

Module: Structured Work Systems

Overview of Structured Work Systems

Hume, K., & Carnahan, C. (2008). *Overview of structured work systems*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, The University of North Carolina.

Structured work systems are an element of structured teaching developed by Division TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped CHildren). Structured teaching, as defined by Division TEACCH, is an instructional strategy that emphasizes visual supports. Its aims are to increase and maximize independent functioning and reduce the frequent need for teacher correction and reprimand (Schopler, Mesibov, & Hearshey, 1995). The individual work system is defined as a visually organized space where learners independently practice skills that have been previously mastered under the direct supervision of an adult. A work system visually communicates at least four pieces of information to the learner:

- The tasks the learner is supposed to do
- How much work there is to be completed
- How the learner knows he/she is finished (progress towards goal)
- What to do when he/she is finished

Evidence

Structured work systems meet the evidence-based practice criteria within the elementary and middle school age groups (elementary and middle school age, n = 5 combined evidence). Only one study met criteria in the early childhood age group.

With what ages are structured work systems effective?

Structured work systems can be implemented with individuals across the age range, beginning in preschool and extending through high school and into employment settings. With early childhood and elementary-aged students, work systems are an effective component of classroom or home programming that increase independent performance across a number of curriculum areas, including academic and play skills (Hume & Odom, 2007; Ozonoff & Cathcart, 1998). In older learners with ASD, work systems have been effective in increasing on-task performance and task completion in after-school activities and job skills (Hume & Odom, 2007; MacDuff, Krantz, & McClannahan, 1993).

What skills or intervention goals can be addressed by structured work systems?

Structured work systems target adaptive behavior skills including on-task behavior, task completion, transitions between tasks, increasing response chain length, and independent performance across curriculum area (e.g. play skills, self-help skills, academic skills).

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In what settings can structured work systems be effectively used?

Structured work systems have been used effectively in classroom settings, home settings, group home settings, and in one employment setting. Structured work systems are intended to be used as one component of comprehensive programming for individuals with ASD.

Evidence Base

The studies cited in this section provide the basis upon which this practice was determined to meet the NPDC on ASD's criteria as an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist but were not included.

Preschool

Ozonoff, S., & Cathcart, K. (1998). Effectiveness of a home program intervention for young children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 28, 25-32.

Elementary and Middle School Age

Dettmer, S., Simpson, R., Myles, B., & Ganz, J. (2000). The use of visual supports to facilitate transitions of students with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 15, 163-170.

Hume, K., & Odom, S. (2007). Effects of an individual work system on the independent functioning of students with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37, 1166-1180.

Panerai, S., Ferrante, L., & Caputo, V. (1997). The TEACCH strategy in mentally retarded children with autism: A multidimensional assessment. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 27, 345-347.

Panerai, S., Ferrante, L., & Zingale, M. (2002). Benefits of the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) program as compared with a non-specific approach. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 46, 318.

Selected Additional References

Krantz, P., MacDuff, M., & McClannahan, L. (1993). Programming participation in family activities for children with autism: Parent's use photographic activity schedules. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 26, 137-138.

MacDuff, G., Krantz, P., & McClannahan, L. (1993). Teaching children with autism to use photographic activity schedules: Maintenance and generalization of complex response chains. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 26, 89-97.

Mesibov, G., Shea, V., & Schopler, E. (2005). *The TEACCH approach to autism spectrum disorders*. New York: Plenum Press.

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Panerai, S., Ferrante, L., Caputo, V., & Impellizzeri, C. (1998). Use of structured teaching for treatment of children with autism and severe and profound mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 33, 367-374.

Schopler, E., Mesibov, G., & Hearsey, K. (1995). Structured teaching in the TEACCH system. In E. Schopler & G. Mesibov (Eds.), *Learning and cognition in autism* (pp. 243-268). New York: Plenum Press.