

EXERCISE BOOK

AUTISM^{NZ}

Every step together



TILTING THE SEESAW

ONLINE

NAME

SCHOOL

Whakatauki

Mā te rongō, ka mōhio; Mā te mōhio, ka mārama; Mā te mārama, ka mātau; Mā te mātau, ka ora.

Through resonance comes awareness; through awareness comes understanding; through understanding comes knowledge; through knowledge comes life and wellbeing.

Learning Outcomes of Tilting the Seesaw Online

The aim of the Tilting the Seesaw Online programme is to provide practical, strength-based strategies to support the inclusion of a student with autism into the primary school classroom to teachers who cannot access our delivered programme.

The goal of the strategies is to enable you to make learning inside and outside the classroom more accessible and meaningful. Our strength-based strategies help to foster the student's independence, self-esteem, social understanding, self-management of behaviour, and abilities to interact with other students.

For Autism New Zealand, inclusion means providing access to high-quality educational experiences for all students.

The course is divided into 6 modules:

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Understanding Autism and Strengths |
| 2 | Visual Supports |
| 3 | Story Supports |
| 4 | Emotional Regulation |
| 5 | Inclusive Strategies |
| 6 | Challenging Behaviour |

How the Programme Works

Distance Learning requires a number of interlocking components to achieve the best results:

- Self-Directed Learning from static information provided by the course. This comes in a number of formats, including reading material, videos to watch and links to other knowledge.
- Opportunities to apply that knowledge to a situation. This is done in the form of assignments to complete weekly and to discuss with your dedicated coach.
- Opportunities for getting together with other people in a similar situation to you to discuss the materials and assignments.
- Following assigned dates and times for review and social networking times.
- A final assignment that demonstrates your learning in practice



The course will follow this progression:

- 10 participants selected for the course.
- Prior to the course beginning, times and dates for completion of Assignments and catch-ups are given.
- Week 1: Understanding Autism and Strengths content and Assignment 1.
- Contact made with Coach.
- Week 2: Assignment 1 completed and sent to Coach; coach gives feedback.
- Group Catch up and Visual Supports content and Assignment 2 distributed.
- Weeks 3, 4, 5 and 6 follow the same pattern covering the remaining 4 topics.
- A final assignment completes the course.

Support can also be found on the Tilting the Seesaw website.

www.tiltingtheseesaw.org.nz

Keep an eye out for these icons!

	<p>My Voice</p> <p>This icon represents a 'My Voice' quote. We recognize the importance of the "nothing about us, without us" and so the voice of autistic people is used through quotes.</p>
	<p>Classroom Snapshot</p> <p>These are classroom examples that show ways to implement strategies.</p>

Picking a Focus

To help keep your learning structured it is sometimes a good idea to pick a focus. Some of these general themes may be worth considering:

<p>Preparation</p>
<p>One of the key themes that emerge from students with autism is that they would like to be more informed about what is happening during their day.</p> <p>Consider: Is the child prepared for changes in their routine? Are they prepared for what happens in the day? In more ways than just verbally?</p>
<p>Feeling Included</p>
<p>Many children with autism have a feeling of being excluded. Social isolation and exclusion may lead to poor self-esteem.</p> <p>Consider: Are groups structured to include the child with autism? Does the child have other children to play with at breaktime? Friends?</p>
<p>Sensory Issues</p>
<p>The environment in which a child works in can impact greatly on how well they are able to show his talents. Sights, sounds, smells and touch can all influence the child's learning.</p> <p>Consider: Does the child show distress in certain sensory environments, does the child avoid, seek out sensory information?</p>
<p>Communication</p>
<p>Challenges with communication is a core element of autism. How teachers communicate with the child and how they communicate with teachers needs to be thought about.</p> <p>Consider: How do adults communicate best with the child? How do teachers get across understanding? Has the child got alternative forms of communicating other than speech?</p>

Executive Function

Executive function skills help children to plan, organise, execute and sequence tasks. Many children need support in these areas.

Consider: Has the child got organising tools, time management skills been taught, alternative ways of recording allowed?

Self-Regulation

Emotional and self-regulation is used to help control our impulses, regulate our behaviour and stay calm. It is important for social and emotional wellbeing, academic and social success.

Consider: Have strategies been taught to support the child to regulate emotions?

Self-Awareness

For some children, knowledge about autism and self may contribute to a feeling of self-worth and understanding and a sense of belonging.

Consider: Is disclosure of autism an option? How do parents feel about this? Has there been opportunities to discuss this? Do the class know and have some understanding of neuro-diversity. Are child's interests considered?

Motivation

Traditional forms of motivation may need re-examining for children with autism.

Consider: Have alternative ways of motivating been considered?

Structure

At the heart of Tilting the Seesaw lies an understanding that structure needs to be in place for a child with autism. Structure creates predictability and clearer expectations and reduces anxiety.

Consider: Are work systems in place for the child? Are visual strategies used as a matter of course? Are visual organisation tools used?

Adult change – the bridge

Tilting the seesaw is fundamentally a programme about changing parts of the teachers practise to meet the needs of children with Autism. We use the analogy of the Bridge to help explain this.

“Imagine the child with Autism is on one side of the Bridge and you are on the other side. On your side are all the new experiences and learning that can take place. All the student has to do is walk over the bridge to join you. **But**, what if the student has difficulty walking over the bridge or is afraid of taking that first step. Then surely it would be better for us to cross over to the student's side of the bridge and start by taking that first step together. As teachers we are good

at adapting and changing to support students. Meet the child where they are to begin and take one step. And most importantly, celebrate that step. A small steps approach to learning where we recognise the students' achievements, that is what "crossing the bridge" is all about

Understanding the Seesaw

The seesaw concept is an adaptation by Autism New Zealand's Neil Stuart, of Esther Thelen's work on Dynamic Systems Theory.

Autism New Zealand uses the seesaw as a metaphor to help us analyse classroom situations and activities to work out where support may be needed for a student with autism.

The seesaw below is balancing two contrasting groups of words that describe activities and situations. The left side shows words for situations that are static or 'same-same', and the right side has words used for situations that are dynamic or changeable (different).

In everyday life, many situations have elements from both sides of the seesaw. For example, if you drive the same route to work every day, that is 'same-same'. But on the way you may get a red light one day or a green light the next day. This is unpredictable, so it is on the dynamic side of the Seesaw. You may also give someone a lift, or see someone you know to wave to, or you may witness an accident. All these situations can make the journey different.

Certain

Same same,
predictable, linear, in
order, clear
expectations, familiar,
time related, closed,
logic, static, certain

Uncertain

Changeable,
unpredictable,
simultaneous, random,
no expectations, new,
open time limits, open,
emotional, fluid,
uncertain



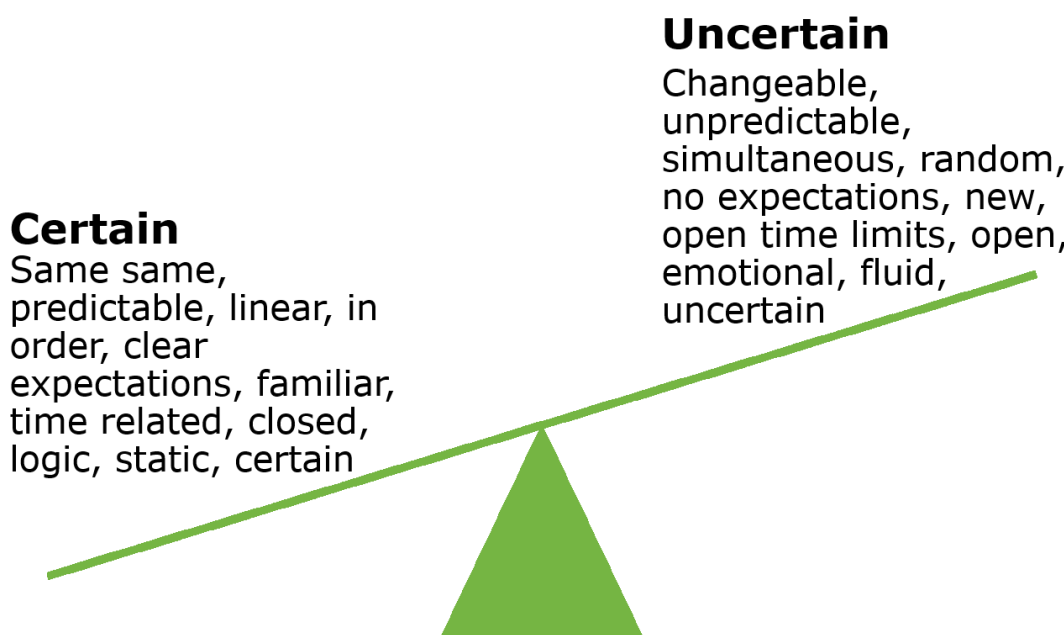
Adapted from Esther Thelen,
Dynamic Systems Theory

We all like some 'same-same' in our lives, as this keeps us less anxious, but we also like some change too. If there is too much change, we may feel our lives are out of control. If there is too much sameness, our lives may feel a little boring.

Different Seesaws, Different Brains

Everyone's seesaw is different. Which way does yours tilt?

Children with autism generally like their seesaws to be heavily weighted on the 'same-same' side, as shown below. So, your student with autism will prefer classroom activities and school situations that are predictable and familiar and may try to avoid those that are not.



My Voice: Making order out of chaos

I loved to copy, create and order things. I loved our set of encyclopaedias. They had letters and numbers on the side, and I was always checking to make sure they were in order or putting them that way. I was making order out of chaos.

-Donna Williams

How Compensation Strategies Help

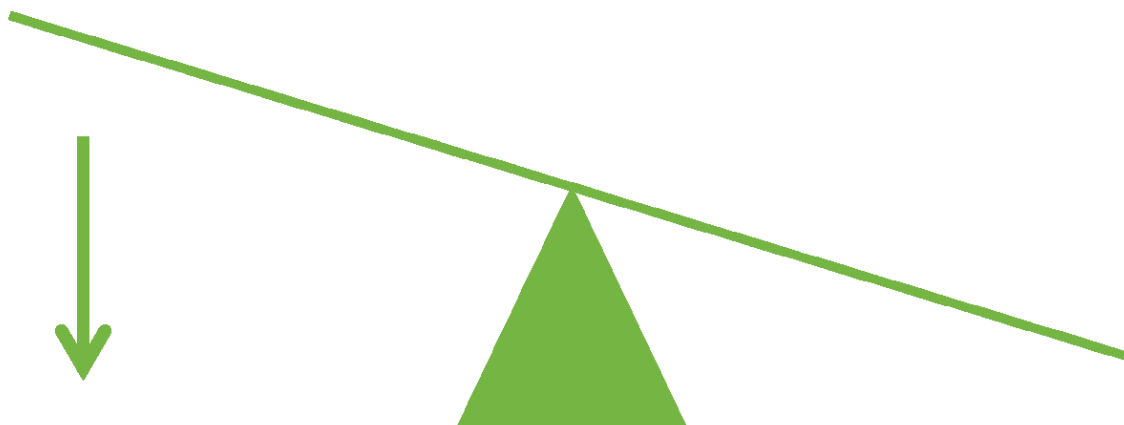
Using the lists on the seesaw, we can assess each classroom activity and school situation to discover if it is certain (static) or uncertain (dynamic).

If an activity is heavily weighted to the certain side, we believe that a student with autism will be less anxious doing it. Similarly, if the activity is heavily weighted towards the uncertain side, the student with autism will have more difficulty taking part.

In uncertain situations and activities, we can use compensation strategies to tilt the seesaw, making the activity more certain and accessible to students with autism.

Using compensation strategies assists in reducing anxiety and will be more likely to increase a student’s participation in learning *and* foster their independence and inclusion at school. We can begin to Tilt the Seesaw!

Information



By understanding how autism specifically affects your student's behaviour, you can develop personalised compensation strategies to help tilt your student's own seesaw.



Classroom Snapshot: Tilting the Seesaw in practice

The class teacher noticed that her student had challenges at mat time. At first, she thought that mat time was on the same-side of the seesaw because they did it at the same time daily and it occurred regularly. But as she thought more about it, she realized there were lots of changeable things. For example, the student didn’t always sit in the same place, didn’t know how long they were to stay there, didn’t know if it was a singing mat time, a story mat time or a talking mat time. She realized she could take away some of his fears by creating his own mat which showed him exactly where to sit. She also created 3 symbols for sing, talk, and story to put on the whiteboard which helped all the children understand what was happening on the mat.

Module 1: Understanding Autism and Strengths

A Note on Language

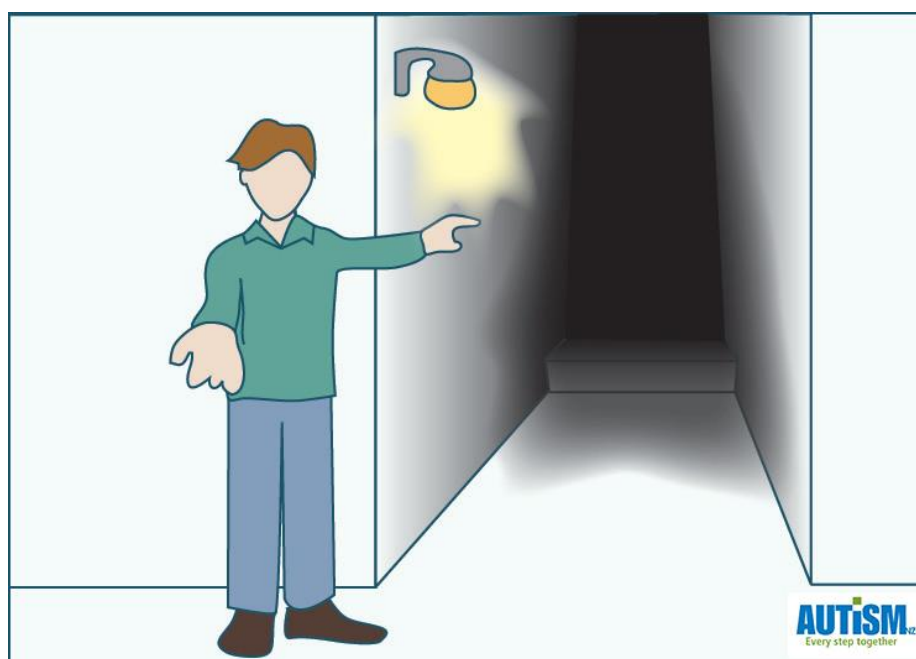
The language in this book describes classroom and playtime settings in school. Although aimed at teachers and other school staff, the information and strategies are intended to work across both the home and school settings.

There is debate in the autistic community about whether people should use 'autistic person' (diagnosis-first) or 'person with autism' (person-first). Many autistic adults prefer the diagnosis-first as they consider their autism an intrinsic part of their personhood.

While Autism New Zealand recognises this, we have chosen to use person-first language in this workbook. The reason for this is the workbook is aimed not at people with autism themselves, but on those around them who are seeking knowledge. In this situation we find that person-first language fosters greater awareness of the personhood and many different facets of people with autism - this is a crucial learning curve for non-autistic people wanting awareness and understanding. Fundamentally it is whether a teacher shows kindness, compassion and an ability to adapt to the learning needs of the particular student which contributes to being a good teacher of children with autism.

Autism New Zealand does not use terms such as 'high-functioning' or 'low-functioning' and try to avoid 'disability' except when used in medical texts. We find this type of language is inaccurate at best, and potentially negative and harmful to people with autism. This leads us to our first metaphor.

The Reality of Autism



The Dark Alley

'Come down this dark alley with me'

The Dark Alley is an exercise that perhaps gives an insight into how a person with autism may feel when faced with changes to their life, new events, and unpredictable situations.

How would you feel if you were

asked to go down a dark alley with a stranger? Would you feel anxious? Scared? Refuse to go? Run the other way?

Would you feel less anxious and scared if you trusted that person?

Would you feel less anxious and scared if someone put the lights on so you could see what was happening in the dark alley?

Ask yourself:

'Am I asking the person I know to constantly go down the dark alley?'

'How can I become the trusted person?'

'How can I put the lights on?'

This exercise was created to demonstrate what Neil Stuart of Autism New Zealand had been told and seen himself with the people he had worked with.



My Voice: Tilting the seesaw to 'certain'

Reality to an autistic person is a confusing, interacting mass of events, people, places, sounds and sights. There seems to be no clear boundaries, order or meaning to anything. A large part of my life is spent just trying to work out the pattern behind everything..... Trying to keep everything the same reduces some of the terrible fear.... Life is bewildering.

-Therese Joliffe

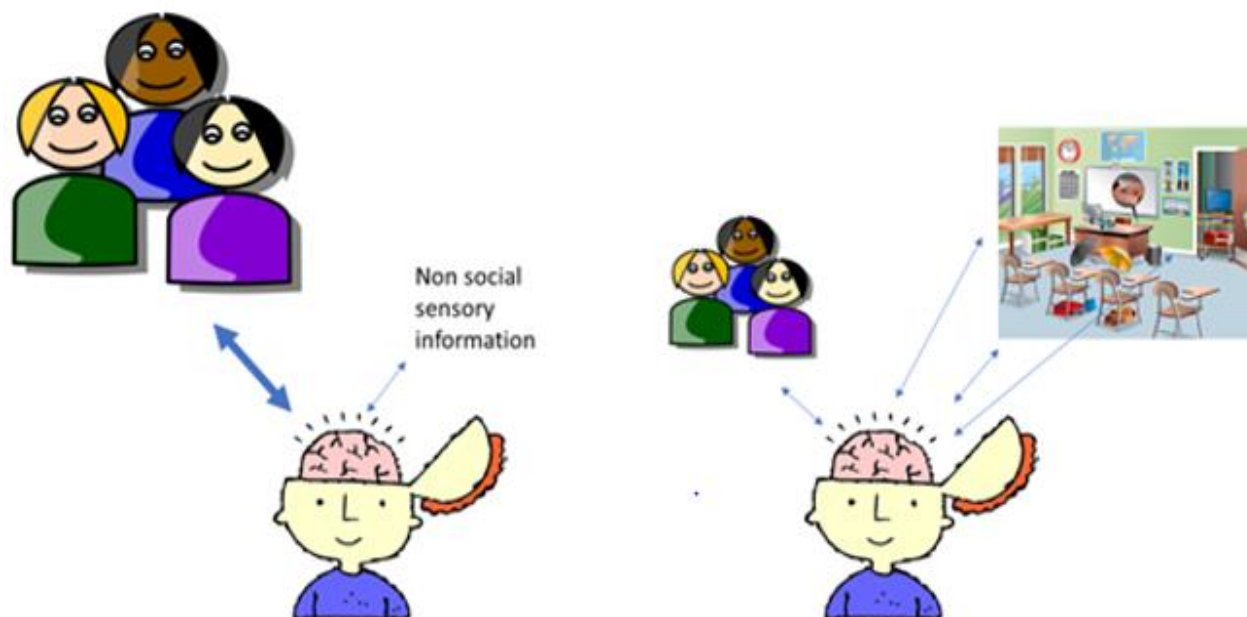
I just got to a point where school had become a phobia and I couldn't get out of the car. As soon as I'd get in the car to go to school, I'd start having a panic attack.

-www.learnfromautistics.com

Differences in How the Brain Works

The brain makes sense of the world by prioritising sensory input. Such input includes sounds, what we see, taste, touch and smell but also proprioception, interoception and vestibular. The brain prioritises input, so it can focus on what is most important, depending on the circumstances.

The brains of neuro-typical people usually prioritise sensory input related to social interaction and communication, especially speech, tone of voice and body language. The movement of people, the sounds people make are more likely to reach the brain than other movements and sounds. The brain is **socially sensory oriented**.



However, many students with autism may find this prioritisation difficult. Social sensory input is just part of the sensory jumble going on around them.

All of the many sorts of sounds, sights, smells, textures and tastes occurring at one time may be distracting or confusing for people with autism.



My Voice: Managing sensory input

I was intensely pre-occupied with the movement of the spinning coin or lid. And I saw nothing and heard nothing. I did it because it shut out sound that hurt my ears. No sound intruded on my fixation.

- Temple Grandin, A is for Autism

Taking regular breaks from a confusing overwhelming sensory environment may help to minimise sensory overload.

Medical models of autism tend to emphasise the challenges that people on the spectrum face. A social model recognises that the environment may not be suitable for a child, and that only when we change the environment will we see the potential of that child.

Understanding Your Student

Understanding autism is your first compensation strategy to help you start tilting your student's seesaw.

Understanding the autism spectrum means for your student:

- There may be difficulty communicating and interacting socially.
- A desire for routine and sameness may reduce anxiety. Change may be challenging
- Support may be needed for the dynamic/changeable aspects of school life.
- The sensory environment of the class may prove challenging

Changing the way you communicate with your student may help.



My Voice: Understanding communication

'It was ages before I realised that people speaking might be demanding my attention. But I sometimes got annoyed when I realised that I too was expected to attend... because my quietness was being disturbed. Speaking for me is still often difficult and sometimes impossible.... I know in my head what the words are, but they do not always come out.... Sometimes when they do come out, they are incorrect. Sometimes I used to repeat the same words over and over again, as this made me feel safer.'

- Therese Joliffe

Here are some simple ways to make your spoken communication clear and 'same-same' when teaching your student with autism. If you follow these guidelines, you can help your student comprehend what you are saying.

1. The Rule of 5: 'Fewer than 5 words, wait 5 seconds'

This strategy incorporates two huge challenges for you as an adult! The first challenge is to reduce the number of words you say in each sentence to fewer than 5 words. The second challenge is to wait for 5 seconds after each sentence, to allow the student to process what you said.

Handy Tip! Write a reminder sign for your desk: 'Rule of 5'.

2. Use the student's name first

We can cue the student by saying their name first. This gets their attention and allows them to work out that we are speaking to them (since they may not pick up non-verbal cues like eye contact).

For example, to guide a student to finish one activity and move to the next, you could say '*Jack, time for reading*'.

3. Give positive direction

Someone with autism once said, 'Everyone told me what **not** to do, no one ever told me what **to** do'. As much as possible, tell your student what to do, rather than what not to do. Sometimes the word 'no' can cause difficulties or upset a person with autism. Try to phrase instructions positively.

For example, say: 'Jack, use a tissue' rather than: 'Stop picking your nose!'

4. Use 'first' and 'then' to describe sequences

How can you get across that what they want is not available now but will be later? Using 'first' and 'then' can help your student understand about sequential events.

For example, say: 'Jack, **first** we do reading.' Wait 5 seconds!

Then say: 'Jack, **then** we do computing'.

5. Give warnings before an activity finishes

Avoid upsetting your student by giving plenty of warnings before a favourite activity ends. Giving three warnings is standard.

For example, start with: 'Jack, five minutes left on computer.'

Four minutes later say: 'Jack, one minute left on computer.'

When the minute is up say: 'Jack, computer time is finished.'

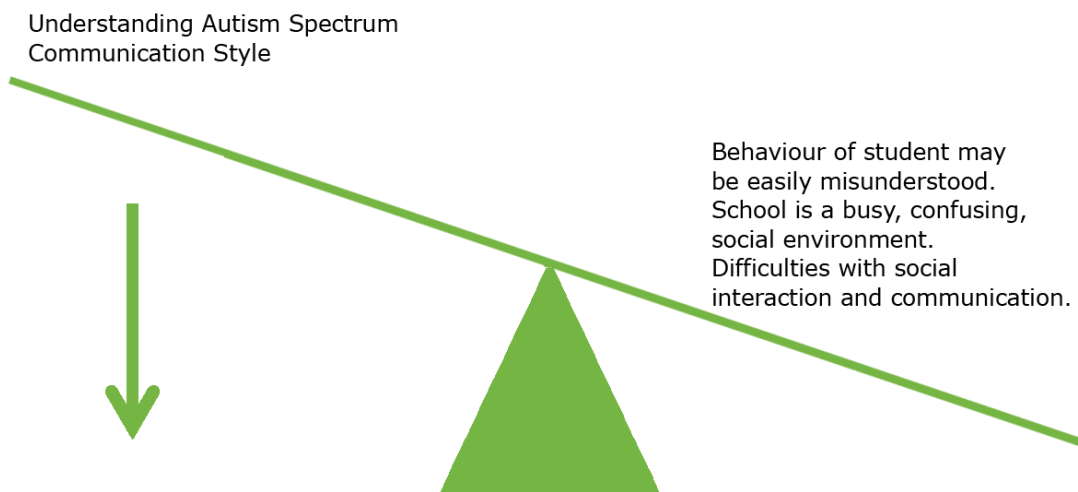
Back this up with something visual.

6. Asking questions may not lead to answers

Asking questions may be anxiety provoking and can lead to students with autism answering in rote ways, such as replying 'no', or 'I don't know' or similar scripted responses.

7. Make communication visual

See Module 3 for specific visual communications.



Strengths and Interests

By using students' strengths alongside the compensation strategies taught in this programme, you can create high-quality educational experiences for your student.

Typically, students with autism are good at the following types of learning:

- Acquiring knowledge
- Rote learning (learning by heart)
- Remembering information for long periods of time
- Learning in detail and in 'chunks'
- Paying close attention to small details
- Concentrating on narrow topics of interest
- Visual learning and thinking style
- Using visual information meaningfully
- Using concrete information
- Understanding and following rules
- Actions and thought processes that are logical and follow strict rules, such as maths problems and computing systems

Using Special Interests

Dr Stephen Shore, an adult with autism, advocates that students' special interests should be taken into account when designing education programmes. They provide a good source of motivation to learn about different subject matter and to complete other work.



My Voice: Using special interests

For the student who has a special interest in aviation, airplanes can be employed to introduce subject matter. For example, there's plenty of mathematics involved in calculating distances, speeds, amount of time, etc. when considering flight paths of airplanes. Where an airplane lands can be used to introduce subject related to social studies. Similarly, comparing the need for careful scheduling of flights or maintenance of airplanes can be compared to the scheduling of the day, week, or other period of time for the student.

- Dr Stephen Shore



Classroom Snapshot: Using special interests

Sophie is not eager to do the cross-country practice.

Her clever teacher decides to put five laminated photos of the Wiggles to collect along the route. Sophie loves the Wiggles!

She carries a baseboard to collect them all. She eagerly runs to get the next one now.



My Voice: Incorporating interests

"It is important for teachers to know about their student's interests and build on these existing strengths. Using these topics as the centrepiece of students' academic work helps to keep them focussed, engaged and motivated and can also serve as a bridge to new topics and skills."

- Dr Stephen Shore

Often students become especially interested in a certain topic, character or subject. These interests used to be negatively described as 'obsessive' and are still described in the diagnosis manual as 'restrictive'.

Dr Stephen Shore prefers to call these interests 'focussed'. He sees them as a source of motivation, and ultimately where people with autism may find employment.

Clara Park writing about her daughter in the book *The Siege*, preferred to call them 'enthusiasms'.

Often a person's motivation to learn is heightened by including their interests – that applies to everyone!

Where possible include a person’s enthusiasms to help them learn new things or experience activities that may not be undertaken otherwise.



Classroom Snapshot: Using special interests

Spelling was always a challenge with little interest or participation from Johnny. Johnny was seven years old and had a fascination with hot air balloons.

Johnny’s teacher drew a hot air balloon and cut around the basket. She suggested Johnny could choose five words to put into the basket of the hot air balloon. These became his spelling words and his routine for participating in spelling with the rest of the class. Each day he chose his own words, initially related to hot air balloons but later diversifying into a wider range of interests.

The teacher used a special interest to engage with Johnny and to motivate an interest in learning to spell new words.

Using Strengths for Independence

Independent Work Systems

Developing an individualised work system for the student uses the strengths of the student with autism. It is clear, predictable and certain.

For example, one type of independent work system is to use an office ‘in-and-out’ tray. Work to be done is placed in the in-tray where the student can easily find it. Once the task is finished, the student places the completed work in the out-tray.

This helps the student to understand what is next to do, and when that work is finished. After the work has been completed, it can be helpful to offer reward time. A choice board or choosing box can be used to provide options to the student in advance so they do not have to ask the teacher.



A divided folder or filing box can perform the same function as in and out trays.

Include all the materials that the student may need into the work schedule/system - avoiding the need to wander around the room collecting them and the potential of getting distracted!

It can be a good idea to make one of the activities a social activity to ensure that the student with autism is not always working alone in a corner. An example of a social activity could be a group activity or reading a book with another student.

Understanding autism and communication style.
Use child's strengths and interests.

Behaviour of student may be easily misunderstood.
School is a busy, confusing, social environment.
Difficulties with social interaction and communication.

Video References

Ethan Lisi dispels the stereotypes of Autism

https://www.ted.com/talks/ethan_lisi_what_it_s_really_like_to_have_autism

Stephen Shore talks about looking at autism in a different way

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk9T7ngEijs&t=217s>

National Autistic Society information video on sensory overload

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPknwW8mPAM>

A small part of the uplifting tale of a father who connects with his son through Disney movies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAKOXbO2-Eg>

Watch how a sister introduces the independent work system to her little brother

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pejI65qGrg>