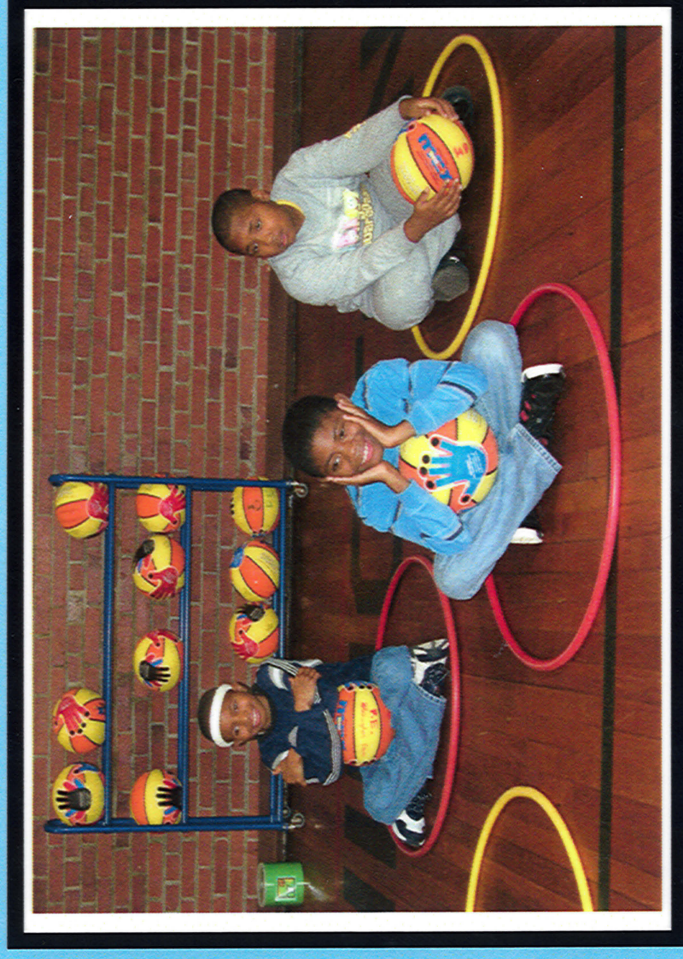


Tasks Galore



Making Groups Meaningful

Laurie Eckenrode

Pat Fennell

Kathy Hearsey

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Tasks Galore

Making Groups Meaningful

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Third Book In A Series

Acknowledgements

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Finally, we acknowledge our students. Nothing is more radiant than their smiles when they are having fun in a meaningful group. We hope the joy for what we do, the respect for those we teach, and the desires to help are evident in this book.

About the Authors

Laurie Eckenrode, Pat Fennell, and Kathy Hearsey are former teachers of students with special needs. Much of their work has been serving in different capacities for Division TEACCH. Laurie taught in an exemplary structured teaching classroom, which she developed, and which served as a TEACCH training model. She now uses this expertise in her work with the North Carolina State Infant Toddler Program. Pat served as a psychoeducational therapist with the Chapel Hill TEACCH Clinic. Kathy continues her work as a TEACCH therapist and was a former director of TEACCH's supported employment program. The three authors have extensively trained parents and professionals in structured teaching methodology and have won many awards for their achievements in the field of special education. Together, Laurie, Pat, and Kathy have 65 years of experience working with exceptional children and adults.

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INTRODUCTION

To negotiate the world independently, we need to function in situations where there are others. We take our turn in the grocery line, share space in the elevator, sit near others in the theatre, wait to use gym equipment, and so our day goes. By the time we enter kindergarten, we have learned many of the rules that govern group interactions. We are ready to be group learners. Playing and working with others have become satisfying parts of our lives.

On the other hand, if we are asked to participate without knowing the purpose of the group, would we be willing to sit still, remain near others, and be quiet? What if the rules that govern group interactions do not make sense to us? Would we know what turn taking is all about? What if we are asked to perform a task that our classmates know how to do, but we do not. Would group participation then be satisfying? We clarify many of these issues for students with special needs, especially those with autism spectrum disorders, by implementing within group settings

- structured teaching strategies,
- individual goals, and
- consistent visual routines.

The purpose of *Tasks Galore Making Groups Meaningful* is to give parents, teachers, and therapists the skills and confidence to set up group opportunities for their children. We demonstrate strategies to make groups meaningful to students and to reinforce positive feelings about group learning. The first three chapters describe how structured teaching strategies, consistent routines, and individualized educational goals apply to groups. The next four chapters discuss circle time, project-focused, movement, and music groups and include pictures of actual tasks used during these types of group activities. The final chapter puts all the ideas together for organizing a successful party. Throughout the book, pictures accompany the text, further illustrating the elements to consider when designing groups.

We believe that including group times for students with special needs is very important. Once students know what their roles are and what to expect in a group setting, usually they adopt the appropriate group behaviors. Making groups understandable to our students means they feel competent. They learn to take pleasure in groups, finding being around others enjoyable and fun. Playing and working with others become satisfying parts of their lives.

CHAPTER ONE

STRUCTURED TEACHING STRATEGIES GIVE MEANING TO GROUP LEARNING

Structured teaching strategies have proven helpful to students with autism spectrum disorders in teaching individual skills that they then use independently. When developing group activities, we use these same strategies that draw on the students' strengths of visual understanding and memory for routines. We search for visual and concrete ways to teach subtle and abstract skills associated with group learning. We organize learning situations for students with autism spectrum disorders around four aspects of structure:

1. physical structure to define the space;
2. schedules to sequence the daily activities;
3. work systems or to-do lists to outline what and how much is to be done, the concept of finished, and what comes next; and
4. visual structure to clarify how to approach the task.

We individualize these parts of structure to fit what each student understands.

Setting up group learning situations in visual ways and with procedures that become routines helps the student understand the purpose of the group. Each type of group situation will be slightly different, and, therefore, how the teacher, parent, or therapist structures the situation also will differ. What guides us in our designs is our ability to take the perspective of these students who understand best through what their eyes tell them. Whatever the group, we follow these structuring procedures on behalf of our students.

- When the students arrive at the place where the group activity takes place, we want the arrangement of the setting to define for them what will happen there (physical structure).
- We give them individualized visual information that tells them where to go (schedule cue).
- When the students take their places in the group, we want them to know what they are to do, whether they are making progress, and when they will be finished (work system).
- When the students work on a task, we want them to look at the pieces of the task and have a sense of what they are to do (visual organization), recognize the significant detail (visual clarity), and know how to sequence the steps (visual instructions).

We will illustrate how individualizing these parts of structure look in practice by using the group example of circle time.

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

The *physical structure* defines the space for the activity and clarifies where to sit and on what to focus. The students can look at the space and understand what is to happen there. The teacher's thoughts and planning behind the physical structure minimize distractions.



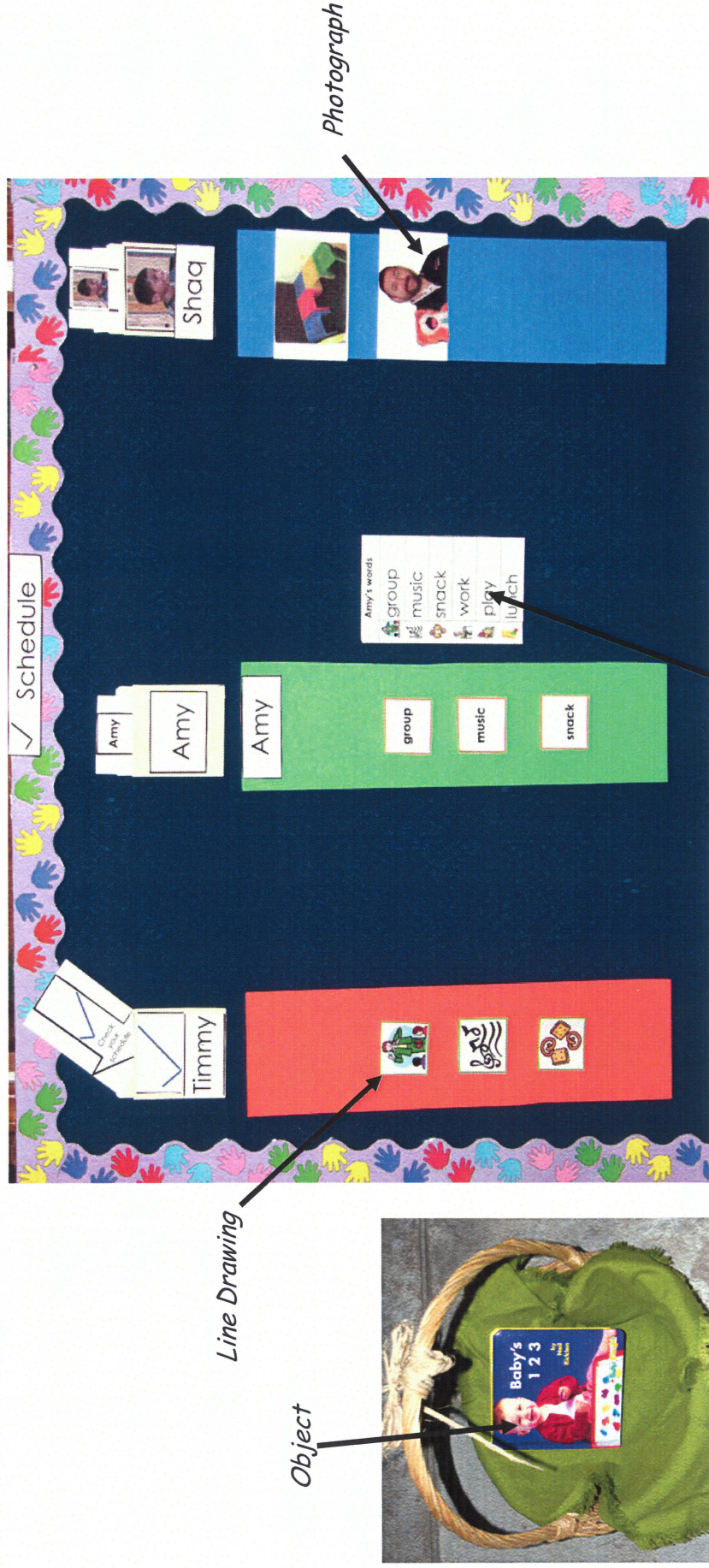
Seats face the chalkboard and the teacher sits at the top of the conical arrangement so the students' eyes are drawn to her.



Bookshelves provide boundaries for the activity space.

SCHEDULES

Individual *schedules* give students the sequence of their school activities. Students check their schedules and see cues that indicate to them, in an individualized way, that they are to go to a certain activity. Students might use an object, a line drawing, a written word, a photograph, or any other type of cue that is meaningful to them. What the different cues have in common is that they provide a visual way for the student to know where to go and what activity to expect.

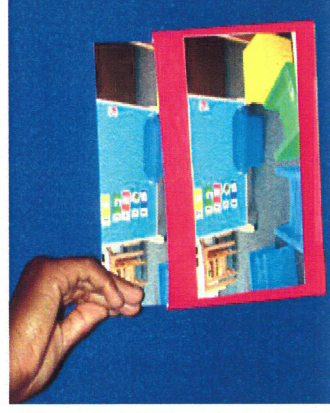


Dictionary defines written word with picture cue to help student comprehend his written schedule.

Some students know it is time to check their schedules when their teacher gives them a "check schedule" card. Using this visual cue as a guide, they locate their individual schedules in a classroom transition area. On the schedule, they find the visual cue that directs them to their next activity. In making the transition from their schedules to the activity area, students might carry their cues with them if they need help remembering where they are going. They place these cues into pockets or other specified locations in the area.



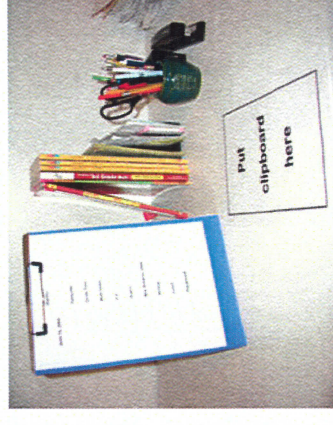
Student makes the transition to her schedule and places check schedule card in the pocket.



Placing a card in a pocket gives some students an initial reason to go to the correct area.



This student knows to go to circle time because an object, the book that he carries there, is associated with this activity.










A student who carries a written list schedule needs a routine place where he can put it once he gets to the area.

WORK SYSTEMS

Once the children arrive at the circle time area, they need to know what is going to happen there. A *work system* or to-do list provides this information in a visual way that a student can interpret and use.

The work system answers for the student

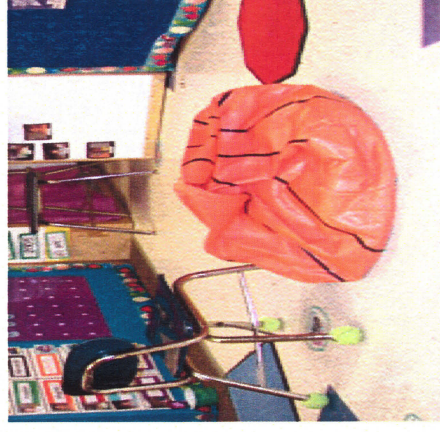
- What to do?
- How much to do?
- How do I know I am making progress and when I am finished?
- What happens next?

	Who is here today?	
	Songs	
	Lunch Choice	
	Time to read	
	Calendar	
	What is next?	

The work system can be one the teacher manipulates for the entire group.



On the other hand, an individual might best understand what to do if he has his own individual work system that can be held and manipulated.



The physical arrangement of the to-do tasks also can be arranged in a left-to-right order. This well-thought-out array of activities serves as a work system for some students.



Using objects as work system cues helps some students learn to anticipate the sequence of circle time:

- signing in - photograph on plastic block,
- greetings - basket of farm animals to pass out,
- song - maraca,
- lunch choice - plastic food,
- WHAT'S NEXT/play - fire truck.

VISUALLY STRUCTURED TASKS

Once students actually *see* the *visually structured tasks* introduced at circle time, they know what they are to do with the materials. Visual strategies include:

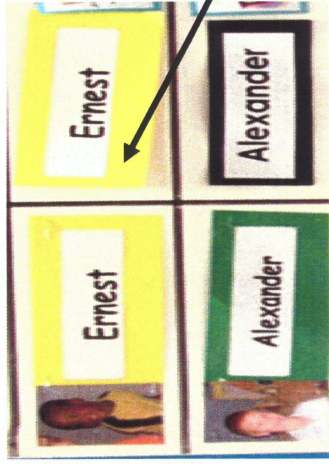
- visual organization, which arrays and contains the bits and pieces of the task;
- visual clarity, which highlights information that is significant to the task; and
- visual instructions, which give the sequence of the task.

With these techniques, we make the beginning and ending points of a task visually evident.

We individualize each student's part so that what he is to do is understandable and meaningful. The visual structure of the students' part of the task is individualized, as is what skill they are to accomplish. For example, during morning group, each child checks in at the "Who is here today?" board. How he or she checks in, however, depends on each child's skill level. The visual strategies used also are individualized according to what the child comprehends. A group activity, thus, becomes an avenue for teaching and reinforcing individualized goals.



Class sign-in board



Skill: Matches written name
Visual structure: When necessary, a color-coded background gives additional clarification of the match.



Skill: Spell name
Visual structure: Orange outlined box visually clarifies where to write.

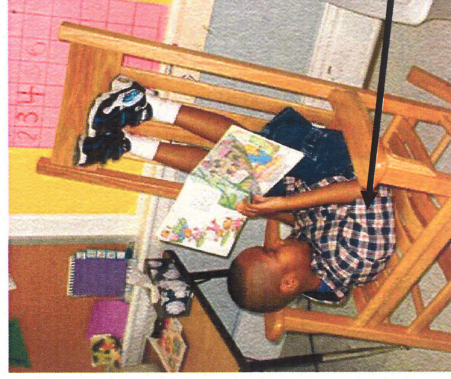


Skill: Matching picture
Visual structure: Container organizes where to place picture (attached to a block).



Skill: Match letter to spell name
Visual structure: Red boxes with matching letters clarify sequence to spell name.

Occasionally, there are group activities that address cognitive or language goals that may be too advanced for certain students. Another way we individualize, therefore, is deciding which students' levels match what activities. If a student is not yet ready to learn what is being taught in a group activity, we have that activity occur at the beginning or ending of the group time. That way this student can come later or leave earlier, so the activities done when he or she is participating in the group time are meaningful. What students do when they are not part of the group depends on students' needs. Some may need a break from intrusion and go to quiet play, some may need more activity and go for a walk, and some may be able to continue to work on skills and go to an independent or one-to-one work session. Sometimes, there are other students who may be ready to work on all the skills being concentrated on during group times, but they simply are unable to sit as long as the other students. These students may take a brief walk and return to group or may be assigned tasks during group that allow more movement.



Student takes a break from circle time.



All students participate in greetings during circle time.



Student leaves circle time when activities become too abstract and goes to independent work.

CHAPTER TWO

VISUALLY STRUCTURED ROUTINES MAKE GROUP EXPECTATIONS UNDERSTANDABLE

Many students with autism spectrum disorders have excellent memories for routines. We use this strength when setting up groups. Routines clarify for students how to take turns, what the expected behavior is, what finished means, and how to make transitions between classes.

TURN-TAKING ROUTINES

More than one person contributes to a shared group task. The first student only finishes his or her individual part, then waits and watches as others bring the entire task to completion. To participate in group-activities, students need to understand taking turns. We introduce visually structured routines in the hope of making the abstract concept of turn taking meaningful.



The visual instructions for calendar convey not only the tasks to be done, but also which student will do which task. Each student has a part in placing information on the calendar board.

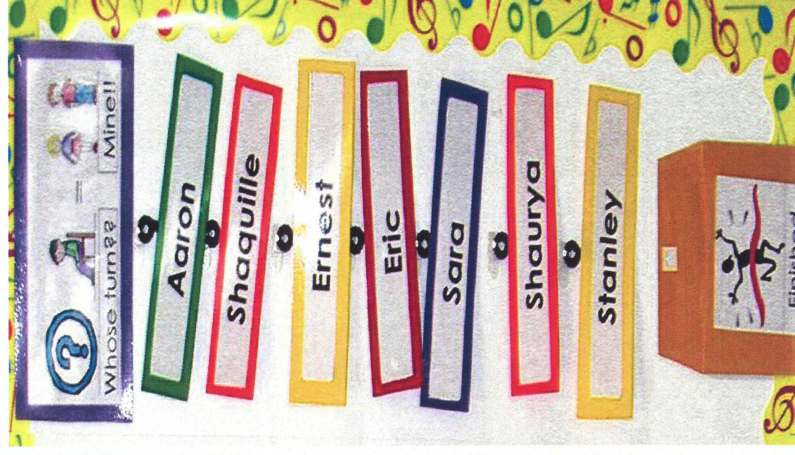


Student knows it is his turn to place the year on the calendar because his photo is beside the activity.

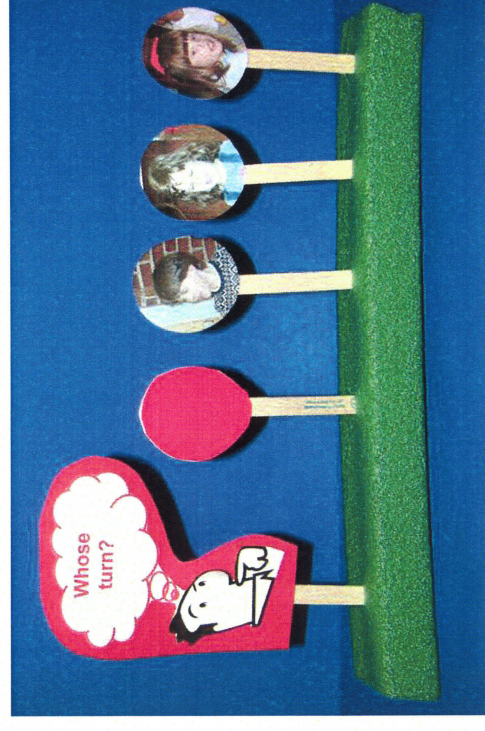
Some students might be able to understand taking turns with peers when their teacher posts a turn-taking board, which **visually clarifies** whose turn it is for each part of an activity. Some students understand the turn-taking concept when each student's name card is displayed. After each child has his turn, his name card disappears.



Teacher holds name cards that easily become to-do list of how many have turns. When all cards are gone, turn taking is finished for that activity. Because there is no set order, there is an element of surprise.



Name cards indicate the sequence of the students' turns, and pocket contains whose turns are finished for that activity.



The stick photographs indicate the sequence of the students' turns. Turning the photograph around indicates that a student's turn is finished.

Students need to understand the concept of turn taking in terms of not only when it is their turn to take concrete actions but, also, when it is their turn to talk. Holding a photo of the speaker (that has previously been used for teaching turn taking with concrete materials, such as taking turns in a board game) matched to the actual speaker or the use of a microphone highlights whose turn it is to speak.

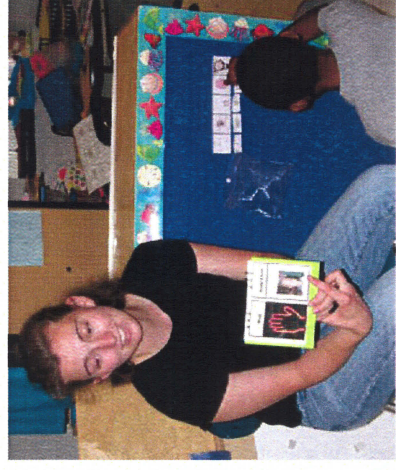


Pointing to her photo, the teacher clarifies for the student that it is her (teacher's) turn to speak.



A microphone is an engaging concrete cue that clarifies whose turn it is to talk.

Implicit in alternating turns is waiting for one's turn or waiting for a preferred activity. We use gestures, signs, and words, along with some visual indicator of waiting, to help teach this concept. We tie in the concept of waiting with why the child is waiting.



We can clarify the concept of wait by showing a picture that indicates "wait" and a picture of "whose turn."

APPROPRIATE GROUP BEHAVIOR ROUTINES

The four aspects of structured teaching strategies are routines that make groups meaningful. If students

1. can look at the setting and comprehend what kind of activity is to take place there (physical structure),
 2. know where they are to go (schedule),
 3. have a to-do list for group time (work system), and
 4. participate in unambiguous activities and turn-taking procedures (visually structured tasks),
- they typically behave appropriately during group times. The students participate eagerly because they see the progress that they are making as they finish one activity, put it away, and mark it off the to-do list. They usually stay seated and are watchful because, through routines and visual strategies, they recognize that, once an activity is completed, something will happen next.

By adapting group-learning environments, we further enhance the likelihood that appropriate behaviors will occur. We match students to an individualized type of seating, for example, if we know that the particular seat will help the student remember to stay seated during circle times.



For some students, a colored shaped mat on the floor clarifies where to sit.



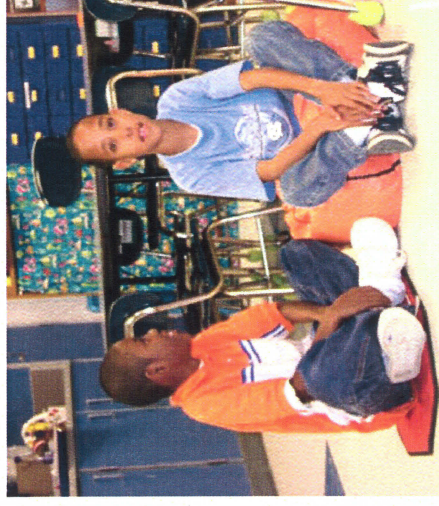
Some students might need the physical boundaries formed by the arms of a chair and/or the sensory feedback from a rocking chair or a beanbag chair.

We recognize the unique sensory needs of some of our students and make the necessary adaptations. Some students need the feedback of a sensory object when they are sitting or need to hold an object to help them keep their hands in their own space. We choose an object that does not interfere with the student's attention to the activity.



This student needs the sensory input of a beaded necklace to remain engaged in circle-time activities.

Routines that encourage suitable group behaviors can be fun. A teacher can use a verbal routine or even a nonsensical rhyme, such as "criss-cross, applesauce," each time he wants his students to sit properly and to respect each other's space. Once learned as a routine, it is easy for the teacher, who is leading the group, to say the rhyming phrase in the singsong voice as a reminder. We often state our directions in a singsong tone. We find that such a cadence draws the students' attention to the words because this tone is different from that used with other words. Caregivers can support their words with pictures of their students' sitting properly.



"Criss-Cross Applesauce"

Students can even enjoy learning what being quiet at group means. The abstract word, "quiet," can adopt concrete and visual meanings when a motor movement that the teacher models enthusiastically accompanies the word. Visual reminders of group rules can be designed for the teacher to show to the entire group or can be designed as individual reminders that can be easily given to the students when they need to remember the behavior.



The teacher is enthusiastically modeling the "shh" prompt by hunching her shoulders and covering her mouth.

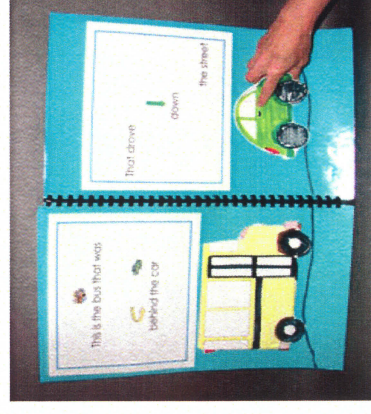


The picture of "quiet" helps the student remember this group expectation.

Group experiences often expect students to do much sitting, listening, and remaining quiet. Our groups are most effective if the students can more actively participate. The children need to be able to move about and manipulate objects as a routine part of their group participation.



Student moves from his seat to write the date on the board.



Student moves from her seat to manipulate pictures in the storybook.

In these ways, we implement procedures that become routines because they are used each day in similar situations. Procedures do not mean that the same activity must be done each day, or that the order of the activities must be the same, but the procedures do mean the activities follow certain forms. The child's uncertainty about the novel event is eased because the procedures are well known. Family members, too, can participate in circle group activities because students have learned the procedures well and, as a result, are less anxious about why there is an unexpected person at group.



Santa is a surprise visitor during circle time, but students remember their well-learned routines.



Mother and daughter at circle time

FINISH ROUTINES

Inserting the concept of completion into every activity is an essential routine on which students rely. It is so much easier to feel competent and stay attentive if know we are en route to being finished. Using mats that students retrieve and put away is a routine that provides clear beginning and ending points for group times and is a routine that can be used in a variety of settings. By generalizing classroom routines across settings, we bring a familiar procedure to a new place to make the novel seem familiar.



Students put away their mats when circle time is finished.



Students put away their basketballs when P.E. is finished.



Students put away their instruments when a song is finished.

TRANSITION ROUTINES

Many groups for our students require that they move outside of their classroom to another location. If we apply structured teaching strategies to these times, the students usually make the transitions easily.

When several students are making a transition from their classroom to another location at the same time, we establish routines or procedures for lining up or waiting.



In this classroom, students are assigned symbols each day at circle time, which correspond to where they should stand in the line.



Symbols are placed on floor near the door for lining up. Students stand on their symbols (in this case, a vehicle which is the monthly theme for this classroom).



In this classroom, the students line up on footprints that are color coded. Each student is assigned a color.

In the example above, the students use visual cues to show them where to wait. Some students require both physical and visual structure to help them understand waiting.

With these students, we might use "wait" chairs. As with all aspects of our classrooms, we individualize how each student is required to wait based on what he or she understands. While one child in a classroom might need a wait chair, another might also need a basket of wait toys that he can play with while waiting.



Classroom wait chairs



Toys to manipulate while waiting

When leaving the classroom to go to another location, it is essential that individual schedules tell the students what the activity will be so they know where they are going. Most of our students carry the object, symbol card, or written list in a folder or on a clipboard to help them remember where to go. Some students carry objects during their transitions to an out-of-classroom setting and then use that object in a group activity. Other students carry their picture card or their schedule to the group setting and find the designated place it belongs.

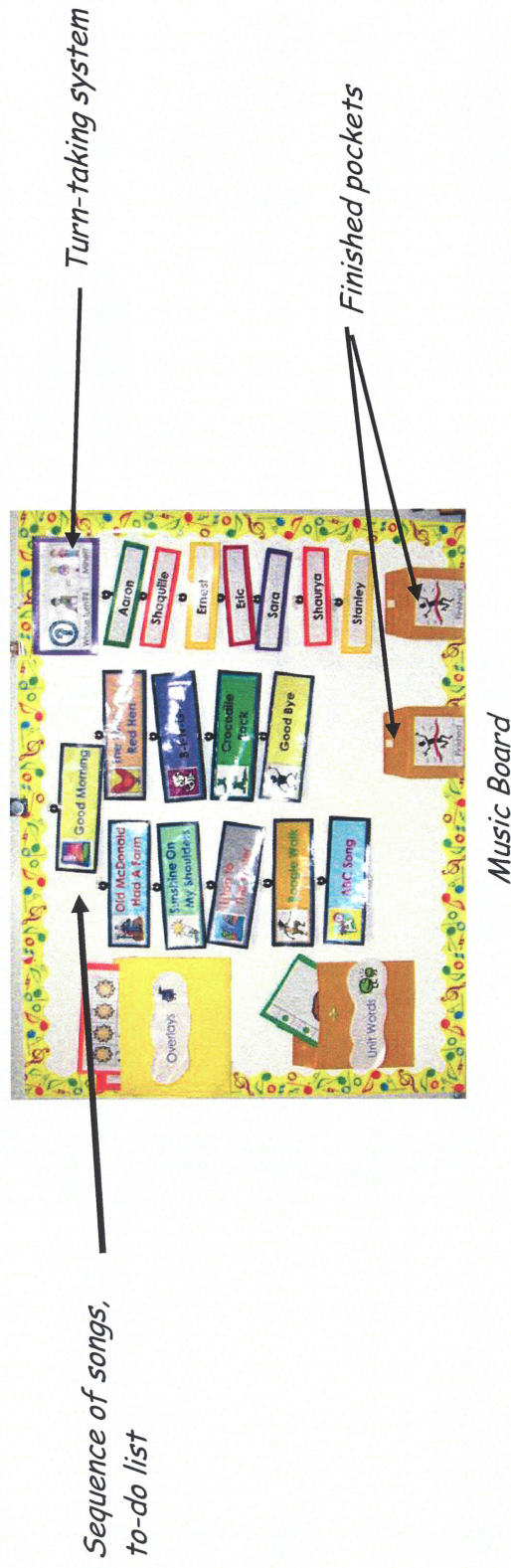


*Written-picture card
corresponds to pocket
at P.E.*

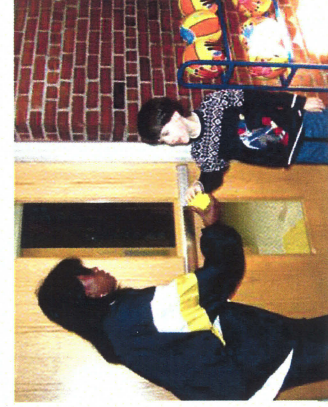


*Carrying daily schedule
during transitions
throughout the school*

Students are less anxious about making out-of-classroom transitions because they will find in that setting a to-do list similar to that which they use at circle time. The group work system also incorporates valuable visual information about turn-taking procedures.



When the group ends, it is equally important that the students have set routines or visual information to tell them where to go next. The good-bye song is consistently used at the end of music group. A routine of lining up and returning to the classroom follows this song each time. This well-practiced routine indicates to the students what is next, so no additional visual information needs to be added. In physical education class, however, the students have individualized work systems. They receive answers about what is next through individualized visual information. Where to go next can be answered by an object, word, picture, or symbol that tells the student where to go after group is finished.



At the end of P.E., the student is handed an object (Duplo™ block) that he matches to a Duplo™ block in the play area of the classroom.



The last card on a student's P.E. work system directs him back to his classroom.

The transition to out-of-classroom groups also is eased if routines used in classroom groups can be generalized. Here students clearly know dance is finished because they put away the colored circles that they stood on for dance group just as they put away the mats they sat on for their classroom circle group.



Following turn-taking system on dance board, students put away their dance circles one at a time.



Student places his dance circle on top of stack.

CHAPTER THREE

INTEGRATING STUDENTS' INDIVIDUALIZED GOALS MAKES GROUPS MEANINGFUL

In our classrooms, we include group experiences in which students must listen to receive information and must communicate to give information. These groups provide times for students to work on concepts based on the school standard course of study and drawn from community life experiences. The concepts introduced and the skills practiced during group times will relate to the goals on the students' individual education plans. We find that students often learn a skill more easily during these group times if they see a reason for using that skill.



Student learns to write her name in a one-to-one session with her teacher.



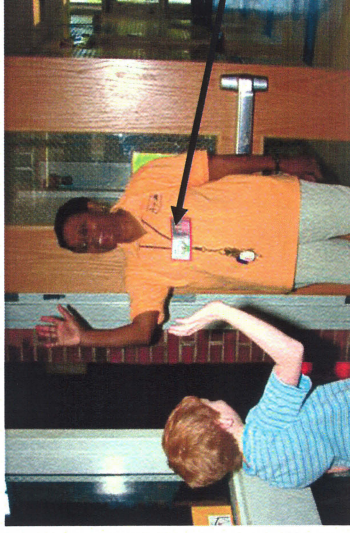
Student utilizes the skill to write her name under her lunch choice in circle time.

GENERALIZING SKILLS

It is essential to demonstrate to the students how the skills that they practice during group activities can be generalized beyond the classroom setting. Taking the visual cues out of the classroom helps with this generalization. For instance, students who work on greetings as part of their circle time routines might also practice greeting others in the hallway and in other classes.



Students work on greetings as part of their circle-time routine.



Students extend their greeting skills in the hallway and in other settings.



The visual prompt is used to cue the student on how to greet the P.E. teacher.

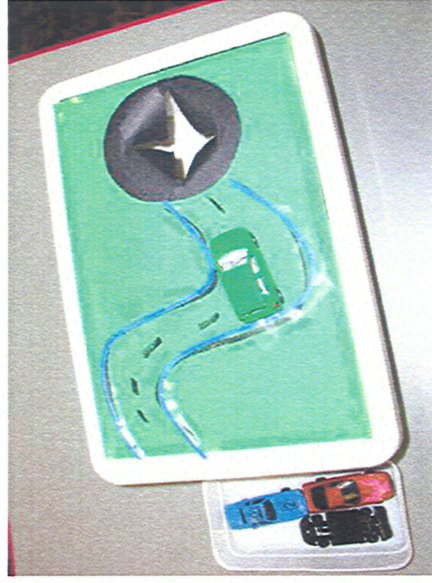
USING THEMES

We also apply themes we introduce during group times to individual goals. For example, learning about types of transportation leads to new vocabulary words for the student to understand, say, read, spell, and use in sentences; new stories to read; new songs to sing; new ideas to act out in play; and new conceptual ideas to match, sort, categorize, and associate. This knowledge can be used later in real life experiences, such as a ride on a city bus or a visit to an airport.



During a community outing, a student sits in the cockpit of an airplane.

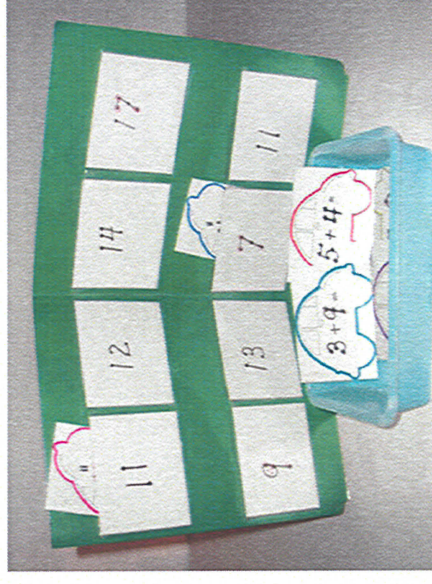
Some tasks based on a periodic theme use the theme as a means to address other skills.



Fine-motor shoebox task incorporates a transportation theme.



Matching colored patterns using airplanes



Matching addition problem cards to the correct answer

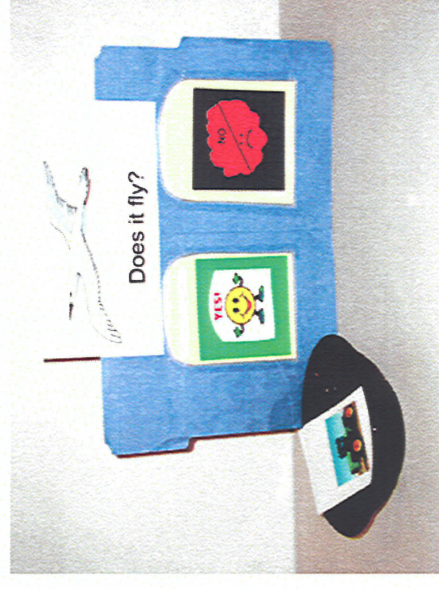
Some tasks based on a theme teach skills and concepts directly related to the theme.



In their pretend play, students recognize the function of vehicles as they drive cars around a track.



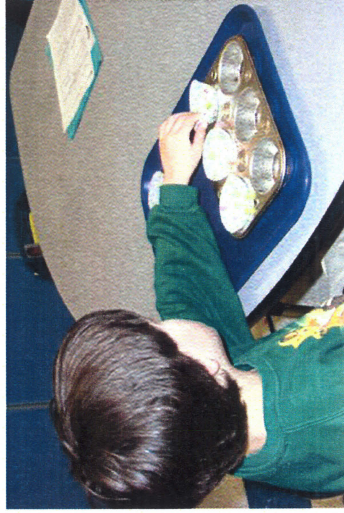
Clips picture of vehicle with its name



Sort vehicles that fly versus those that do not

CONTRIBUTING SKILLS TO GROUP PROJECTS

Some of our groups are built around collaborative activities in which students contribute individual parts to the finished product. We assign students tasks that parallel their individual educational goals. For example, a student who is working on vocabulary words associated with cooking during his independent work time follows verbal directions during cooking group.



The student who is working on one-to-one correspondence is assigned the task of putting one cupcake holder in each muffin tin section.



Student who is learning names of food ingredients is assigned the job of collecting eggs during a cooking group.



USING GROUP EXPERIENCES TO REINFORCE OTHER GOALS

We can use the students' real life group experiences as a teaching example for the students who are learning to sequence.



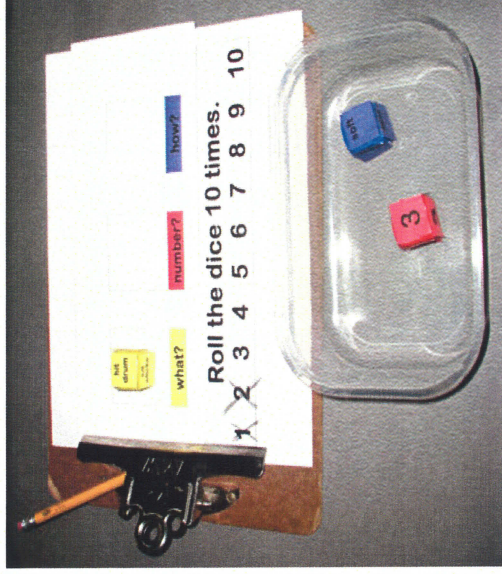
After making cupcakes in a cooking group, the student is sequencing the steps to making cupcakes during her independent work session.

TEACHING SKILLS NEEDED FOR OUT-OF-CLASSROOM GROUPS

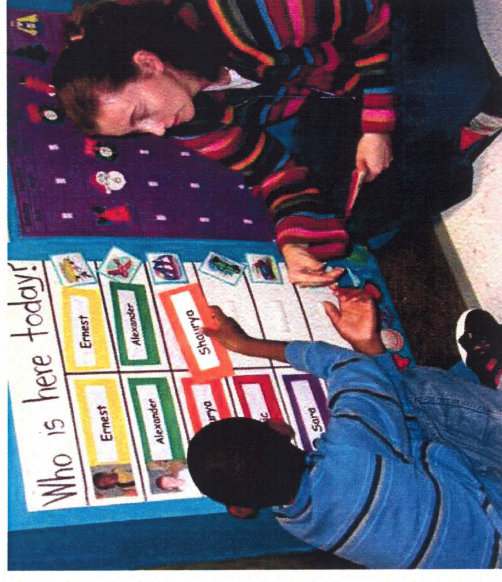
We also teach the skills the students need to know in their out-of-classroom groups during one-to-one teaching, group times, and independent work within the classroom.



Student learns the action of hitting instruments with three different instruments, selecting instrument that corresponds to picture shown by teacher.



While students work on goals of answering questions, learning conceptual words, and practicing number skills, they also learn to recognize names and actions associated with the instruments that they will play in music class.



Student learns to read classmates' names so he will understand the turn-taking sequence.

Such a coordinated back-and-forth flow between what the students are learning during their one-to-one teaching times and practicing in group-settings greatly enhances their learning a skill. Students eagerly participate in the groups because they already understand from their one-to-one teaching times what the caregiver is asking them to do. Assembling the students at different times during their school day for group experiences helps them not only apply individual goals within the context of a group but, also, provides an opportunity for them to see themselves as part of their classroom group.

CHAPTER FOUR

CIRCLE TIME

In circle-time groups, students sit in an arc-shaped grouping, listen to the group leader, and respond as directed. We find it valuable to begin a school day with a circle-time group because it brings all the students together. The tasks of the morning circle time orient the students for the daily activities that will follow. Circle times can provide opportunities for students to learn

- social skills—developing an awareness of classmates;
- communication skills—discussing activities of the day and personal information and asking and answering questions;
- cognitive skills—learning concepts related to the school standard course of study and community skills;
- imitation skills—copying movements in songs, rhymes, and finger plays;
- listening skills—listening to stories and directions;
- academic skills—using math, writing, and reading skills in functional ways.

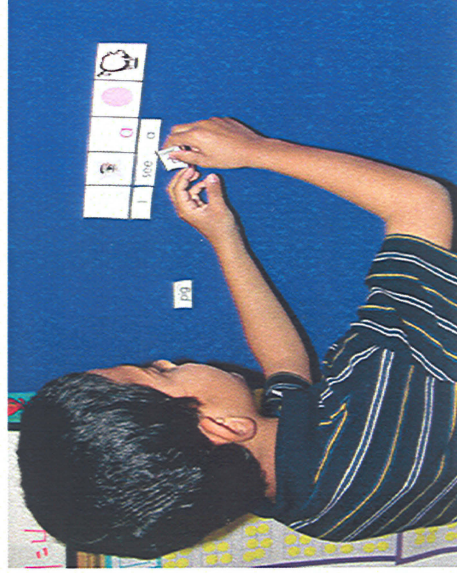
Because students pay attention best when circle times are relatively short, not all these activities can be addressed during one circle-time group. Brief circle times can occur throughout the school day. What follows are samples of activities we incorporate during circle-time groups.



Circle Time - Functional Academics



Reading a book that highlights the names of teachers



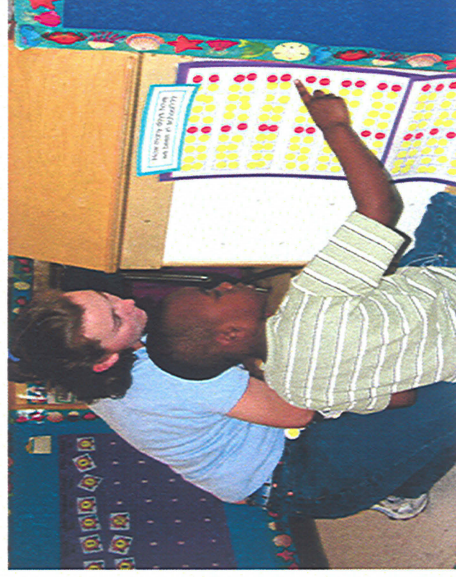
Matching written words to pictures to create a sentence about the monthly theme



Adding the numbers of students who chose a specific lunch item



Putting the date on the calendar (sequencing numbers)



Counting by fives, the number of days the students has attended school (yellow dots = days 1-4, red dots = day 5)

	sunny	cloudy	rainy	snowy
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Total	2	4	1	0

What was the weather like this week?

Graphing the weather for one week and adding the totals

Circle Time - Greetings



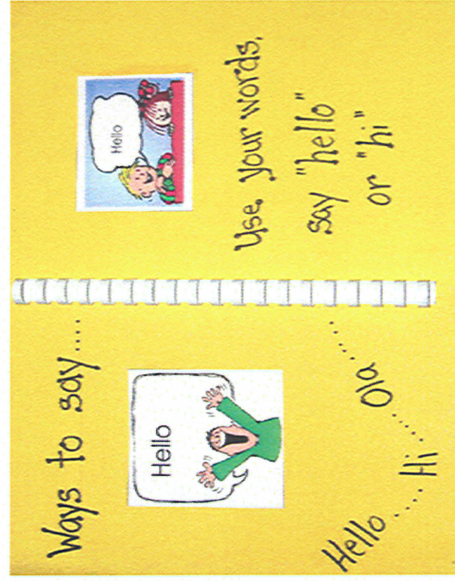
Greeting peers by giving them an object



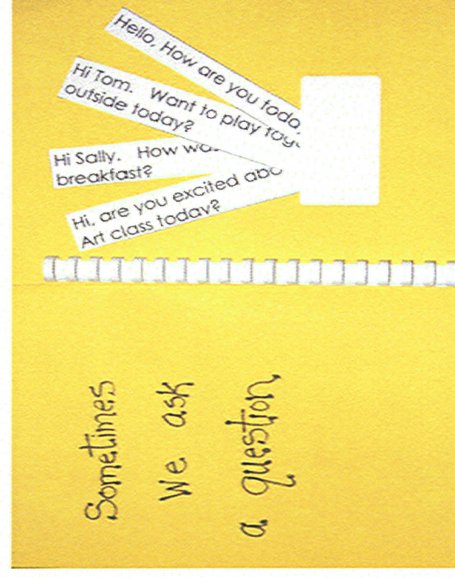
Greeting a peer with an age-appropriate "high five"



Visual reference provided when student greets teacher



Greeting book: ways to say hello



Greeting book: scripted questions to ask when greeting others

Circle Time - Language Concepts



Associating activities, holidays, weather, and clothing with seasons



Scripted and visual prompts for starting a conversation



A barometer to gauge level of favorite foods



Visual board about pigs (topic of the day)



Finding pigs (topic of the day) in rice and matching to picture jig

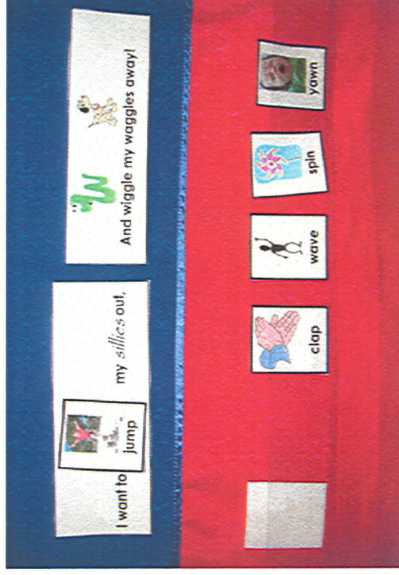


Scavenger hunt to increase awareness level of others in the class

Circle Time - Rhymes and Songs



Wheels on the Bus: student attaches choice onto the bus as the group sings the song.



Shake Your Sillyies Out: student chooses the next action and places card onto sentence strip.



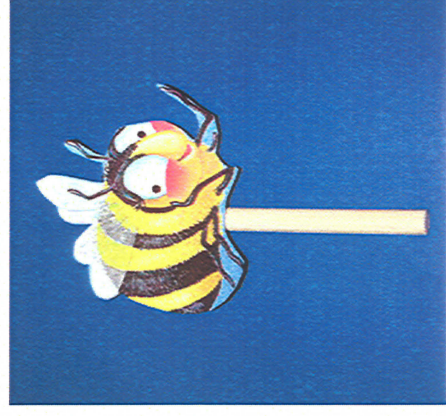
She'll be Coming Around the Mountain: student attaches each item onto the mountain while singing the song.

Hungry Tiger: sung to the tune of *Where is Thumbkin*

Today is Monday (day of the week)
Today is Monday
What to eat
What to eat
Monday is a pretzel day
(name of food that student places in the tiger's mouth)
Monday is a pretzel day
Yum, Yum, Yum!



Student chooses a food item and places it into the tiger's mouth.



Each child has a bumble bee and, on the last line, he touches his peers and says, "OUCH."

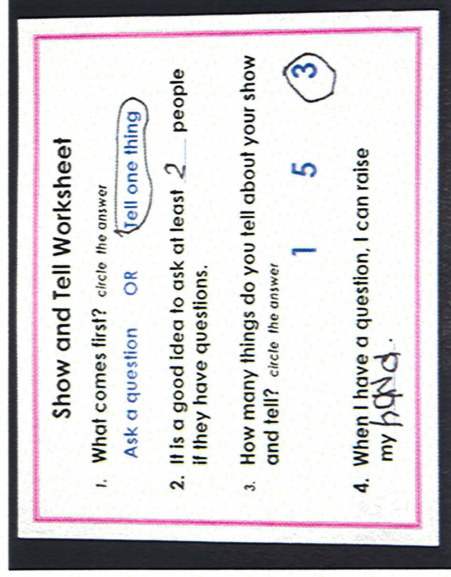
Bumble Bee: sung to the tune of *Jingle Bells*

Bumble Bee, Bumble Bee
Landing on my toes
Bumble Bee, Bumble Bee
Now he's on my nose
Bumble Bee, Bumble Bee
Now he's on my elbow
He lands on me and he goes
Buzz, Buzz, OUCH!

Circle Time - Show and Tell



Show and tell bag with three objects for students to show their weekend activities



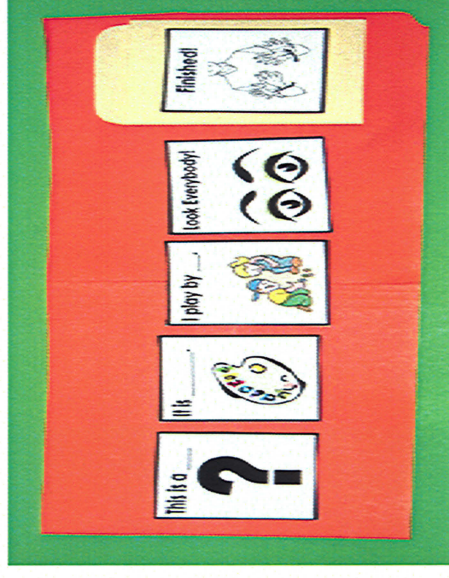
A worksheet about show and tell procedures that the student completes during independent work



Signs that the student wears when it is his turn for show and tell (Classmates follow these prompts.)



Counting flip book to visually clarify for the student how many ideas or comments to share

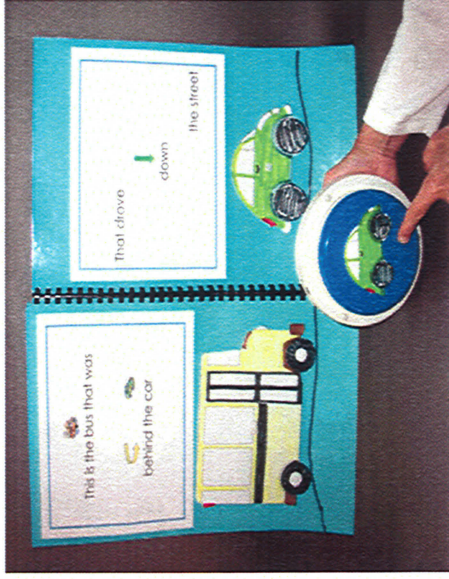


Show and tell script: It is a _____. It is (color). Play by _____. Look, everybody!



Student giving show and tell and placing a counting marker into finished pocket after each idea

Circle Time - Stories



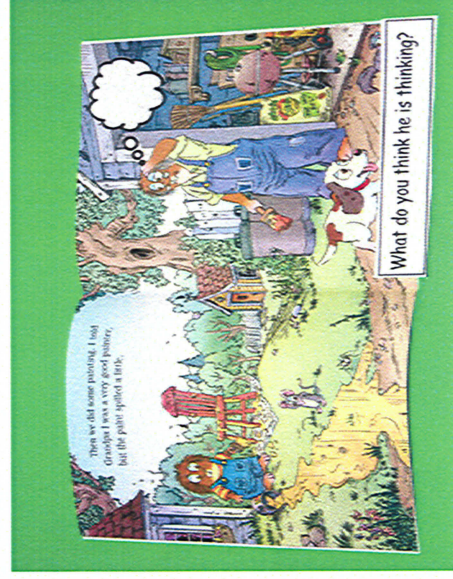
A talking device such as this Big Mack™, that corresponds with pictures in teacher written transportation book



Acting out the transportation story with objects



Acting out the Peter Rabbit story using props



Reading a story and making inferences about what someone is thinking



Sticky numbers that the student places in the grid as the story is being read to track the number of pages read



Teacher-written story to prepare students for upcoming community activity

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE AND SCHEDULES

As with all of our group settings, we give thought to the physical structure of the group project space. Often we use a group table for our projects; however, this table probably will be used for different kinds of activities during the school day. The table typically will be in a corner of the room. Project materials arranged on or near the table set the stage for what is to happen there. The students know what they are to do because the information on their individual schedules tells them what the activity is and where to go. Another part of physical structure involves positioning of staff members. The teacher, who is leading the activity, sits at the table with the students so she can reach each one. It is easier to connect with the students during these times if we can easily make eye contact with them.



Leading teacher sits at table with students.



Assisting teacher stays near students whose skills are emerging and who may require assistance with their projects.

Students usually sit in assigned seats, so that students who need more assistance sit near each other, students who distract each other sit further apart, and students who move about to get materials during group sit where they can travel about easily.

WORK SYSTEMS AND VISUAL STRUCTURE

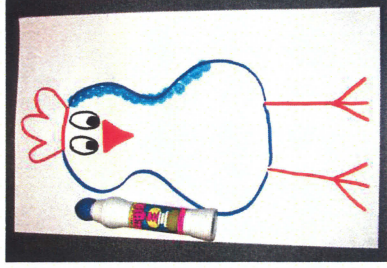
Completing a project requires multiple materials and multiple steps. We plan so that all materials are readily available to the caregiver who leads the group. The materials are visually organized into containers that correspond to the steps of the project. This high level of organization eliminates the students' tendency to grab materials and indicates to the students what is needed when.



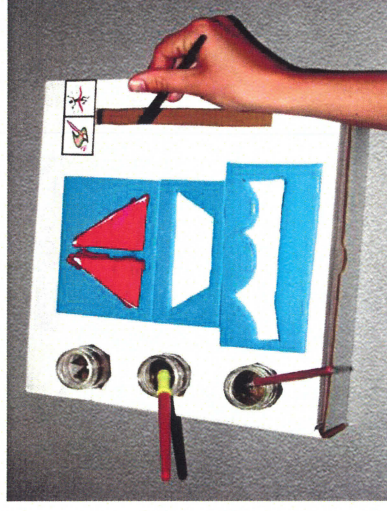
Materials are organized in advance of students' arriving for the project group.

INDIVIDUALIZING SKILLS AND VISUAL STRUCTURE

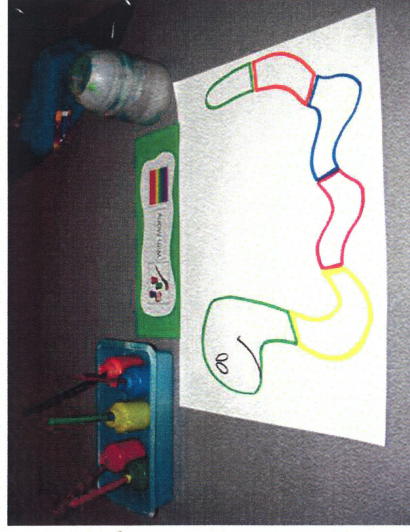
During this project group, students are exploring paints and markers. The individualized organization of the materials for each task defines how to get started and how to proceed. Thought is given to both individualizing skills and visual structure in ways each student understands. Students use their acquired or emerging abilities on their projects.



Bingo Push Marker set on picture defines the task. Students, who cannot yet manage paints, can first learn to fill a space with an up and down motion.



Shoebox painting task clearly defines the left to right sequence of get brush, paint, and put brush in finish slot. Student paints within a boundary that has a raised edge as a cue.



Paints are to the left. As a color is finished, the brush is placed in the finish jar to the right. Color coding on the snake teaches the child that more than one color can be used.



A student ready to choose colors is provided a "menu" of possibilities.



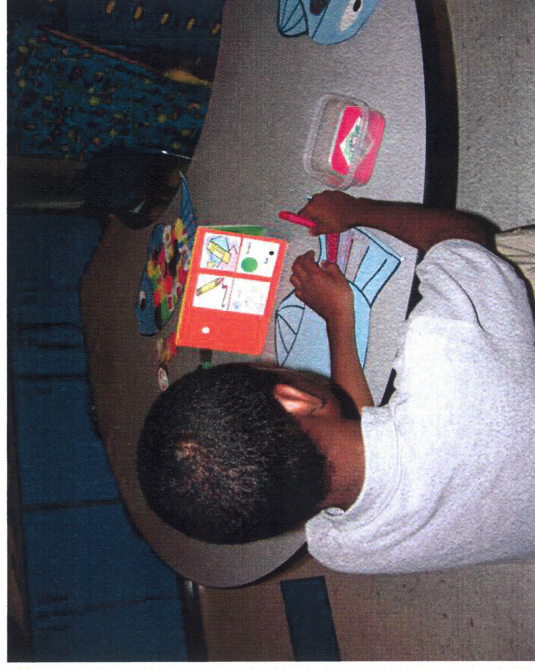
Student designs his own zoo animal painting. Paints to the left are ready to be used; additional colors in front may be requested. Finished brushes go to the right.

INDIVIDUALIZING TO-DO LISTS OR THE VISUAL INSTRUCTIONS


Students can successfully complete their projects if they are given visual instructions that delineate the steps. The visual instructions function as the to-do list or work system. If the visual instructions are geared to students' levels of understanding, the students see what and how much work is to be done, as well as recognize that they are making progress as they complete each step. We individualize the visual instructions that the students are to interpret.



Objects tell what to do.



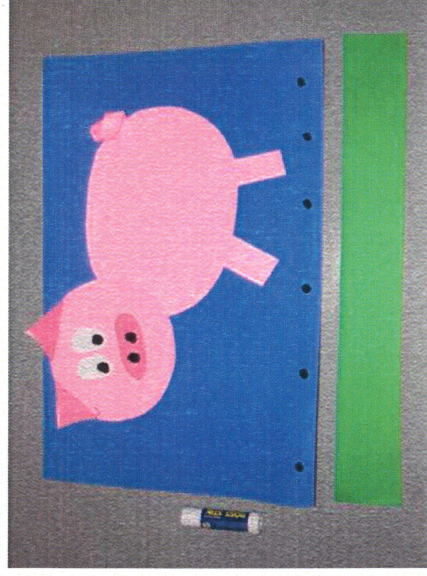
Pictures define what to do.

Let's Make A Fish 	
Cut the fish on the black line	
Color the head, fin and tail..... choose any color	
Glue on the eye	
Glue on the scales	
Finished	
Pick a fun activity in your notebook until everyone is finished	

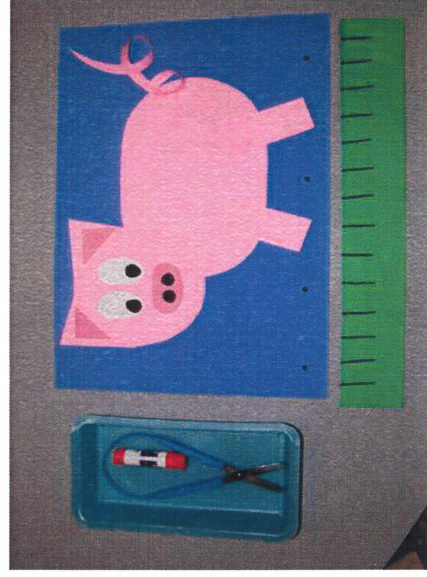
Written list outlines what to do.

The projects of students whose skills are emerging probably will have fewer steps. Students, whose skills allow for multi-step projects, tend to remain attentive and seated during these project-focused groups because the visual instructions for the task and the visual organization of the materials inform them that something will be coming next. Through routine, they naturally wait for that next step.

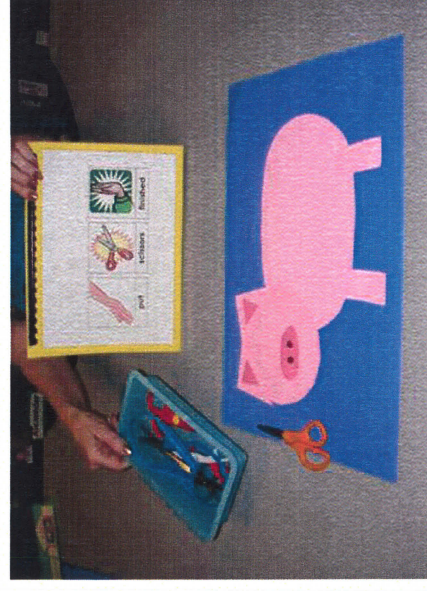
In one classroom, students learn about the farm. During project group, each student will make a pig. Individualized visual instructions delineate the steps required so that students' to-do lists are in forms they understand.



Object defines what to do, and dots provide visual instructions about where to put glue.



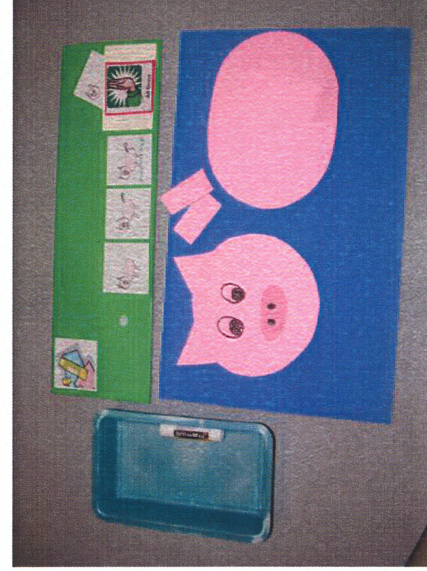
Two-step object sequence with to-do materials on left (beginning skills of snipping and then gluing)



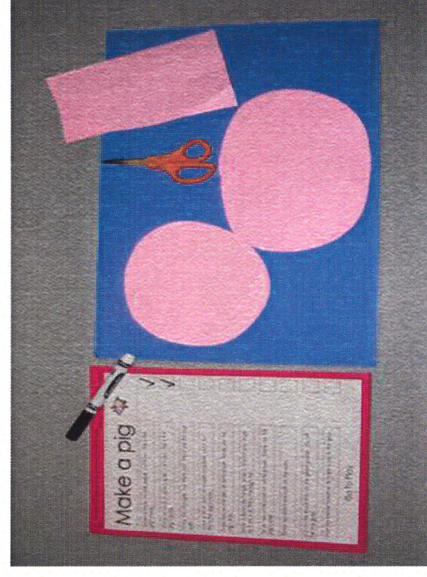
Step-by-step picture and word directions presented in flip book (only one page is seen at a time.)



Information sheet includes requests and comments, as well as step-by-step directions in a left-to-right, top-to-bottom sequence.



Pictured visual instructions disappear as each step is finished.



Visual instructions are in written, checklist format.

VISUALLY STRUCTURED SOCIAL PROJECTS

Once students develop the skills, projects can become fun shared activities. We find that organizing our project groups with an extreme amount of structure can provide an avenue for some students to adopt these strategies as their own. Our step-by-step visual instructions teach organizational protocols that some students can generalize to other school and community situations or to their own independent projects. Giving the students a systematic way to organize art, craft, and building materials can help a student access his creative and social potential.



Students share pegboard and pegs to create a project.



Students share Duplos™. Each chooses a pattern and builds the design.



Students build a train track as a group project. Taking the tubs on the left, first they match the colored ends of the track. Then they place the buildings, people, and scenery on the corresponding label. Finally, the students place the train on the track. After each train makes one rotation around the track, it is placed on its corresponding picture on the right.

WAITING ROUTINES

Often as part of our group projects, we require our students to wait until each group member has finished a step. Then the entire group proceeds to the next step. Sometimes, waiting and watching classmates complete their steps encourages the students who rush through their work to slow down and take more care. Waiting as a group also reinforces the idea about being a member of the group. We establish waiting routines to help.

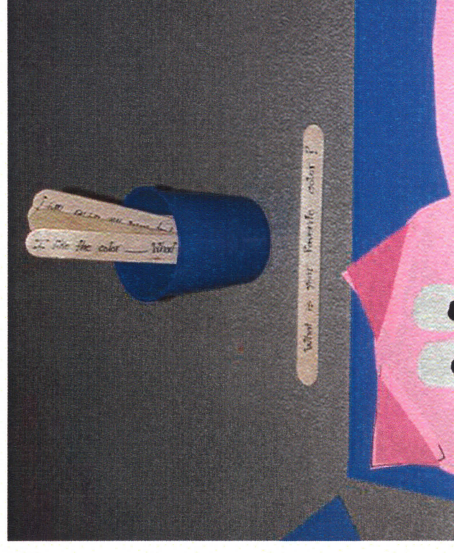
Waiting can be fun times. The children can sing a song or count. These waiting times can also be wonderful opportunities for us to talk with the students. We adjust the language we use so what we say to the children is at their level of understanding. We might comment about the project theme, ask questions related to the theme, play an "I Spy" game (seeing who can spot something red or something that swims while looking about the room), or point out what other students are doing on their projects.



These hand outlines adhered to the group table tell some students what to do with their hands while waiting.



Other students might need verbal and visual reminders as to why they are waiting.



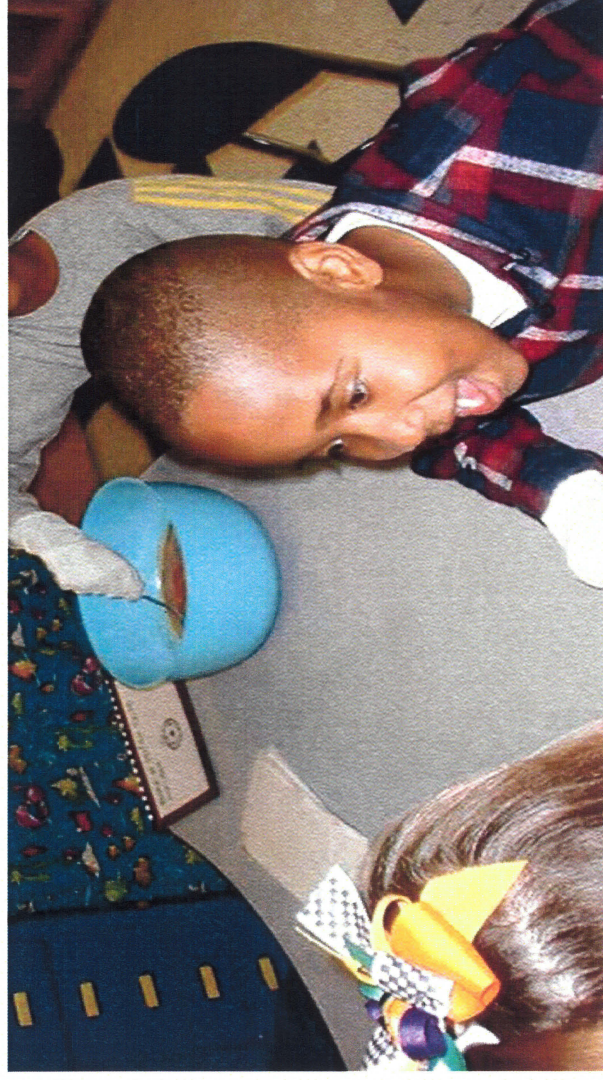
For verbal students, we sometimes provide conversation starters (on tongue depressors), so they can talk with each other.

FINISH ROUTINES

Some skills, such as coloring or stirring, do not have clear ending points. How does one know when they have colored or stirred enough? We set procedures for these types of tasks. For example, the ending point for stirring could be when a timer beeps, when a song or rhyme about stirring is finished, or when a designated number of stirs are counted. Often, the routine procedures for designating finish points can become strategies for the students to use independently in other settings.

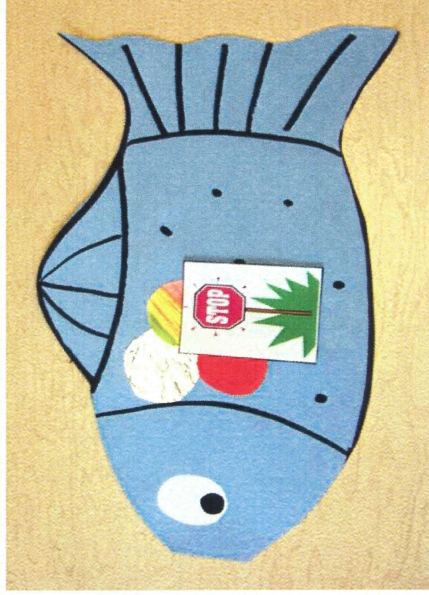


A student stirs cake batter while the class sings a song.



Classmates sing a song about stirring, and the end of the song clarifies when to stop stirring.

It is best if the finished product is completed during one group session. Occasionally in our classrooms and often in regular educational settings, the project takes more than one session to finish. If this is the case, we give students a routine to follow so they understand they must stop, but they will return later to finish. Some of our students in regular educational classroom settings finish their products but may draw over what they completed, for example, because they do not know what else to do. Giving these students a routine for what to do when finished with their projects helps.

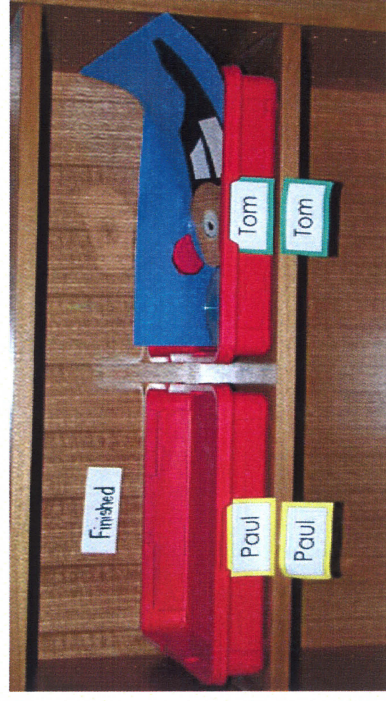


Stop sign placed on art project helps students understand they will finish later.



Page in the student's notebook gives suggestions about what to do when finished.

Once the product is completed, the students need to know where it belongs. A consistent place for the students to put their arts and crafts to dry provides such a routine.



Students place finished work on labeled shelves.

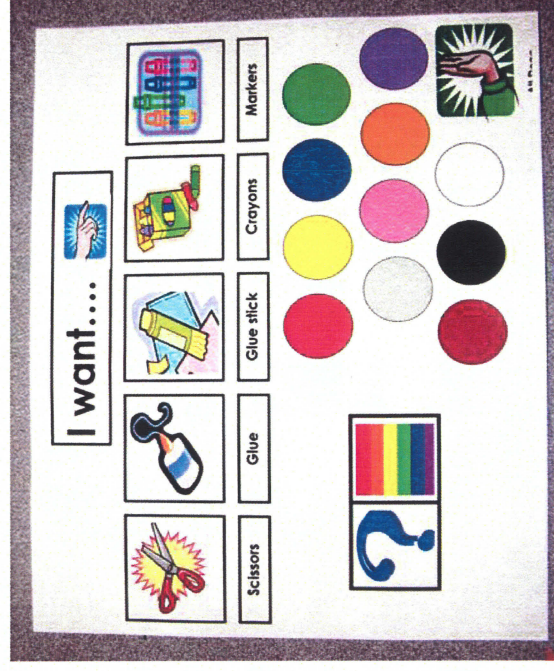
COMMUNICATING NEEDS AND CHOICES

A project activity provides many opportunities for the students to communicate both what they need to do to carry out the steps and what they choose to use for certain steps. We consider the individual ways students communicate and provide systems, so they are able to convey what materials they need or choose for their projects. Students must recognize first what materials they need to complete a step before they can be taught to communicate that request. Once they understand the meaning of the project, they can usually be encouraged to choose among materials.

Some students need visual reminders, so they know what their choices are.



Student points to color choice while requesting a color.



Example of board that might cue student as to what to request and choose



Another student's cues might be in the written/picture form.

We search for systems so that all students can communicate their needs and choices in ways meaningful to them.



Augmentative communication devices, such as this Cheap Talk™, often create interest in words. For the nonverbal child, they assist in communicating requests. We use augmentative devices only when students realize why they are activating the sound on the device (i.e., to get a point across to another person).

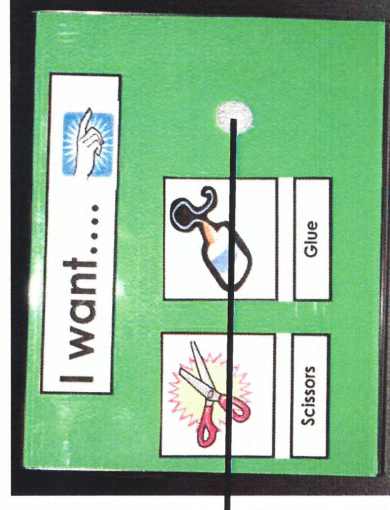
Often students understand communicating with another person best if they exchange an object or picture for what they need or want.



Students who understand the meaning of objects exchange a tightly sealed bag with the needed object in it for the object itself.



Student requests crayons by giving picture to teacher.



Cards used for picture exchange

CHAPTER SIX

MOVEMENT GROUPS

Including movement groups keeps our students fit, gives them time away from the rigors of schoolwork, and even seems to increase their ability to cope with school demands. Sometimes our students have out-of-classroom physical education and dance classes that entail exercise, dance, and other forms of movement related to the standard course of study. Because these classes typically occur only once a week, we often include movement groups that take place in the classroom.



Yoga provides both fun and relaxation.

Highly structuring these types of groups helps the students know the procedures and eliminates chaotic movement. Structure in these movement groups means that

- the physical space is visually organized;
- the individual schedules indicate the kind of activity and where to go;
- the to-do lists or work systems answer questions about the work and progress toward finishing; and
- the movement tasks are defined by practiced routines or visual cues.

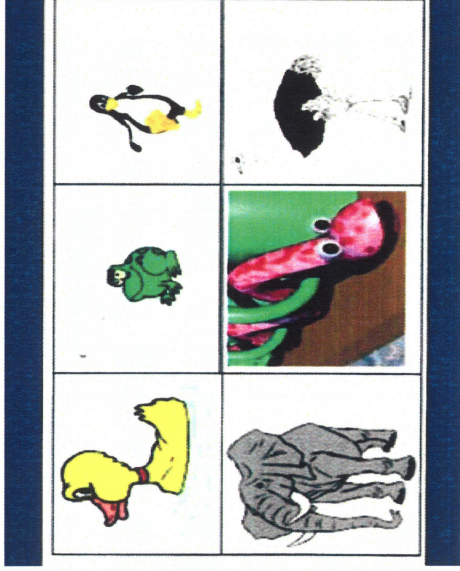
There are other structuring requirements for movement groups because they are different from groups in which the children are stationary, and the group space is more physically confined.

These requirements include

- a specified space where the movement will take place—students learn to move in this space after being taught to follow the routine or to look for the visual cues,
- a clear ending point for the movement activity—students know how long the activity will last or understand the number of repetitions they are to complete (If the movement is coordinated with music, the ending point is often the conclusion of a song.), and
- a specified place to go after each movement activity has ended.



A specified place to move about: in this action song, students have learned through routine to confine their movement to around the table.



A clear ending: this visual sequence lets some students know that the activity is finished when they have pretended to be each of the animals on their cards.



A place to go when finished: through routine, students know to return to colored mats when the music ends during a classroom exercise time.

Movement - Dance



Imitating exaggerated gross motor movements



One-to-one teaching within a larger dance group



Using colored circles to clarify where to stand



Paired dancing using a sombrero to define boundaries

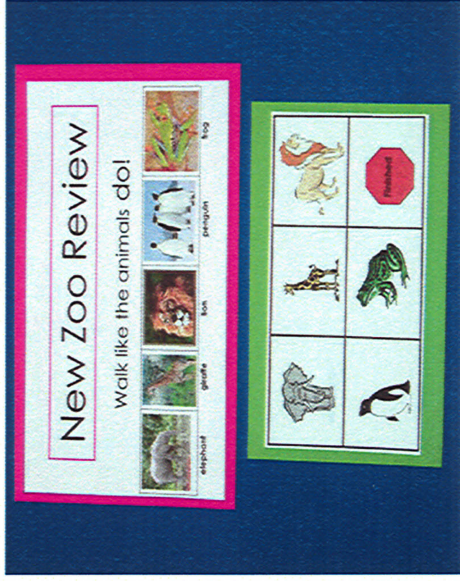


Using scarves to encourage creative movement

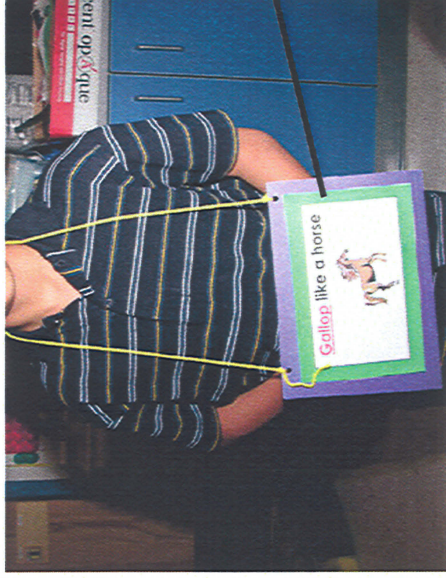


Using bells on the wrist to clarify right hand/side for *Hokey Pokey*

Movement - Visual Cues



Two types of visual cues highlighting the sequence of animals to be imitated in an activity



Each student wears an animal visual cue that indicates the movement he should perform.



Movement activity using the table to clarify the route



Use of hats and other props for students to perform various movements (e.g., jump like a frog over the log)

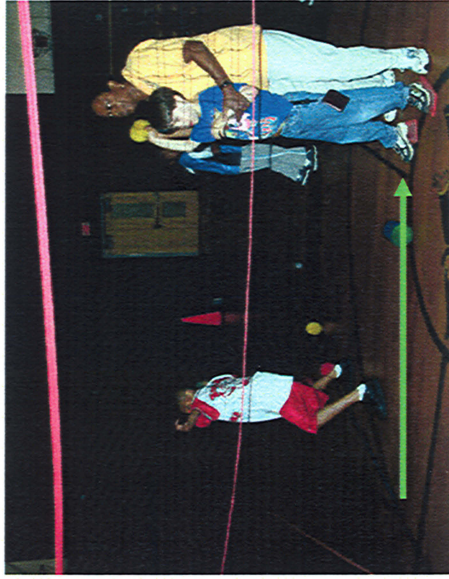


Mother, may I: cube tossed for movement, taped lanes for boundaries, and street signs for "Yes" or "No"

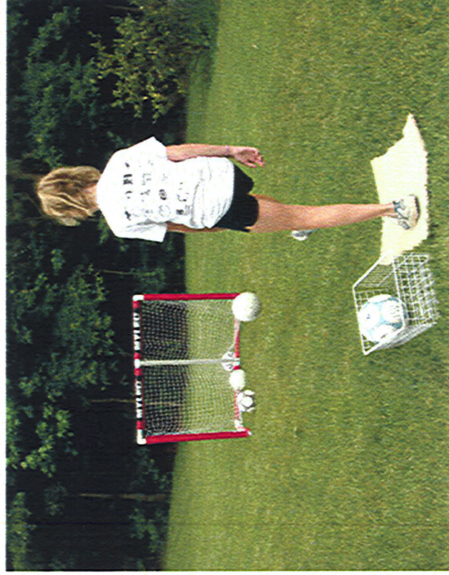


Use of pom poms to count down in the song, *Sally the Camel*

Physical Education - Ball Play



Throwing ball over net, using footprints for feet placement



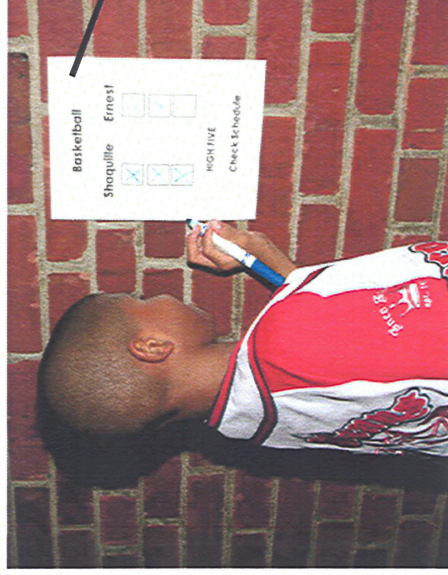
Carpet square defines where to stand and the basket of balls to the student's left clarifies the beginning and end.



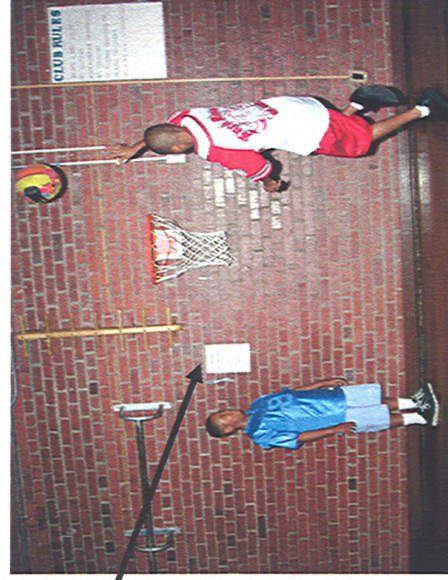
Separated teaching area within larger gym to work on batting skills, using cone for the tee



Colored footprints and matching balls; throw ball into upper basket, moving left to right around the hoop; bubbles when finished

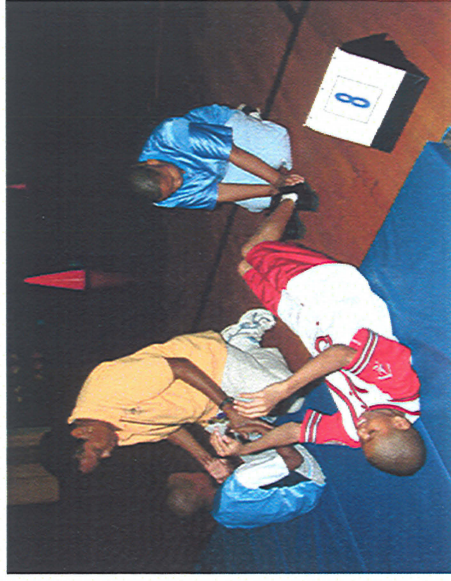


Keeping score of a basketball game



Taking turns shooting the basketball

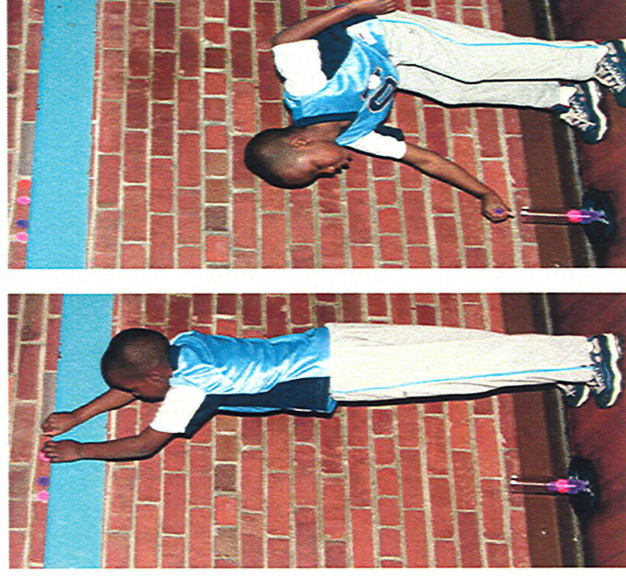
Physical Education - Exercise



Using a counting flipbook for sit-ups



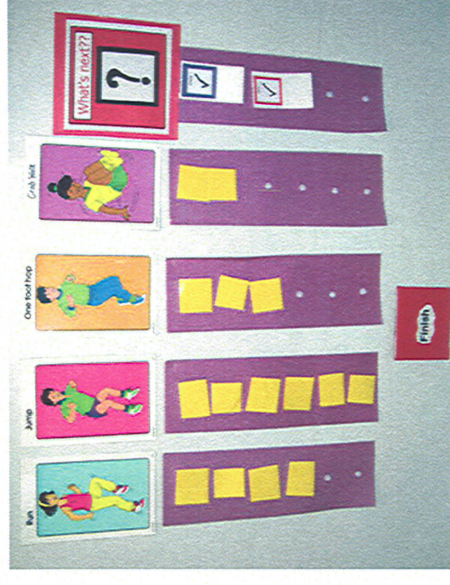
Using a music tape to clarify when sit-ups are finished



Taking balls off the wall ledge and placing into tube for stretching and toe touches (Balls indicate number of repetitions.)

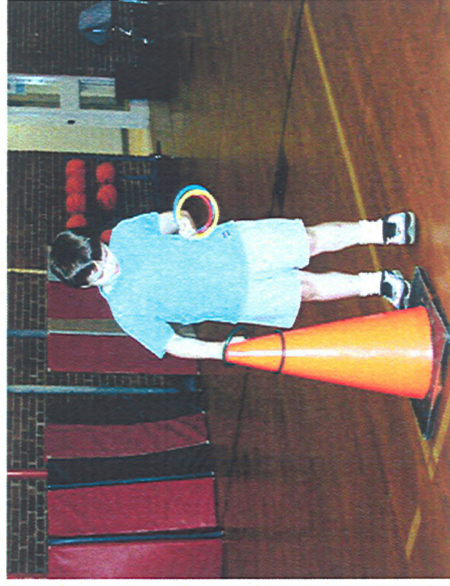


Jumping jacks, using a visual jig for foot placement



A movement/exercise chart for two students to use simultaneously (Yellow cards represent repetitions.)

Physical Education - Running



Student places a ring on each cone, four cones per lap.



Cones are used to define "track" within larger gym; student touches each cone as he rounds each corner of the track.



Placing play dollar bill in basket at the end of each lap



Students rounding cones of indoor track



Tennis balls are used as counters, and the outdoor track provides the student with clear boundaries.

Physical Education - Scooters



Matching work system: pictured-written card matches to can in corresponding scooter area



Visual cue highlights touching purple circle at one end and yellow circle at the other end of the scooter course.



Placing scooter wheels on either side of the rope provides student with boundaries for scooter course.



Hula Hoops™ clarify for students where to wait for their turn.

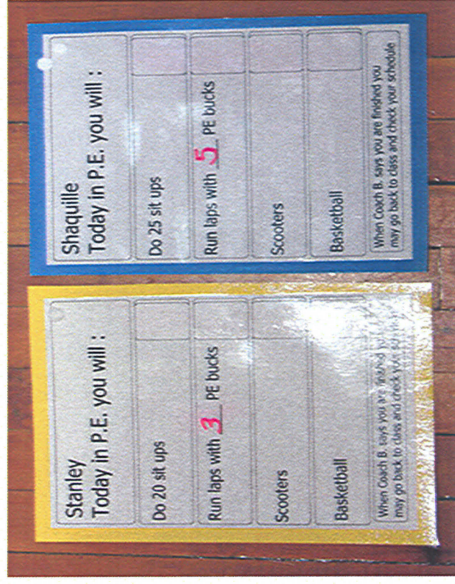


Student carries scooter and places it next to matching scooter for transition to the activity.



Student places a ring on the cone as a counting system for the number of laps with scooter.

Physical Education - Work Systems



Written work system



Picture and written card work systems



Object work system: student carries ball to goal and begins to shoot hoops.



Whistle blown to indicate when an activity is finished and that it is time to check the work system



Picture work system in transition area



Basketball activity area where the picture card is placed

CHAPTER SEVEN

MUSIC GROUPS

People of all cultures seem to enjoy making music. As children, we are naturally enthusiastic about singing and making sounds. Children with autism spectrum disorders often have a keen interest in music. For some, learning lyrics, tunes, and rhythms is an area of strength. Because the students respond well, we include songs in several of our routines for lining up, cleaning up, sequencing steps, and ending activities. Songs that we introduce as part of routines sometimes become reminders that the students use to cue themselves when in similar situations. Songs and rhymes keep our students engaged during our classroom circle times.

In a music specialty class, there are music goals related to the school standard course of study to be addressed. Implementing structured teaching practices; setting up consistent routines related to turn taking, group behavior, and finishing; and individualizing the goals to fit each student's level lay the groundwork for meaningful groups in which music goals can be taught.



Music - Routines



Taking turns using a microphone for a concrete cue



Movement/object routine within a song



Rhythm routines using a tambourine or drum within a song



Making a choice of an instrument; teacher counts down from five to clarify length of time for making choice.



Placing instruments under the chairs as an identified finished location until the instruments are needed

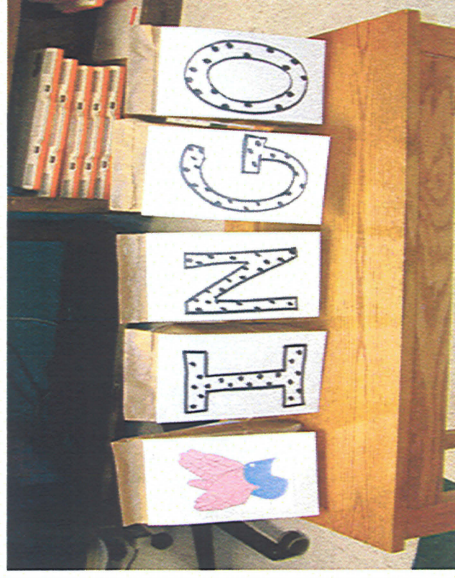


Placing sticks on shoulder so they can be collected and put away

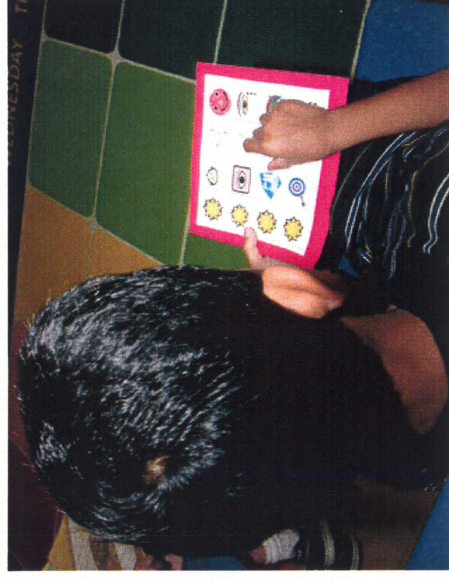
Music – Visual Cues



Visual board for music: song cards for to-do list and name cards for turn taking are both arranged top to bottom.



BINGO: turn around the paper bags when student should clap instead of saying the letter



Visual cues for each verse of the song



Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree: puppets and silk tree used to act out the rhyme



Old MacDonald Had a Farm: student chooses stuffed animal for class to sing about and places in barn when finished.

CHAPTER EIGHT

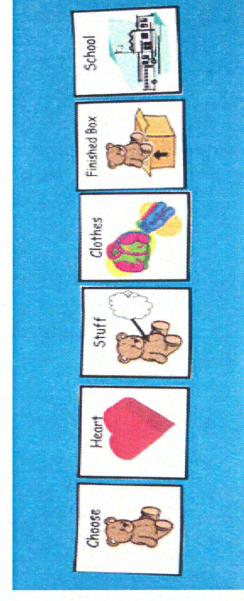
PARTIES

Parties often include elements of the previously described groups and are supposed to be fun group times. However, for many children with autism spectrum disorders, extra people in their homes can lead to noise and commotion. This confusing stimulation often does not encourage the children to participate, and they may seek the solace of a quiet space or may get upset if forced to join in. In short, parties may not be fun for them.

The structuring techniques and routines helpful in making school groups meaningful help children to appreciate parties. A to-do list for parties is essential. Once the children know

- what activities will happen,
- the order of the activities,
- how they are progressing through the activities,
- when they will be finished, and
- what happens after the party,

they understand what the party is all about.



To-do list for the birthday party



Birthday party in a community setting

PARTY TO-DO LISTS

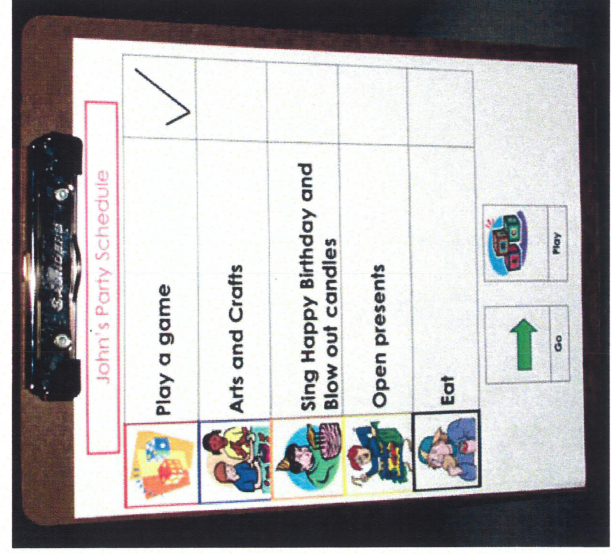
To-do lists serve the purposes of school work systems. To be meaningful, they need to use visual cues that students understand.



Party activities represented by objects



Pictures indicate the activities



Picture-word checklist tells children what to do.



Children know what to do because they understand the meaning of this party list.

HOME AND SCHOOL COLLABORATION

We teach some activities that may happen at parties during our school activities. Just as we ask parents to reinforce the students' educational goals at home, at school we reinforce goals that are important to parents and that can help parents and children have fun as a family. We welcome parents into our classrooms so they can see how structuring techniques benefit their children and how these techniques can be applied at home.

In the classroom, we often teach the traditional steps of a birthday party. Preparing the students ahead of time about party routines is a key because many of these traditions involve an uncomfortable sensation, such as loud singing, to which the children must become accustomed. For example, if the children practice the birthday party steps several times during the school year, they are often able to enjoy these parts of their own birthday parties.



First, you wear a birthday hat.



Guests will sing the birthday song to you.



Then, you blow out the candles.



Sometimes, having a printed copy of the birthday song helps children know how long the singing will last and gives them something on which to focus during the singing.

ROUTINES

We show parents which routines from school can be incorporated into home parties.



Knowing when finished: some party activities do not have clear ending points; for these, we might use a timer to indicate the ending point.



Knowing how to proceed: start and finish boxes help children know where to begin and when they are finished opening gifts.



Knowing where to wait: having a specific place to sit helps children who are waiting for their turns.



Knowing when to take turns: having a visual list of words and pictures helps children recognize the sequence of turns.

KNOWING HOW TO MAKE TRANSITIONS AMONG ACTIVITIES

Providing a visual cue that the children can take from one activity center to another is important because transitional cues can clarify that what usually happens at the dining table will be different on the party day.



TIMING AND SEQUENCING OF ACTIVITIES



Interspersing active times with quiet times, such as playing in a swimming pool then watching a video



Making it visually clear to the child that, after the party, he can return to his most preferred activity



Providing a place for children to take a quiet break

CENTERS AT SCHOOL

Several centers from school parties adapt easily to parties at home.



Songs and rhythms

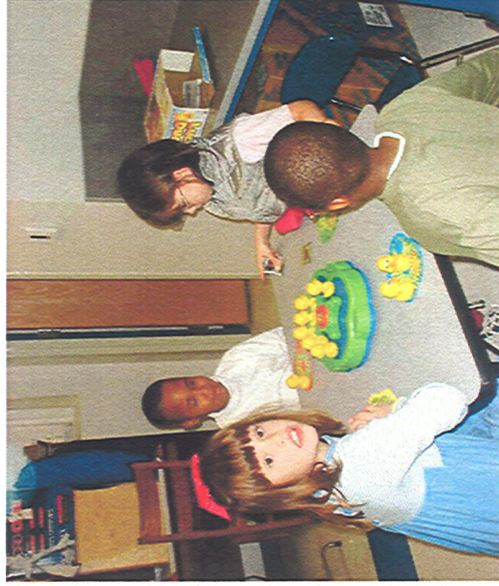


Table game



Active game



Cooking and eating activities



Story time

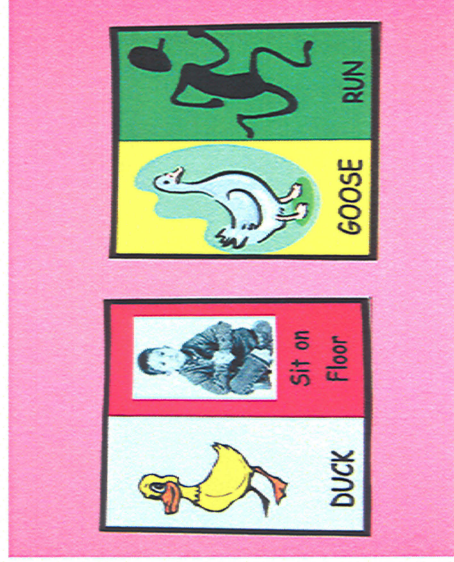


Project activity

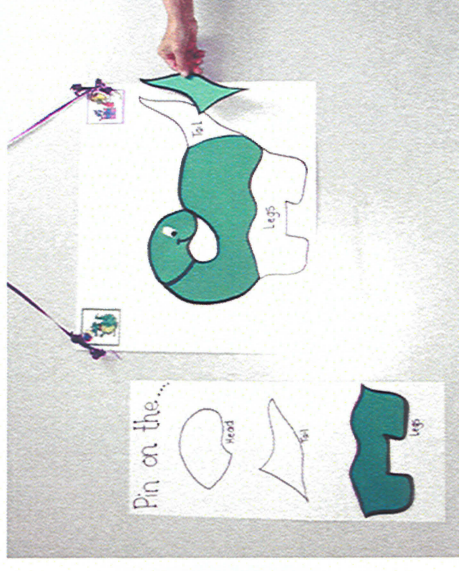
Visually Structured Party Games



Clothespins in the Bottle: visual cue in chair highlights where students should place their knees. When the container to the left is empty, the students know the game is finished.



Duck, Duck, Goose: the student passes out a card to each player that says either duck/sit on floor or goose/run. The two children then run around the circle, back to the carpet square labeled with their name and photograph.



Pin the Tail on the Dinosaur: this game lends itself to a variety of themes' seasons to capitalize on the students' interests and strengths.



Musical balloons: children toss the balloons until the music stops, and then they go back to their labeled chairs. Space is physically structured with the chairs and flags.



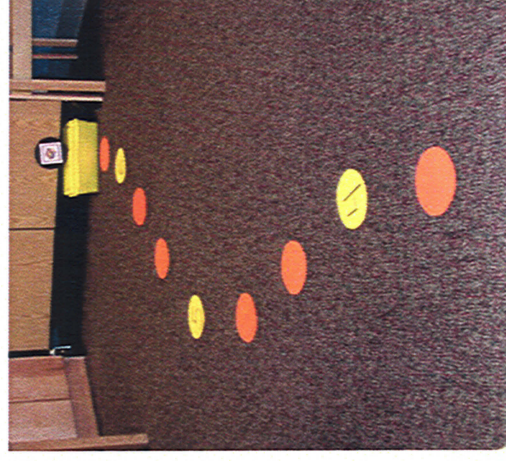
Visual instructions: alternating balloon and chair cards highlight what to do.



Turn-taking board: depicts two children's turns at a time.

More Party Games

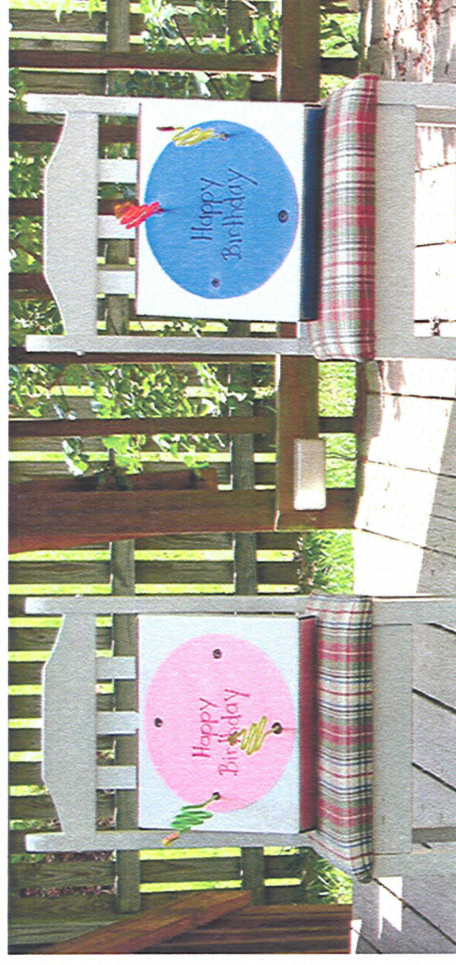
Ring toss: footprints clarify where to stand, and the rings placed into slots highlight the concept of finished.



Treasure hunt: a well-marked path leads to the treasure. Children know to stay on the path by either following the numbered trail or picking up the circles as they go.



Relay races: two children relay between table and chairs to put the candles in the cakes.



Birthday cakes with candles made from twisted straws are placed on chairs.



References

Division TEACCH

Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children (TEACCH) is a Division of the Department of Psychiatry of the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Established in 1965, it is the nation's first statewide program for the treatment of children and adults with autism and similar developmental disorders. For information about the services and training opportunities that Division TEACCH offers, please visit www.TEACCH.com.

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