

## DEVELOPING PARTICIPATION From observer to participant

### Introduction

The child with autism in the inclusion setting is expected to participate in the classroom community along with his typical peers. Group participation is complex and abstract to the concrete thinker and must be broken down into its component tasks. Participation is, by nature, a social experience. Typical children usually find motivation and gratification through participation as a result of interaction with other people, as well as a sense of pride and accomplishment. The child with autism may view participation as merely a necessary task for which he has no interest apart from artificial reinforcement. Creating successful participation requires systematic dissection of complex group settings, with isolation and mastery of component skills. Participation elements rarely lend themselves to a discrete trial format. Furthermore, environmental cues may be variable, transient, or absent. For example, the child may understand that he should raise his hand during group time. However, the transient nature of an auditory instruction may elude the child with an auditory processing difficulty. Thus, instructing the child to respond to an environmental cue such as “when the teacher asks a question” will be ineffective. Alternative strategies must be used that encourage on-task behavior based on more permanent cues.

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### Domain

1. Following commands
2. Imitation of peers
3. Responding
4. Initiating
5. Working with a partner or group

### Approach

#### Following commands

Simple participation begins with the child following the teacher’s verbal, group instructions. Simple, one step instructions must be mastered before moving on to multiple step instructions. At the preschool and kindergarten level, individual participation is predominately in response to auditory group instructions. Stimulus control is transferred to the teacher when the child no longer needs to be prompted by the aide to “Do what the teacher says,” and so forth. Reinforcement should be accompanied by specific verbal praise. Commonly, the child with autism will respond only to directions given to him by name, “John, clap your hands” rather than to the general group instruction, “Everybody clap your

hands.” The teacher should be instructed that using his name is a heavy prompt and that it is preferable to repeat the instruction with emphasis, “Everybody clap your hands.” If the child still fails to respond, then using his name as a prompt is appropriate and must be followed by an unprompted trial. So the trial looks like this:

Teacher: “Everybody clap your hands.” Child: no response.  
 Teacher: “Everybody clap your hands.” Child: no response.  
 Teacher: “John, clap your hands.” Child: claps hands  
 Teacher: “Everybody clap your hands. Great clapping John!”


information necessary to complete a task such as incorporating the lesson into a writing task. The recall element should indicate that the child knows what he is supposed to do.

#### Using comprehension

If the child can recall auditory instructions given to the class but can not translate them into meaningful steps that enable him to complete the assignment, an intermediate step is needed. A written cue card that expands on the group instructions can bridge the gap in understanding and allow the child to complete the task independently rather than being prompted through it. Thus, “Write a story about a time you felt disappointed” is expanded to:

1. “Disappointed” means when you did not get something you wanted.
2. Think of something you want. Write it here:
3. Now think of a time you did not get it.
4. Write 5 sentences that tell about it. Tell what happened and how you felt.

The child with autism can significantly improve his attention through an approach that minimizes distractions, teaches self-regulation of distracted behaviors, and provides attention teaching tasks within specific situations. Attention skills must be well established before the child can participate in the group dynamics of the classroom.



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### Chapter Summary

Manage distractions according to:

- Specific setting
- Source
- Teaching self-regulation

Teach attention through individual tasks:

- Visual tasks
- Auditory tasks

Measure attention through:

- Recall
- Comprehension