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## **Literacy Instruction for Student with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

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Research on the unique literacy needs of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has grown in the past decade. While reading profiles vary, many children with ASD are better at decoding (i.e., word calling) than comprehending text (Carnahan and Williamson, 2013). Like all learners, these students need instruction that aligns with their individual strengths and needs.

Thematically based instruction integrating daily word study, reading, and writing is the foundation of this instruction. Word study is systematic investigation of words and word parts that enables understanding of spelling patterns and meanings (Morrow & Carnahan, 2010). For many students with ASD, activities such as matching, sorting pictures, and letter identification become the mainstay of their word study instruction. While these activities may be important, teaching students with ASD about how words function and their purpose is critical. Thus, embedding discrete word level skills in larger, thematic based lessons is imperative (Carnahan and Williamson, 2013).

Daily reading instruction is also critical to support literacy development for learners with ASD. In order to comprehend a text, readers must integrate background knowledge with the information provided by the author. Many students with ASD, however, have difficulty identifying relevant background knowledge and integrating it with the information in the text. One strategy for helping students with ASD integrate background knowledge is using specific areas of interest as the topic of a thematic unit (Carnahan and Williamson, 2013).

Finally, students need daily instruction in writing. Connecting this instruction to the materials students are reading can maximize instructional effectiveness. Learners with ASD need writing instruction that emphasizes meaning (i.e., idea generation) over form, or the actual paper-pen task of writing. Writing is a complex and challenging task for many learners with ASD. Thus, incorporating multiple means of expression, such as blogs, photo voice, Animoto, texting, and communication devices will likely increase students' interest in writing and their success.

When the student is included in a science unit about rivers, information from the unit can be incorporated across the school day. For word study instruction, the student may study word families such as the "er" word families. Reading activities might include partner reading books about rivers, reading online books, and the teacher reading aloud to the class. The student could write or create photo essays about American rivers, integrating words from the word study instruction, and the books they read. Additionally, using strategies such as KWL charts and Venn Diagrams help learners organize their understanding. These integrated instructional activities increase background knowledge, build vocabulary and encourage communication (Carnahan and Williamson, 2013).

Word study, reading comprehension and writing skills encourage active participation in all areas of the school day. Literacy instruction should be individualized; student interest and student's background knowledge

should drive instruction. Systematic instruction embedded in meaningful contexts allows for purposeful and meaningful engagement in all academic subjects (Carnahan and Williamson, 2013).

References

Carnahan, C., Williamson, P., Hollingshead, A. & Israel, M. (2012). Using technology to support balanced literacy for students with significant disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 45 (1), 20-29.

Carnahan, C., Williamson, P. & Christman, J. (2011). Linking cognition and literacy in students with autism spectrum Disorder. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43 (6), 54-62.

Morrow, L. M., & Carnahan, C. (2010). Exemplary and Balanced Literacy Instruction. In C. Carnahan & P. Williamson (Eds.) *Quality literacy instruction for students with autism spectrum disorders* (pp. 189-216). Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism Asperger Publishing Company.

Direct link to our website:  
[www.KansasASD.com](http://www.KansasASD.com)  
[www.TASNBehaviorSupports.com](http://www.TASNBehaviorSupports.com)

## November TRAININGS

**November 6 & 7**  
**Autism Diagnostic Team (ADT) Training**  
 Registration Closed

**November 12 & 13, 3:00-3:45;  
 4:00-4:45**  
**Tri-State ASD Webinar Series: Two Part Series, ASD & Literacy**  
 Link to register for part 1: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N7YW5HL>  
 Link to register for part 2: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N72LP3N>

**November 14, 8:30 am- 10:00 am**  
**ADOS-2 Module 1 Practice Webinar**  
 Link to register: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZTMK9QB>

### TIPS FROM THE CORNER:

With your school year well under way, take time to reflect upon how effectively you implemented key practices proven to impact yearlong success.

**1) Specific Frequent Feedback**  
 Continue to provide specific frequent feedback for students following expectations. Specific feedback includes three components: the expectation, the behavior, and the rationale. For example, “I noticed that you used **safety** in the hallway by keeping **eyes forward** in order to **avoid stepping on your neighbors’ feet**. Use a 4 to 1 ratio of positive specific feedback statements for every one corrective feedback. Reflect upon a time of the day that requires you to stop instruction due to disruptive behavior. Is it surrounding an expectation or procedure with which students are struggling? If so, Teach/Show/Practice and Reinforce the expectation or procedure.

**2) Active Engagement**  
 Continue to instruct learners what it looks like/sounds like to be a responsible learner in your classroom. Minimize the use of hand raising where only a few students get called on to answer questions. Typically only the students who know the answer raise their hand, while those who are uncertain, avoid raising their hands. It is difficult to adjust to instructional needs when it appears from the few students with raised hands that instructional content is understood. Instead vary individual with group responses or monitor everyone’s written response electronically or on a white board.

Time spent providing specific, frequent feedback and actively engaging students in the learning task will save you reactive management time throughout the year.

