INNOVATIONS IN EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH ASD AT THE TEACCH AUTISM PROGRAM

Mark Klinger, Associate Professor Rehabilitation Counseling
Glenna Osborne, Assistant Director Supported Employment
Joanna Mussey, Posdoctoral Fellow
Mike Chapman, Director Supported Employment
UNC TEACCH Autism Program

- Started in 1972.
- Part of the UNC School of Medicine and NC AHEC Program.
- 7 Regional Centers providing lifespan diagnostic & intervention services.
- 2 Supported Employment Programs serving 300 individuals with ASD.
- A residential facility.
- A research program.
Changing Prevalence of ASD

- When TEACCH was created in 1972, the rate of ASD was 1 in 2,500.
- 2002: 1 in 150.
- 2006: 1 in 110.
- 2008: 1 in 88.
- 2010: 1 in 68.
- 8 year olds in 2002 are now 20 years old.

ASD Prevalence per 1000 8-year old Children

ADDM: Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring
CDC, 2014
Increasing Rates of Adults with ASD

- Based on these estimates, we will see a 123% increase in demand for adult services for individuals with ASD in the next 6 years.

- Cimera and Cowan (2009) reported that the number of individuals with ASD using Vocational Rehabilitation services rose a dramatic 121% from 2002 to 2006.
Whole Person View

- What you do for a living
- Where and how you live (urban/suburban/rural)
- Membership in religious/community organizations
- Friends or acquaintances
- Marital status and/or nuclear family
Postsecondary Education and Employment (NLTS2 Study; Shattuck et al., 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Training</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or 4 Year College</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Employment</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Activities</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Full-Time Employment (21-25 Year Olds)

(NLTS2 Study; Roux et al., 2013)
Young adults with ASD without an intellectual disability are three times more likely to have no daytime activities compared to adults with ASD who have an intellectual disability.

Taylor & Seltzer, 2011
ASD Challenges to Successful Adulthood

- **Learning Styles (Organization/Attention):**
  - Need specific and detailed expectations.
  - Need organized environment to improve accuracy and productivity.

- **Social Skills:**
  - Difficulties understanding the perspective or “theory of mind” of colleagues can lead to social “faux pas” in the work or college setting.

- **Emotion Regulation:**
  - High anxiety can lead to poor emotion regulation.
  - Sensory processing difficulties can lead to emotional outbursts.
Four Innovative Transition to Employment Programs at TEACCH

- **T-TAP**
  - Assessment instrument to measure transition readiness.

- **Project SEARCH**
  - High school transition to employment program for those with ASD and ID

- **T-STEP**
  - High school transition to employment program for those with ASD but not ID

- **UA-ACTS**
  - College transition and support program for those with ASD but not ID
TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile
What is the TTAP

- Comprehensive tool to assess individuals with autism
- Designed to look at goals most commonly needed in adult life
- Has both a Formal and Informal assessment section.
- Meant to be used over the life of the individual.
The Assessment Scales

- A Direct Observation
- Two Interview Scales
  - Family/Home and
  - School/Work
The Assessment Scales

- Focus on six functional/transition areas
  - Vocational skills
  - Vocational behaviors
  - Independent functioning
  - Leisure skills
  - Functional Communication
  - Interpersonal Behavior
Home Scale – Vocational Behavior

- Works Independently
- Asks for Help When Needed
- Relations With Authority/Accepts Supervision
- Respect for Property, Rules, and Regulations
- New Tasks
- Delayed Instructions
- Tolerates Interruptions

- Adjusts to Changes in Routine
- Maintenance of Own Area and Possessions
- Mobility During Tasks
- Working in Proximity to Others
- Distracted by TV, Computer, or Favored Materials
Direct Scale – Vocational Skills

- Sorting
- Correcting Sorting Errors
- Matching to Jig
- Matching/Sorting Colors
- Sorting and Collating
- Uses One-to-One Correspondence to Complete 3-Step Task

- Travel Kit Assembly
- Simple and Sophisticated Alphabetizing
- Measuring with Ruler
- Filing by Number
- Measuring with Cups and Spoons
- Typing
Travel Kit
Travel Kit with Photos
Measuring
Measuring with Photos
Follows Schedule
Dart Board
Written Instructions
TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile
Informal Assessment
Expanding the Use of the TTAP

- Formal section provides a basis to start from.
- Formal section only assesses a small subset of skills.
- Best Practices show that in order for transition to be effective, need to use both Formal and Informal Measures.
Cumulative Record of Skills (CRS)

- Skills on CRS are those found through the TEACCH Supported Employment Program to lead to positive transition outcomes.
- Used to track overall measurement of skills assessed throughout the informal assessment process.
- Helps with identifying goals to be assessed.
- Can use for short or longer assessments.
CUMULATIVE RECORD OF SKILLS (CRS)

- Areas 1-5 Vocational Skills
  - Vocational Skills – Clerical, Domestic, Warehouse/Stocking, Library, Landscaping/Gardening

- Areas 6-12 Other Adult Domains
  - Mobility, Leisure Skills, Vocational Behaviors, Communication, Interpersonal, Independent Functioning and Environmental Factors
1. **Vocational Skill – Warehouse/Stocking**: Make sure to list the locations where each item was assessed. If more than one location is used, you may need to use a separate sheet for each location. Make a note of the environmental differences or similarities between each location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Setting and Structure</th>
<th>Emerge</th>
<th>Setting and Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inventory:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify products</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record on proper sheet</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Locating items in a store or warehouse</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Can the individual fill an order or use a list to gather items.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Putting items away in a store or large facility</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Blocking (stacking item on back of shelf)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fronting (Bring items to front of shelf to make it look full)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lifting:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lift 10 pounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lift 20 pounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lift 30 pounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lift 40 or more pounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do they use proper technique?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Labeling/Pricing:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Check to make sure price and label are correct an match</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stocking/Stacking:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Check to make sure items are put in the correct place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do the do if there is no space on the shelf or the item does not have a matching on currently on the shelf?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Packaging</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assembling</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Taping and Mailing:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Boxes for delivery</td>
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</table>
1. **Vocational Behaviors** – These correspond to the issues related to length of day, ability to attend to details and ability to focus for extended periods of time. Please note the various locations and what was observed. Please list anything that is relevant to the individual that may hinder or improve the ability to work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Setting and Structure</th>
<th>Emerge</th>
<th>Setting and Structure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stamina:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Works at a steady, fast pace for 10 minutes,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• for 20 minutes,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• for 30 minutes,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• for 1 hour,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• for 1½ hours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In “comments” section for each passing score, note tasks that student completes at this pace.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>On task ability:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stays on task with supervisor or coach in close proximity,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stays on task with coach across room,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stays on task with coach in next room.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In “comments” section, note number of minutes and tasks or job.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transitions within tasks (stationary vs. mobile):</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Completes multi-step tasks that do not require movement (stationary) consistently without hesitation or repetitious movement,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Completes multi-step tasks that require movement within a small area (20 sq.ft.) consistently without hesitation or repetitious movement,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Completes multi-step tasks that require movement within a large room (100 sq.ft.) without hesitation or repetitious movement,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Completes tasks requiring movement from room to room within hesitation or repetitious movement. Note tasks or jobs in “comments” section.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions from task to task:</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Setting and Structure</td>
<td>Emerge</td>
<td>Setting and Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Makes at least one transition between tasks without personal prompt,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Makes at least 3 transitions between tasks without personal prompt,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Makes all transitions from one task to the next during work day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Note type of schedule that assists independent transition.</td>
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</table>

| Response to Corrections:                                                                                                  |      |                       |        |                       |
| • Accepts correction at planned time (on schedule or work system) with written or picture cue,                           |      |                       |        |                       |
| • Accepts correction at planned time (on schedule or work system) with verbal/ personal cue,                             |      |                       |        |                       |
| • Accepts correction at unplanned time in midst of task with written or picture cue,                                     |      |                       |        |                       |
| • Accepts correction at unplanned time in midst of task with verbal/ personal cue. Note job or tasks in “comments” section. |      |                       |        |                       |

| Self-Calming Strategies:                                                                                                  |      |                       |        |                       |
| • Responds to visual cue from supervisor to remove self from stressful situation and engage in pre-established self-calming strategy, |      |                       |        |                       |
| • Responds to verbal cue from supervisor to remove self from stressful situation and engage in pre-established self-calming strategy, |      |                       |        |                       |
| • Independently removes self from stressful situation and engages in self-calming strategy.                                |      |                       |        |                       |
| In “comments” section, identify the self-calming techniques.                                                             |      |                       |        |                       |
Cumulative Record of Skills (CRS)

- Provides a foundation for:
  - Identifying skills that can be taught across settings
  - Documenting competence and accommodations
  - Analysis of performance across settings
  - Tracking progress toward transition outcomes
DEVELOPMENT OF A PROJECT SEARCH AUTISM AUGMENTATION PACKAGE

Glenna Osborne, UNC TEACCH Autism Program
Amie Duncan, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center
Jerry Philip, New York Collaborates for Autism
Brandi Pittman, High Point Regional UNC Health System
Project SEARCH was founded in 1995 by Erin J. Riehle, Nurse Administrator at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital in collaboration with Susie Rutkowski of Great Oaks Career Campus.

- One school year
- 10-12 students with a variety of intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Certified tutor and job coaches
- Immersed in host business culture
- Rotations through unpaid internships with continual feedback
- Outcome of employment in the community
NYCA-FUNDED ‘AUTISM AUGMENTATION PACKAGE’

- Cornell University and NYCA
- Virginia Commonwealth University
- University of North Carolina TEACCH Autism Program
- Project SEARCH
- University of Cincinnati UCEDD
GOAL

- Recent data analyzed across over 200 Project SEARCH sites shows that individuals with ASD are less likely to be employed after participating in PS than individuals with other DDs.
- Implement and evaluate an established vocational intervention for transition-aged youth with developmental disabilities in their last year of high school (i.e., Project SEARCH) with autism specific supports and resources in order to increase rates of employment in youth with ASD.
SPECIFIC AIMS

- Determine whether Project SEARCH with a cohesive ASD augmentation package (ASD-AP) leads to increased employment in youth with ASD as compared to the traditional Project SEARCH model.
- Refine the ASD-AP and assess the feasibility of integrating it into the Project SEARCH model by implementing it and modifying it at two ASD-only sites across 2 years.
The Project SEARCH sites at NYCA, VCU, and UNC TEACCH build on the Project SEARCH model and utilize a range of assessments, curriculums, and supports that incorporate empirically based, best-practice strategies for students who have ASD, which increase skill acquisition and maintenance.

- **NYCA** → Utilizes an Enhanced Autism Curriculum to provide enhanced supports and structure to Project SEARCH model.
- **VCU** → Has regular consultations with a behavior analyst and utilizes structure and visual supports.
- **UNC TEACCH** → Assesses skills, plans and implements goals with the TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP) and utilizes Structured TEACCHing principles.
Before start of PS internships: Formal Section of the TTAP

- Home & School Work Scale
- Direct Observation Scale

Informal Assessment

- Present Level of Functioning
  Recommendations for internship sites and goals at sites

Cumulative Record of Skills (CRS)
- To help Identify Skills

- Community Site Assessment Worksheet (CSAW)
  Pre Instruction

- Daily Accomplishment Chart (DAC)

- Community Site Assessment Worksheet (CSAW)
  Post Instruction

- Cumulative Record of Skills (CRS)
  To Record Skills

Annual IEP/ITP Meeting to prepare for new Transition Goals

- JOB and successful transition to other community sites and activities
STRUCTURED TEACCHING

- An approach for all ages, all functioning levels, all skills, all environments
- Goal: Create environments that promote independence
- Understanding the characteristics of autism
  - Understanding strengths and interests of each individual (Mesibov et al., 2005).
HOW DOES STRUCTURED TEACCHING WORK?

ASD Characteristics:

- Visual learner
- Focus on details
- Time and organizational problems
- Managing attention: engagement and disengagement

Structured TEACCHing:

- Visually clarifies information and expectations
- Provides organizational systems for time, space, problem-solving
- Decreases anxiety and increases flexibility
- Eases transitions
STRUCTURED TEACHING

- Physical Organization
- Individualized Schedule
STRUCTURED TEACCHING

- Work System
- Visual Structure of Materials
KEY DOMAINS TARGETED IN THE EAC

- Curriculum Domains – 4 Core Areas
  - Social & Communication Skills
  - Job Skills
  - Problem Solving Skills
  - Career & Life Skills

- Targeted across contexts
  - Training room
  - Job sites
  - Social opportunities
COMPONENTS OF THE EAC: PS COMPONENT ENHANCEMENT TOOLS

- *Project SEARCH Program Component Enhancements* refers to enhancements to timelines, procedures, and templates of existing Project SEARCH toolkit components that support EAC’s goal of promoting long-term independence in the workplace for individuals with autism.

- Examples: modified yearly calendar, BAC agenda guidelines, peer mentoring feedback forms, document repository, and web-based communication and collaboration tools
## COMPONENTS OF THE EAC: CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK – GOAL TARGETING AND PROGRESSION IN THE NATURAL TIMELINE OF A PS YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Key Event</th>
<th>Social/Communication</th>
<th>Career/Life Planning</th>
<th>Job Skills</th>
<th>Problem Solving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>Family/Team Meetings Business Advisory Council Meeting</td>
<td>About Me E mail account Greet peers</td>
<td>Interview skills Presentation skills</td>
<td>Follow schedule Computer literacy</td>
<td>Self-regulation Follow multi-step instructions asking for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>1st Rotation Begins Peer Mentoring Event</td>
<td>Appropriate email with peers/managers Respond to peers</td>
<td>Pre-Resume skills resource binder</td>
<td>Identify tasks completed at job</td>
<td>Set goals Identify personal challenges at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>BAC Meeting Employment Planning Meeting</td>
<td>Appropriate social interactions with Peer Mentors Take phone messages</td>
<td>Resume development Present About Me to new audiences Organize personal resources</td>
<td>Accurately report tasks learned at job site Build fluency in job skills</td>
<td>Track goals Deal with downtime Troubleshoot challenges at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep</td>
<td>End of 1st Rotation Workshop Week</td>
<td>Understand how to leave a job Social vs. information questions</td>
<td>Resignation letters Travel training Identify job task preferences</td>
<td>Update resumes Identify new skills acquired</td>
<td>Understand unclear instructions Use supports/strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>2nd Rotation Begins BAC Meeting</td>
<td>Update About Me Ask social questions</td>
<td>Reference letters Identify preferred work environments Personal schedules vs. work schedules</td>
<td>Search for jobs with preferred tasks/roles Build individual job skills</td>
<td>Understand feedback Evaluate progress on goals Ask for clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Mid-year review Group social event</td>
<td>Identify professional relationships Respond to social questions</td>
<td>Ask for structure Self-advocacy Goals for graduation</td>
<td>Search for convenient, preferred employers Understand the job application process</td>
<td>Accept feedback Update/revise goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMPONENTS OF THE EAC: CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK – GOAL TARGETING AND PROGRESSION IN THE NATURAL TIMELINE OF A PS YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain/ Key Area</th>
<th>Career and Life Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Event Link</td>
<td>Parent Open House, Parent Meetings, Rotation s Begin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>1. Intern will follow an established daily routine using an appropriate schedule with verbal prompting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Intern will be able to independently navigate Google Docs or similar word processing program.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Intern will be able to independently enter data in a spreadsheet, using a task analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Intern will be able to identify and record daily goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Intern will be able to organize, label, and match work areas using visual instructions/work systems/task analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Intern will develop a Resource Binder using a visual model and task analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Intern will maintain a Resource Binder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>1. After a week of supported instruction, intern will follow either posted schedule or group schedule with verbal prompting, on 5 consecutive days. Progress is recorded on a daily checklist. See Schedule Assessment (CL1).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. When given (emailed or written) instructions to create a document, intern will be able to independently create, spellcheck, and save document using word processing software. Independence is achieved when intern meets criteria for Independent for all items on Word Processing Rubric (CL2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. When given a task analysis, intern will independently complete each task specified. Mastery will be assessed by production of the spreadsheet, as well teacher ratings on the Spreadsheet Assessment (CL3).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Intern will complete Daily Goals Assessment either on the computer or by hand, with only verbal prompting to begin the activity (CL4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. When given either picture or written instructions (CL5), intern will be able to organize, label and match several office supplies. Mastery will be assessed via checklist on Organizing Office Supplies Assessment (CL5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Intern’s resource binder will be evaluated using Resource Binder Rubric. Mastery is achieved when all areas rated meet criteria for Independent (CL6).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standards

Learning Standards for Career Development and Occupational Studies: 1, 2, 3a
Project SEARCH Course of Study: 4.1.1, 4.1.25.1.5, 5.1.6, 2.1.4, 11.1.1, 10.1.3
WHERE WE ARE NOW....

- Current progress on PS ASD-AP
  - Revised Rubric
  - TTAP Training
  - Plans for integration of EAC content into the TTAP
  - Development of a repository of curriculum materials and supports
  - Development of a Structured TEACCHing “hands-on” training for PS
TEACCH SCHOOL TRANSITION TO EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (T-STEP):

PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT SKILLS IN HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH WITH ASD

Mark Klinger, Ph.D., Glenna Osborne, M.Ed., Laura Klinger, Ph.D., Tamara Dawkins, Ph.D.
Transition needs of High School Students with ASD

- A focus on traditional academic goals leaves minimal opportunities for vocational training in school settings.

- Growing evidence that individuals with ASD need vocational supports.

- School systems are struggling to meet the transition needs of young adults with ASD who are often unemployed after leaving high school.
T-STEP

Group intervention for high school students with ASD enrolled in last 2 years of:
- occupational track
- regular diploma curriculum track

18 session intervention
- Classroom-based group didactic sessions
- Skill-practice opportunities
- Weekly school employment experiences
Evidence-Based Practice

- Structured Work Systems (Schedules)
- Visual Supports
- Video Modeling
- Social Narratives
- Naturalistic Intervention
- Reinforcement

T-STEP

Evidence-Based Practices from Hume & Odom, 2011
T-STEP Modules

Executive Function
- Approaching Tasks in an Organized Manner
- Time Management and Flexibility

Social Skills
- Social Niceties
- Asking for Help

Emotion Regulation
- Coping with Stress
- Accepting Corrective Feedback
Session 13 Didactic: Accepting Corrective Feedback

Setting:

Group (Students, Transition Facilitator, TEACCH Therapist)

Learning Objective:

OBJECTIVE #2: WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECEIVE AND USE CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

- **Materials, Narratives and Worksheets:**
  - “Why is it Important to Receive and Use Corrective Feedback?”

- **Goals:**
  - Help students identify times when they have received corrective feedback from someone

- **Activities:**
  - Students will complete the worksheet and write and discuss times when they have received corrective feedback
Social Narrative: Why is it Important to Listen to Feedback Even if it Upsets you?

- Sometimes people do not like being told that they need to change the way they are doing something. They say things such as, “it feels bad” or “I don’t like it”, or “I like to be right”. People think being told that they need to change the way they are working means there is something “wrong” or “bad” about something they did or even who they are.

- THINK, teachers and bosses give you advice because they believe that you can make the change and improve your school work or your job. They are trying to help you. Be POSITIVE and remember that they are trying to help you.
T-STEP Research Project

- Conduct a pilot study of the T-STEP to:
  - test the effectiveness of the intervention
  - obtain preliminary data to support a randomized clinical trial (RCT).
TEACCH Partnership with Schools

- Identify 1-2 teachers per school
  - Receive training in the T-STEP during the 1st year of the grant and
  - Co-lead sessions with a TEACCH interventionist during the second year.

- Enroll approximately 30 adolescents
  - 15 enrolled in T-STEP (Fall 2015)
  - 15 waitlist (Fall 2015), enrolled in T-STEP (Spring 2016)

- Identify potential school-based employment sites and school personnel supervisors for students to practice the job skills they are learning through the T-STEP sessions.
Outcome Measures

- Becker Work Adjustment Profile (BWAP)
  - 63 item Pencil and Paper Questionnaire
  - Rated by classroom teacher, employment supervisor at 3 time points

- Employee Evaluation
  - Paper survey
  - Rated by employee supervisor pre and post T-STEP intervention participation
Expected Outcomes in the Work Setting

» Compared to waitlist, intervention participants will demonstrate:

» Increased organization and on-task behavior

» Increased appropriate job-related social skills behaviors (e.g., asking for help when needed)

» Improved coping behaviors (e.g., fewer signs of frustration and more appropriate responding to corrective feedback)

» Improved work-related skills as rated by supervisors & teachers on the Becker Work Adjustment Profile
Transitioning to College with ASD

Joanna L. Mussey, Ph.D.
Laura Grofer Klinger, Ph.D.
Mark R. Klinger, Ph.D.
Sarah O’Kelley, Ph.D.
Higher Education & ASD

“...there is evidence that a potentially significant number of students in college fall on the autism spectrum. However, many brilliant students find college to be a formidable mixture of overwhelming sights and sounds, full of change and disruption. They quit, never to return, and a vast resource of intellect and unique insight is thus lost.” Dawn Prince-Hughes (2003)

Universities face new challenges supporting students with ASD who have the intellectual capacity for college, but need specific social and cognitive supports (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar 2008)
High School vs. College Accommodations

- At the college level, the Office of Disability Services (ODS) determines eligibility (there is no IEP).
- Common ODS accommodations include:
  - Extended time for tests and quizzes
  - Reduced distraction environment for exams
  - Note-taker for lecture based classes
- The responsibility for securing ODS accommodations rests on the student, not the faculty or parents.
- While meeting academic support needs, these accommodations do not meet the social-communication and daily living skill needs faced by students with ASD.
ASD Challenges to Successful Adulthood

- **Learning Styles (Organization/Attention):**
  - Need specific and detailed expectations.
  - Need organized environment to improve accuracy and productivity.

- **Social Skills:**
  - Difficulties understanding the perspective or “theory of mind” of colleagues can lead to social “faux pas” in the work or college setting.

- **Emotion Regulation:**
  - High anxiety can lead to poor emotion regulation.
  - Sensory processing difficulties can lead to emotional outbursts.
ASD in the Classroom

A history class is focusing on the civil war. John comes in and sits next to Chuck, whom he does not know very well and initiates conversation about the minute details of a civil war battle. John seems unaware that Chuck is somewhat uncomfortable and uninterested in this topic. After the professor reviews several major battles of the civil war, he asks if there are any questions. John immediately stands up and corrects the professors details about a particular battle that was discussed. Other students in class look uncomfortable, roll their eyes, and some snicker. John feels stupid and unaccepted by his peers. He does not attend any more history classes during the semester and receives a failing grade.
Types of College Support Programs

- University-based support groups (often through the Office of Disability Services).
- University-based comprehensive programs that provide organization, academic, and social support (offered through campus autism clinics, disability services, education departments, psychology departments).
- External comprehensive programs. Often also include supervised living arrangements.
- University certificate programs for students with intellectual disabilities.
Support Program Examples

University of Alabama ASD College Transition & Support (UA-ACTS)

The College Program for Students with Asperger Syndrome

Laura Klinger, Ph.D. (Alabama) & Marc Ellison, Ed.D. (Marshall)
UA-ACTS Program Services Overview

- **Learning Styles/Organization**
  - Weekly individual sessions & study hall
  - Study skills/academics/class participation; executive functioning, daily living skills

- **Social Communication Skills**
  - Weekly individual sessions & bimonthly support group
  - Social aspects of college life necessary for college classroom success
  - Self-advocacy including appropriate use of campus resources

- **Emotion Regulation/Coping Skills**
  - Weekly individual sessions
  - Monitoring of psychological and emotional well-being

- **Campus Education & Outreach & Collaboration with Campus Academic Services**
  - Diversity workshops and training for instructors, housing personnel, advising personnel, and campus counselors.
Program Efficacy

- Enrolled 11 freshman with ASD receiving services through:
  - University of Alabama College Transition and Support (UA-ACTS)
  - The College Program at Marshall University
- Measured:
  - Adjustment to College
  - Emotional Adjustment (Anxiety, Depression)
  - Social Adjustment (Social Stress, Friendships)
  - Grade Point Average
Initial Findings

- **GPA**
  - Fall & spring semester GPAs similar
  - Average GPA in B- range

- **Anxiety**
  - Peaked at the end of the 1st semester
  - Lowest level at end of academic year

- **Adjustment to College/Life Satisfaction**
  - End of freshman year:
    - 73% indicated good adjustment
    - 82% reported feeling satisfied with their lives (12% ambivalent)
Predictors of College Success

Poor Social Motivation Predicts Lower Grade Point Average

Higher Anxiety Predicts Poorer Adaptation to College
Take Aways

- Overall, students in these support programs did well during their freshman year

- Important to:
  - Screen & target internalizing symptoms
  - Consider importance of social skills interventions to support academic success
  - Start preparations for college early by addressing skills to improve transition to independence
TEACCH Autism Program
Services Across the Lifespan

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