone, the path towards reaching them will vary greatly among individuals. This is especially true for those on the autism spectrum.

Karl Wittig, PE, is Advisory Board Chair for Aspies for Social Success (AFSS). Karl may be contacted at kwittig@earthlink.net.

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