Structured Work Systems

What it is, why it is used: A structured work system refers to the physical structure of a student's work area as well as the physical structure of the activity itself. Both a structured work environment and a structured work task tell the student what is expected of him/her during an activity, how much is supposed to be accomplished, and what happens after the activity is completed. The work system is also organized in such a way that the person has little or no difficulty figuring out what to do. The goal is to teach the person to work independently.

Examples of a structured work areas:

Examples of Structured Work Tasks:

Materials Needed: Materials used in structured work systems will vary.

Possible materials/furniture needed for structured work areas:

- Individual student desks or small tables
- Partitions
- Stackable work baskets
- Plastic storage containers with drawers
- Laminated numbers/pictures/colors with velcro to identify the order in which tasks are completed (these numbers can be placed on the student desk and/or on the work baskets or task drawers)

Possible materials needed for structured work tasks:

- Cardboard flats from soda cans
- Egg cartons or ice cube trays
- Empty plastic food containers (cool whip, butter, sour cream)
- Manipulatives
- Velcro
- Laminating pouches
- File Folders
- Small baskets

Information compiled by Lincoln Public Schools Autism Team (September 2015)

- Envelopes or small paper pouches

How and when to implement:

- When implementing a structured work system, the following student questions need to be answered:
    - What am I expected to do
    - How much am I expected to do
    - How will I know when I am finished
    - Where do I put my finished work
    - What will I get when I'm done or what do I do next
- Within a structured work systems, a student has identified independent work times and teacher work times. After a teacher has introduced a new task during teacher work times and the student demonstrates mastery, that task can be moved to the independent work time.
- Initially, a student may need guidance and teaching to navigate their structured work system, but ultimately the goal is for the student to use the system independently.

Things to consider/problem solving:

- It is imperative to keep work spaces and reward/play spaces separate. This will help a student identify when and where work happens and when and where breaks, rewards and free time happen.
- A student may need to build up his/her stamina for completing multiple jobs.
- The team needs to carefully consider how and when tasks are taken apart. Do not have the student take the task apart after he/she completes the task-the teacher needs to evaluate the accuracy. Staff should not take the task apart in front of the student.

Useful resources to learn more:

http://www.tasksgalore.com/html/tasks_galore_literature_-_base.html

http://www.autismtasks.com/

http://csesa.fpg.unc.edu/sites/csesa.fpg.unc.edu/files/ebpbriefs/StructuredWorkSystems_Steps_0.pdf