

# Innovations and Perspectives Innovations and Perspectives



Linking People and Resources

Newsletter of the Virginia Commonwealth University Training and Technical Assistance Center (VCU T/TAC) for School Personnel Serving Children and Youth with Disabilities and Children At-Risk for Academic Failure

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## A New Year, A New Opportunity

This issue of *Innovations and Perspectives* is designed to help you kick off 1999-2000 by focusing on planning for the upcoming school year. Articles on the following pages are included to jump-start your thinking about how to work with your team, design instruction, use technology, communicate with parents, and plan proactive behavior strategies. To begin, we would like to describe how the T/TAC staff is planning to make the most of the opportunities we offer.

The VCU T/TAC serves nearly 240 public schools, four early intervention programs, and four state operated programs across the 26 localities in Regions 1 and 8. Thousands of teachers, administrators, early intervention service providers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers are eligible for our services. As you might imagine, we grapple with the question, "How can we make sure our services are as useful as possible to as many people as possible?"

Obviously, there is no simple or single answer to this question. Our response, therefore, must be guided by what we believe. We believe we should help our consumers develop the capacity to solve their own problems. The proverb, "if you give a man a fish you feed him for a day, but if you teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime" is a good metaphor for this belief. For example, if a school contacted the T/TAC and asked for a Program Specialist to complete a functional behavioral assessment for a student who has challenging behavior, we would probably not agree to provide those services. However, a request from a school team to learn how to complete functional behavioral assessments may be responded to through several means. The team might be encouraged to attend one or more training sessions that will be offered by the T/TAC, one or more Program Specialists might work with the team at their school, or the team might be referred to training that will be offered by another organization. In addition, the team might be offered resources from the T/TAC library, and team members might consult with a Program Specialist through e-mail or by telephone.

We also believe in demonstrating good practice in training. Our job is to ensure that our consumers develop new skills and learn new things that will be transferred to their work with youngsters. The research on how practicing educators learn reveals that the one-shot workshop is a very poor approach to training if the goal is for new information to be transferred to teaching. Landmark research on the effectiveness of various training approaches conducted by Joyce and Flowers (1988) revealed that when teachers participated in a variety of one shot training events, only ten percent of what had been presented in the training was transferred to their instructional practice. In contrast, when training was paired with peer coaching (two teachers working together to implement the content of the training), 80 percent of the information in training was transferred to the teachers' classrooms.

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DISABILITIES

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Since Joyce and Flowers demonstrated the power of peer interaction as a training tool, others including Bellanca (1995) have shown that peer coaching is only one strategy for enhancing the chances that training will be transferred to instruction. In its briefest form, this body of research tells us that teacher learning is most likely to be transferred to classroom behaviors when there are planned, systematic opportunities for professionals to work and practice new skills together for an extended period of time following the initial training.

So what's a T/TAC to do? Naturally, we do not want to waste resources on training events that seem to have almost no long-term benefit. In order to capitalize on our opportunity to deliver high quality training, we have combined our knowledge of good professional development practices with the results of training needs assessments completed by hundreds of consumers last year. As a result, we plan to offer full day mini-conferences and training strands consisting of several workshops with complementary follow up technical assistance available. Topics will also reflect our consumers' expressed needs in areas such as literacy, instructional strategies, behavior, and drop out prevention. We hope that coupled with follow-up activities such as discussion groups or peer coaching that could be designed at the school level, our training agenda will meet many of your needs.

Like training events, we want to make sure that when we accept a request for a consult we are providing the highest quality service possible. Before you call us to request a consultation please ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I already sought assistance from everyone in my school division who may be able to help me with my question?
- If the consultation is focused on a single student who has an IEP, have I called the IEP Team together to seek solutions?
- Have I given any new strategies **at least four to five weeks** to become effective before I try something else?
- If I call the T/TAC, am I willing to try what the consultant suggests for **at least four to five weeks**?
- Am I willing to consider new things, even if it means I might be asked to adopt a new approach or attitude toward my students, their families, my colleagues, and my work?

If you can answer yes to **all** of these questions, there is a good chance that a T/TAC consultation is an appropriate route to helping you meet your needs.

As with training events and consultations, we are anxious to make sure that local workshops are consistent with what the research in professional development has taught us. In order to capitalize on what we know about the principles of professional development, we hope you will ask yourself these questions before you call the T/TAC to request a local workshop.

- What do I *really* want to achieve through this workshop? If you are content only to raise the level of participants' awareness of information that will be presented, you can probably accomplish your goal with a single workshop.
- Do I want changes in instructional intervention, behavioral intervention, or teaming practices as the result of this workshop? If this is your goal, a stand-alone workshop will almost certainly *not* bring the results you are looking for. Consider what kind of follow up you will implement to enhance the chances that positive changes result.
- Am I overlooking anyone in the school division who could provide this workshop? There are many talented people in every school division, with expertise, who can provide follow-up and on-going consultation in the implementation stage.

The T/TAC is heavily invested in providing services to our consumers that will make the biggest difference possible for students. We are looking toward working as partners with schools, school divisions, early intervention programs, and state operated programs to help bring about the best possible long-term results for the youngsters we all care about. As such, we are planning to try and take advantage of what we know about what you want to learn, how you want it presented, and what we know about how teacher learning is transferred to classroom practice. The beginning of the year is a new opportunity, indeed. It is a privilege to us at the T/TAC to believe we can be a part of helping you realize your goals for change through professional development!

Jo Smith Read

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# TEAMWORK

## A New Year -- A New Team

The beginning of the new school year means that a variety of school teams are being formed and getting organized. These include grade-level teams, school improvement teams, administrative teams, and special education teams. These teams will work together during the next nine months to plan, implement, coordinate, and evaluate a wide variety of services and activities.

Most teams will inevitably be "new" teams even if they existed last year. How can that be? Although team members may be returning to a team from last year, several new members will join your team as a result of retirements, transfers, and new hires. Even if you have only one new member on your team, the team will begin the new year in the "joining stage" of team development. It is important for everyone to recognize the critical nature of this first stage. It provides the foundation for the rest of the school year.

### The Joining Stage

During the joining stage, the critical issues for the team are belonging, identity, trust, openness, and communication. During the first week that teachers are back at work, each team needs to meet in order for the new and returning members to meet one another and to acknowledge that they are indeed a team that will be working together during the coming year. During this first meeting, team members will begin the process of getting to know one another as people and professionals. Some team members use structured exercises to encourage members to discover things that the members may have in common and to bring out the differences and strengths that each member brings to the team.

It is also appropriate in the early meetings for the returning members to communicate to the new colleagues the strengths of last year's team as well as their hopes for improvement during the coming year. New members should be given the opportunity to share their previous experiences with teams and their hopes for this new team. The communication of past experiences, expectations, and hopes for the new year will help the team members build trust and provide a foundation for communications regarding the students' needs and the coordination of services.

### Establishing a Schedule and a Structure

At the beginning of the school year, teams need to develop a schedule and structure for their meetings during the entire year. While their calendars are relatively clear, team members need to agree to the dates and times when they are going to

have regular team meetings. Once this schedule is set, the team members need to protect these meeting times and hold one another accountable for consistent attendance. Regarding the leadership of the meetings, teams need to discuss the formal roles that members will play. Many teams now rotate the roles of team facilitator and recorder of team minutes on a monthly basis. Some teams assign a different member each week to serve as a process observer who gives the team feedback at the end of the meeting. The beginning of the school year is the appropriate time to schedule the rotating leadership for the year.

### Establishing a Meeting Format

Teams need to establish a standard format for all meetings. This will increase efficiency and consistency across facilitators. Here is a suggested format that teams can modify to meet their own needs.

1. Celebrations: begin the meeting with successes and achievements.
2. Announcements: information that can be shared that requires no discussion.
3. Review of minutes: review of decisions made and action steps that were expected.
4. Setting the agenda: review the list of topics to be discussed; prioritize, and assign the amount of time for each item, and the order of the discussion. These are consensus decisions, allowing all members opportunities to have input.
5. Discussions and decisions: the highest priority items are discussed first, decisions are made, and responsibilities are assigned for implementing the decisions.
6. Reflections on the meeting: if the team has assigned a process observer, this member offers observations regarding how the team communicated information, how decisions were made, and how well the participation and leadership were shared. This discussion can also occur with all members participating.

### Taking Responsibility

In the same way that it is important to get off to a good start with your class at the beginning of the school year, teams need to pay careful attention to the variables that will affect how the team works together. A high functioning team will deliver better services to the students and their families and will provide support and encouragement to its members. Dysfunctional teams are inefficient, filled with conflict, and add to the stress level of their members. As a professional, you need to take steps at the beginning of the year to build a team that is strong, supportive, and successful. The first step could be your copying this article and sharing it with your team colleagues. At the first meeting you could lead a discussion of these ideas and explore the team's willingness

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to adopt those that are seen as helpful. This is a new year, a new team, and a new opportunity. Take personal responsibility to make it so.



Howard Garner

## TECHNOLOGY TIDBITS

### Using the Big "T": Technology Support for Students who Have Learning Disabilities and Who are At-Risk for School Failure

As you begin a new school year, ask yourself "Am I using a variety of technology materials to help my students achieve the greatest success with the least amount of effort?" Even though you may think your computer is the only piece of technology in your classroom, look again. Technology is everywhere! Technology tools can be categorized on a continuum from simple, low tech items such as highlighters, pencil grips, and schedulers, to mid-tech devices like electronic dictionaries, hand-held talking calculators, visual timers, digital clocks, and portable keyboards. At the high tech end are computers, the Internet, and a variety of software programs to support all learning activities. Using any of these tools can improve the chances a student will master curriculum content, including the material included on the SOL assessments.

Don't be shy. Set a goal of trying new technologies with your students this year. A number of devices are designed to help both students with learning disabilities and many at-risk students succeed in performing specific activities. Richard Wanderman, an educational technology consultant and a successful adult with learning disabilities, suggests many different kinds of supports. Some students struggle in the academic environment, while others listen and take notes well in class but have difficulty elsewhere. Dr. Wanderman offers a variety of ideas using low to high tech materials to support students with diverse learning needs. As you begin to use these ideas, it is likely you will find many of these supports helpful to all of your students.

- Use a highlighter pen to support reading comprehension by highlighting specific words or text passages, marking topic sentences and highlighting key points in a story.
- For books that can't be permanently altered with highlighter pens, use highlighter tape or erasable highlighters to mark text. Better yet, wide highlighter tape allows students room for note-taking.

- Some students have difficulty remembering assignments and dates. Assign visual icons to frequent assignments to quickly cue students about the content (i.e. a picture of a list will signal a spelling or vocabulary assignment). Schedulers are useful for recording class schedules, homework assignments, and special projects. Since schedulers rely on handwriting and may be frustrating for students who cannot read their own handwriting, you may want to try an electronic organizer such as the PalmPilot which allows the students to enter assignments and dates by hand.
- An analog or digital talking clock will help young students learn time telling skills. Visual timers help very young students understand time limits for activities.
- Talking calculators may be helpful for students who are auditory learners. Calculators that display fractions are helpful for students who have difficulty remembering and understanding fractions.
- Poor handwriting, frequent spelling errors, and dyslexia undermine a student's writing ability and sense of confidence. Portable keyboards such as AlphaSmart 2000 and Laser PC6 are appropriate for students of all ages (even Kindergarten) whose handwriting is slow and illegible, but who can type well on a standard keyboard. Simple software programs are now available for use with portable word processors in topic areas from math to language arts.
- Portable keyboards and computers feature spellchecking and electronic editing. These features radically change the writing process by eliminating handwriting problems, simplifying proofreading, increasing legibility, expanding vocabulary, and making it easier to organize by cutting and pasting text. Simplifying the writing process allows students to focus on creative writing and the excitement generated by putting their thoughts and ideas on paper.
- E-mail systems or computers networked together allow students to practice conversational writing.
- Word prediction software programs such as *Co-Writer2* help students recall words during the writing process. They can be especially helpful to students who are poor readers and spellers, students with dyslexia, and those for whom English is a second language.
- Text-to-speech synthesis programs such as *Write:2 OutLoud* allow students to hear their writing read

back to them. Students can choose to hear each letter of a word, the whole word, or each complete sentence. This will help students monitor and correct errors in sentence structure and composition.

- Spellcheckers can be helpful to some students while the long list of similar words may confuse others. *Write: OutLoud* reads the spellchecker choices for correct words making it easier for students who need auditory cues to select the correct word.
- Graphic organizer software such as *Inspiration* is appropriate for students of all ages, with and without disabilities, who are having difficulty organizing their ideas into sentences and paragraphs. This is a wonderful tool to help any student fully develop ideas for writing.

When you begin to use a new piece of technology with students, allow extra time for you and your students to learn to use the equipment. Technology should then fade into the background as a support that allows teachers to focus on designing instruction and students to focus their energy on learning the curriculum content.



Sharon Jones

### Reference

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### Foot Note:

**Richard Wanderman will be a featured speaker at TechKnowledgy '99, October 8, 1999, Sheraton Park South, Richmond, VA. If you are interested in learning more about using technology with students with learning disabilities, come and see his dynamic presentation. Registration details are on page 10.**

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### FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

There is no such whetstone, to sharpen a good wit and encourage a will to learning, as is praise.



Roger Ascham

# Bringing Out The Best

## Creating a Proactive Classroom: Applying What We Know

Recently I was lamenting to a school psychologist: "It's not that I don't know what to do with children, critical words just come out sometimes, and I regret them afterwards." My friend smiled and said, "Ahh, the theory of baseline." "Baseline?" I asked, feeling self-conscious for not knowing this theory. He explained, "The theory of baseline tells us that over time, no matter how well-educated we are, we all have a tendency to revert to our baseline behavior in our interactions with others. What ever came naturally to us before we went to college is what we will do within approximately five years after finishing college." Now, I have yet to find any written information on the theory of baseline, but I have a great deal of respect for my friend and believe, even if this is his own theory, it makes a lot of sense.

I'm a perfectionist at heart; it comes from years of shaping from my dad. For example, one of his favorite responses to my questions that started with the word "can" was to say, Of course you CAN, but the question is MAY you." It used to drive me crazy, but I learned to always start a request with "May I." Now I find myself engaging in similar behaviors with children. Multiple college courses have taught me alternative ways to teach children how to use proper English, but correcting children mid-stream in their thoughts is my baseline behavior. I'm sure you have yours, too. For this reason, I felt it might be helpful to serve up a refresher course for starting the year off right. You know this information, but the question is do you really apply it in your classroom? Or, like me, do you find yourself reverting to your baseline behavior and then calling T/TAC to help you with a child who has challenging behavior?

Consider this, every new school year, do you carefully plan how you will create a proactive classroom? Do you consider how you will:

- Share control with students,
- Create an environment conducive to learning,
- Provide ongoing positive regard,
- Foster peer relations,
- Offer interesting curriculum, and
- Provide quality instruction that enables each of your students to succeed?

If you're not sure, then consider the following.

**Sharing Control with Students** means taking the time to involve your students in the development of your classroom expectations even when you have a perfectly good laminated list from last year! It also means having an intentionally flexible

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schedule that allows for student choice in the sequence of activities, the location of activities, the topics of study, and the format used to explore new ideas. Finally, it means scheduling opportunities for students to express opposing ideas even though you're under the gun to raise SOL scores.

**Providing an Environment Conducive to Learning** is all about organization and scheduling. An organized, inviting environment is one that allows for student self-sufficiency. For example, do students have access to a borrowing center when materials are left at home? Is there a defined place for completed work?

Good scheduling is an art. It's about providing a stable, predictable schedule with minimal time in large groups and even less time in transition. That means each activity flows to the next with materials ready in advance and students start the next activity when they are ready, versus waiting for the whole group.

**Giving Ongoing Positive Regard** is at the heart of a proactive classroom. Students want to know they are recognized as unique individuals. Remember the reason one student didn't get shot at Columbine High School: he had said hello to the shooter by name every day. Time has to be carved out for non-contingent attention by using designated talk time and varied ways to share personal events (e.g., with sign up boards, communication notebooks, time between activities). To foster disclosure, teachers have to be willing to disclose information about themselves as well. And perhaps, most importantly, discipline has to be done in private and efforts must be made to distinguish between the person and the behavior. Although it may be easier to tell a student to remove a token (from his bag on the bulletin board) for engaging in an inappropriate behavior, consider the student's perspective: public humiliation in front of his or her peers. Similarly, putting a student's name on the board for misbehavior turns the focus on the student versus the behavior you want.

**Fostering Peer Relations** is what ultimately will keep your class running smoothly. Teaching your students how to resolve their conflicts peacefully requires ongoing instruction in anger management, impulse control, and the steps involved in problem-solving (e.g., identifying the problem, brainstorming alternative solutions, and consensus decision making regarding how to solve the problem). Other ways to foster peer relations include planning activities that require group interdependence (e.g., jigsaws) and eliminating competition in the classroom. Taking the time to teach your students how to get along versus separating those that don't, will ultimately lead to more time for instruction.

**Offering Interesting Curriculum** entails providing work that stimulates student curiosity (Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995). To arouse student curiosity, a teacher may provide contradictory information (e.g., why did the people that wrote

the Declaration of Independence have slaves?). Students also want to know why the content is worth learning. This can be accomplished by connecting the topic to the student's personal lives and planning for realistic application. Interesting curriculum permits students to express their creativity as well. So plan for hands-on, open-ended materials!

**Providing Quality Instruction** requires that you know the learning styles of the students in your class. You vary your teaching methods to accommodate their various styles. For example, did you know that many low-achieving students need frequent movement, varied seating and groupings, and dim lighting (Dunn & Dunn, 1993; Mohrmann, 1990)? So, can you find space for a standing work table? Can the florescent lights be turned off and replaced with table lamp lights? Effective instruction also allows for error-less learning, thus, your plans need to consider the various academic levels in your class. There need to be multiple opportunities for self-assessment during the acquisition phase of learning. You'll know your instruction is of high quality if your students are attracted to the work, if they persist in the work despite challenges and obstacles, and if they take visible delight in accomplishing their work (Schlecty, 1992).

I hope this refresher helps! Have a great school year and remember: baseline means before intervention. Be aware of your personal baseline behavior and have your plan for reverting to intervention!



Tracy Landon

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## GOOD BYE, GOOD FRIENDS



The T/TAC is sad to announce the departure of two staff members, Cecial Patrick and Deb Stanley. Cecial, our long time Office Services Specialist in the Region 1 Office has accepted a position in the Biology Department at VCU. Deb, who served as a Program Specialist in Residence at the Region 8 Office has returned to her teaching position in Richmond City Public Schools. We will miss Cecial and Deb as they move on, we wish them both the best of luck!

# IT'S ACADEMIC

## Planning for Instruction

Welcome to a new school year filled with excitement and the promise of success for all students! Do you have a master blueprint for the instructional planning needed to realize your goals and those of your students? The Standards of Learning (SOLs) tell us what critical concepts need to be covered in each content area by grade level. We have been given permission to make the necessary adaptations and modifications to support learners with special needs. But, this information does not create a master plan for quality instruction of students. Instructional planning is left up to you, the teacher. Where do you begin?

Harry and Rosemary Wong (1992) state that there is overwhelming evidence that the first two to three weeks of school are critical in determining how much students will achieve for the remainder of the year. You need to have a plan to maximize the powerful potential of these early weeks. As you ponder what to teach and how to deliver the instruction let the following steps, suggestions, and questions guide your thinking and planning.

**Step 1: Baseline Planning - Where are you now? Where do you want to be? How are you going to get there?** Begin by questioning your own strengths and areas of need as they relate to your ability to teach students. Closely and honestly examine your attitude toward your job and your students (both the achievers and those who are at-risk). Analyze how you organize your time, space and responsibilities. Determine your own learning style and its influence on how you teach others. What role does communication play in your day-to-day activities with colleagues, students and parents? Have you established and articulated clear expectations for yourself and your students? Are you able to motivate your students to achieve, provide them with timely and constructive feedback, and make needed modifications and adaptations to the environment and instructional content? This does not have to be a painful process if you use the findings and set a course for your professional development to address the areas of need. Plan ways to use your strengths to enhance student learning.

Next, take a look at your students' needs. What do you know about the varied learning styles in your classroom? What are the prior learning experiences and entry-level skills students bring to your class? What are their attitudes toward school and learning? Are they motivated? If so, by what? Are you aware of your students' future goals? Assessment in these areas and use of the findings is critical for the success of your planning and delivery of instruction. Students will notice that their needs have been acknowledged and they will feel ownership, passion, and a purpose for their educational experience.

The last phase of this step encourages you to conduct an environmental audit of your classroom based on the learning styles and needs of your students. Our tendency may be to assume that certain factors cannot be changed. If you feel strongly about the impact certain conditions may be having on the performance of your students, it would be wise to discuss these concerns with your administrator and ask for help in making improvements. In your audit, consider things like your room location (accessibility for all students, distractions, etc.), temperature, and lighting. What space do you need for the size class you will have? Will there be room to group students comfortably for activities and to allow independent learners to have a quiet workspace? Do you and the students have space to store materials? What, if any, technology is available to you and your students? Even in the most crowded conditions, a little creativity and ingenuity will go a long way.

**Step 2: Prioritize Essential Learning - What is essential? Why do we teach it?** The Virginia SOLs provide teachers with the essential concepts to be taught in each major content area. You must then determine how these Standards align with your current grade level curriculum and how to go about planning meaningful lessons that incorporate the Standards and the curriculum content. As you develop your lessons, you will want to address the following issues related to knowledge, skills, activities, and assessment. Ask yourself these questions:

### Knowledge

- Who needs to know this information?
- What concepts are essential for all or some students?
- How does this knowledge relate to real life?

### Skills

- What skills are necessary for students to be successful with learning and applying this information?
- Can I address some basic skills through this lesson content (reading, writing, math)?
- What prerequisite skills does the student need?
- Does the lesson allow for implementation of specific students' IEP goals and objectives or 504 accommodations?

### Activities

- Do the lesson activities show a connection to real life?
- Have I given analytical students enough facts and global students enough of the big picture to ensure they all learn?
- Do the lesson activities reflect the use of a variety of instructional strategies to address different intelligence types, learning styles, and student diversity?

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- Can I link learning to prior learning and to other content areas in relevant ways?
- Have I provided for student directed learning opportunities?
- Have I built in ways for parents to be involved in their child's education?
- Do the lesson activities provide opportunities for meaningful practice using a variety of resources?
- Have I incorporated the use of technology to increase learning?
- Have I maximized cooperative learning opportunities and minimized seat work?

### **Assessment**

- Have I built in measures to continuously monitor, evaluate, and assess learning against established quality standards?
- Have I established and communicated high expectations for all, including myself?
- What methods of assessment will I provide to meet the variety of leaning styles/needs in my classroom?
- How will student learning/improvement be rewarded and acknowledged?
- Will some of my assessments be similar to the SOL assessment format?
- What are my plans if student assessment results indicate learning in not taking place?

### **Step 3: What are my instructional responsibilities as a team member (school, grade level, content area)?**

There may be times when you feel that you are operating in a vacuum. You may feel totally overwhelmed by the accountability you have for your students' success on the SOLs. At these times, remember that the success of your school is a group effort. Administrators, other teachers, support staff, parents, and community members must come together to support the students' success. As a member of the school community, your grade level team and/or your content area group, your responsibility is to be active, positive, and resourceful. You can begin by encouraging others to be the best they can be, pointing to their strengths and individual accomplishments. Promote student success and advocate for all students in your school. Try to encourage open and frequent communication with your colleagues to assist in the streamlining of instructional planning. Recruit other staff members with expertise in certain areas to assist you and volunteer your services to them. Meet frequently as a team to discuss instruction and to jointly plan lessons and activities. Continue to seek out resources, workshops, and training to enhance your professional growth.

Instructional planning is, indeed, an intensely critical

component of any successful educational experience. It requires a teacher to examine the strengths and weaknesses he or she brings to the educational environment and to make adjustments for the improvement of instruction. It requires a teacher to have a clear understanding of key learning goals and expectations, and the ability to develop comprehensive and accommodating lessons to help students reach the goals. Instructional planning requires a teacher to be diligent in the assessment of student learning and to be willing to make necessary revisions to support student progress. It is hard work, but it has the potential to deliver impressive results! Have a great year!

Jayne Bradley

### **Reference**

Wong, H.K. & Wong, R.T. (1998) How to be an effective teacher: the first days of school. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publishers Inc.

#### **Plan to Play a Role in Your Future**

The Virginia Department of Education and the State Board of Education are developing proposed new special education regulations, including the special education Program Standards. The new special education regulations will govern how special education programs under IDEA 1997 are implemented in Virginia. The current Program Standards establish teacher caseloads and what teacher endorsements are necessary to teach specific populations of students with disabilities. Opportunities for members of the public to comment on the proposed regulations are required by law. The public comment process will include an open comment period, during which citizens may send a letter to the Department of Education expressing their support for, or concerns about, any provision in the proposed regulations. There also will be public hearings where individuals may express their feelings about the proposed regulations.

The proposed regulations are available through the Department of Education Home Page, [www.pen.k12.va.us](http://www.pen.k12.va.us). It will take several clicks through a few screens to reach them: once you reach the homepage, click on "Inside our Agency"; second, click on "Instruction"; third, click on "Special Education and Student Services"; and finally, click on "Proposed Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia". To receive a print copy, make your request by E-mail to Cathy Pomfrey at [cpomfrey@pen.k12.va.us](mailto:cpomfrey@pen.k12.va.us).

Every comment received during the public comment period will be reviewed and summarized for consideration by the Board of Education before the final regulations are adopted. It is not unusual for significant changes to be made to regulations on the basis of public comment. As a general rule, educators are less likely to make comments on proposed special education regulations than members of advocacy groups, professional organizations, and others who may or may not share the perspective of many school administrators, teachers, related service personnel, and early intervention providers. Don't miss this opportunity to make a difference.

Jo Smith Read



# T/TAC SERVICES

## Technical Assistance Request Form

Use the Technical Assistance Request Form in this newsletter to make your request in writing.

### FAX

Fax your request to the Region 1 Office at (804) 828-7495 or the Region 8 Office at (804) 848-6333. A Program Specialist will call you to discuss your request.

### E-mail

If you have an e-mail account, requests for T/TAC services can be made by sending a message to any one of the T/TAC staff members at the e-mail addresses that follow.

## In What Ways Does the T/TAC Provide Assistance?

The T/TAC is available to help you meet the needs of children with disabilities ages birth to twenty-two and those who are nine years old or younger who are at-risk for academic failure. The topic and focus of services is based upon the needs of requesting school, LICC, or state operated program personnel. Examples of topical areas on which training and technical assistance are available include:

*Assessment<sup>2</sup>*  
*Assistive Technology<sup>2</sup>*  
*Developing Proactive Classrooms<sup>2</sup>*  
*Classroom Structure and Organization<sup>2</sup>*  
*Collaborative Teaming<sup>2</sup>*  
*Communication<sup>2</sup>*  
*Community-Based Instruction<sup>2</sup>*  
*Curriculum Adaptations<sup>2</sup>*  
*Data Collection<sup>2</sup>*  
*Planning for IEP Development<sup>2</sup>*  
*Integration, Inclusion, or Collaborative Teaching<sup>2</sup>*  
*Medical/Physical Management<sup>2</sup>*  
*Positive Behavioral Support<sup>2</sup>*  
*Teaching Strategies<sup>2</sup>*  
*Thematic Units<sup>2</sup>*  
*Transition<sup>2</sup>*

## Who May Receive Services From the T/TAC?

T/TAC services are available to school, LICC, and state operated program personnel who serve: 1) students with disabilities; or 2) students enrolled in targeted early childhood at-risk programs. Although the T/TAC cannot respond directly to requests from families or community services providers, the T/TAC encourages teams of school and/or LICC personnel, families, and community services providers to participate jointly in T/TAC sponsored technical assistance and training opportunities.

## Is There a Cost For T/TAC Services?

All T/TAC services are provided free of charge. Fees for training cover the cost of refreshments and materials.

## How Can I Make a Request for Services?

Requests for training and/or technical assistance may be made through the following methods:

### Telephone

Call the T/TAC toll-free at 1-800-426-1595 in Region 1 or 1-877-383-1199 in Region 8 to talk with a Program Specialist about your need for assistance. You may also contact your nearest regional office by dialing 828-6947 (Region 1) or 848-6339 (Region 8).

### T/TAC Staff E-mail Addresses

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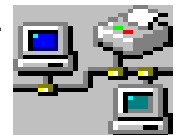
Additional e-mail addresses will be included in future newsletters.



### Web Site

The T/TAC web address is [www.vcu.edu/eduweb/ttac.htm](http://www.vcu.edu/eduweb/ttac.htm). There you'll find a description of our service area and the services we provide. In addition, you can find:

- staff biographies
- our regional training calendar and other training events
- an annotated bibliography of the T/TAC library holdings, and
- an electronic version of our newsletter.





# Risky Business

## A Proactive Plan for Parent-Teacher Communication and Parent Involvement

Have you ever tried to assemble something without the instructions? How successful were you? Did it lead you to frustration and possibly a few words you could never repeat in church? In the end, did your frustration lead you right back to the instruction booklet and the realization of the time wasted because you didn't follow the plans in the first place? A well thought-out plan is often effective for achieving the desired results and saving time. We all know this and yet most of us, at one time or another, will dive into a situation without prior planning only to sit back and say "Look at the mess I've made of things".

Well, it's a new school year with new students, new parents and new ideas for improving parent-teacher communication as well as parent involvement. There are two ways you can address these issues. You can jump right in there and hope for the best or you can develop a proactive plan for putting your ideas in place. I suggest developing your plan and laying the groundwork before you dive into quicksand. You might be thinking, "But, I don't have the time". Remember that a well thought-out plan may save a considerable amount of time, enhance parent communication, increase parental involvement, help to avoid sticky situations and probably save time down the road.

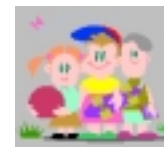
Parent-teacher communication and parent involvement are affected by a number of factors, but respect and trust are most essential to their success. It is necessary to "develop understanding of the cultures and value systems of the families you serve. It is equally important to be accepting of those values even if they are in conflict with your own" (McBride, 1999). Take steps to initiate parent involvement that are guided by respect and trust. Take the time now at the beginning of the school year to meet or talk individually with all parents to gain their perspectives regarding their children's background. Let them know you consider them the expert regarding their child and his/her development.

- Ask them to share what they see as the child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Find out what each parent's goals and expectations are for their children.
- Share your goals and expectations for their children. Confidence in teachers is greatest when parent and teacher goals and expectations align to some degree (Powell, 1998).
- Allow them to tell you anything else about their children that they would like you to know.
- Ask them what kind of help they might need to support the classroom curriculum at home.

Communicating with parents is not always easy. How you plan to communicate and respond to them is critical when establishing respect and trust.

- Talk to parents in language they can understand, not educational jargon.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Notice body language and respond with thoughtful consideration.
- Establish the most effective way to communicate with one another on a regular basis. Determine days and times that are most convenient for meetings or parent-teacher-child school activities.
- Ask for their suggestions.
- Establish types of parent involvement activities they would most like to participate in.
- Tell parents they are welcome in your classroom and plan a home visit if possible.
- Withhold judgement regarding parenting skills and lifestyles. Meet them where they are and accept them.
- Help parents who need community based services find linkages to the appropriate resources.
- Give parents your respect and trust. Remember the "Golden Rule".

Parents and teachers want many of the same things for children. Planning for effective communication early in the school year can have a positive effect on parent participation throughout the year. Increased parent involvement can lead to increases in student academic success. According to research, there is a direct correlation between parental involvement and children's school success, specifically, in academic achievement, improved behavior, enhanced self-esteem, increased student motivation, and better school attendance (Lynn, 1997; Mapp, 1997). As Spinelli (1999) stated, "...United we stand - divided we fail."



Pam Kinney

## References

- Lynn, L. (1997, September/October). Family involvement in schools: It makes a big difference, but remains rare. *Harvard University Newsletter*. 8(5), 3-5.
- Mapp, K. (1997, September/October). Making the connection between families and schools. *Harvard University Newsletter* 8(5), 1-3.
- Powell, D. (1998) Reweaving parents into the fabric of early childhood programs. *Young Children* 53(5), 60-67.
- Spinelli, C. (1999). Home-school collaboration at the early childhood level: making it work. *Young Exceptional Children*. 2(2), 20-26.

# T/TAC SPONSORED TRAININGS

**(#1)** *Virginia Commonwealth University  
Training and Technical Assistance Center  
invites you to a TRAIN THE TRAINER opportunity on:*

## **Conducting Functional Behavioral Assessments and Developing Positive Behavioral Supports**

*Presented by: Jayne Bradley, M.Ed., Pam Kinney, M.Ed., Tracy  
Landon, Ed.D., and Sandy Wilberger, M.Ed.*

October 25-26, 1999, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.,  
Roslyn-The Virginia Diocesan Center, Walker Assembly,  
Richmond, VA

\$16.00 per team member (includes two lunches)

### **Target Audience/Registration Requirements**

To participate in this two-day training, you must have a school-based team of five to six members. Required members include: a principal or assistant principal; a school psychologist or guidance counselor; a general education teacher; a special education teacher; and a parent. You must also have administrator approval/support to meet as a team on a regular basis following the training, to plan for and provide training to teams within your school division or program, and to serve as a support team to teams you train. As a result of participation, your team will receive training materials and limited follow-up technical assistance.

### **Training Description**

This training will teach participants how to provide training to teams regarding:

- IDEA Amendments of 1997 regarding discipline,
- teaming prerequisites,
- philosophical underpinnings of positive behavioral support,
- the process used to conduct functional behavioral assessments and develop meaningful positive behavioral supports,
- the use of various indirect and direct assessment methods, and
- the use of various positive behavioral supports.

Teams will also receive case studies and sample completed functional behavioral assessments and positive behavioral support plans for preschool, elementary, middle, and high school age students.

**Registration Deadline:** October 20, 1999

**Registration Capacity:** Limited to six teams, so register early!

**For more information:** Call Tracy Landon at 804-828-6947 or 800-426-1595.

### **To Register:**

Complete and return the registration form found on page 15 of this newsletter (with a check payable to VCU/VIDD) to:

**Public Relations Assistant Specialist, VCU T/TAC (Region 1 Office), Box 842020, Richmond, VA 23284-2020.**

**(#2)** **Picture this:  
Learning to use the "Picture Exchange  
Communication System (PECS) ©"**

• Come and learn how to use the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Research based, easy to learn and affordable, this system not only teaches students how to initiate communication but it also teaches social interactions as well. Guided practice and video tapes will be used to show you how to set up and use the PECS.

• PECS is appropriate for students of all ages. This training is for teachers and therapists at the beginning to intermediate level of understanding PECS. To participate in these trainings you must have teams of at least two members which may include speech and language therapists, ECSE teachers, Special Education teachers, paraprofessionals and/or parents.

• **(This training consists of one 3-hour workshop, an in-school visit, and a 2-hour follow-up workshop. Participants must participate in all three parts.)**

### **Part 1: 3-hour workshop on PECS**

• Presented by Linda Oggel and Sharon Jones, VCU T/TAC

• October 21, 1999 from 1:00 to 4:00 PM

• John Tyler Community College

• \$5.00 per team member

• **Registration deadline for teams participating in the 3 part training: October 15, 1999**

### **Part 2: In-school visit**

• Linda Oggel

• Sign up for a day and time (November through February) at the

• October 21st training.

### **Part 3: Follow-up and recent research about PECS**

• Presented by Linda Oggel and Sharon Jones, VCU T/TAC

• February 24, 2000 from 4:00 to 6:00 PM

• John Tyler Community College

• \$5.00 per team member

• **This workshop will be for the same teams who attended part 1 and participated in the in-school visit. Individuals**

• **who attended a PECS workshop during the 1998-99 school year may also attend this workshop. Registration deadline**

• for those who attended the PECS workshops last year: February

• 18, 2000.



• Complete and return the registration form found on page 15 of this newsletter (with a check payable to VCU/VIDD) to:

• **Public Relations Assistant Specialist, VCU T/TAC (Region 1 Office), Box 842020, Richmond, VA 23284-2020.**



# Professional Development Opportunities

## Annual Autism Conference (featuring Temple Grandin)

**Sponsor(s):** Future Horizons in cooperation with the Autism Society of America - Central Virginia Chapter  
**Location:** The Richmond Center  
400 E. Marshall Street  
Richmond, VA  
**Date(s):** November 12 & 13, 1999  
**Contact:** 800-489-0727

## Southeast Augmentative Communication Conference (SEAC)

**Location:** Birmingham, AL  
**Date(s):** September 30 - October 2, 1999  
**Contact:** 205-251-0165

## Southeast Regional Conference on Self Determination

**Location:** Greensboro, NC  
**Date(s):** September 17-19, 1999  
**Contact:** Karen McElroy  
800-662-8706

## 1999 Regional Conferences on Improving America's Schools

**Sponsor(s):** U.S. Department of Education  
**Location(s):** Tampa, Florida  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
Chicago, Illinois  
**Date(s):** October 6-8  
November 8-10  
December 15-17  
**Contact:** 800-203-5494

## NSDC's 1999 Annual Conference Faces on the Millennium Our Challenge, our Future

**Sponsor(s):** National Staff Development Council  
**Location:** Dallas, TX  
**Date(s):** December 4-8, 1999  
**Contact:** 800-727-7288  
FAX: 513-523-0638



## DEC International Early Childhood Conference on Children with Special Needs

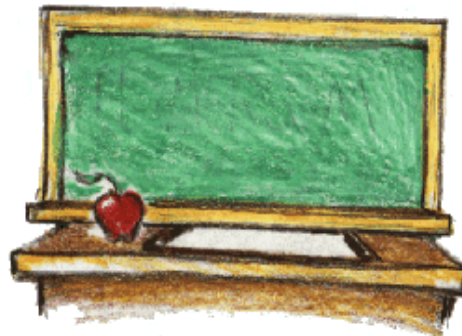
**Sponsor(s):** Division of Early Childhood in collaboration with the Maryland and DC Chapters  
**Location:** Washington, DC  
**Date(s):** December 9-12, 1999  
**Contact:** [www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org)

## The T/TAC Welcomes New Staff

The T/TAC is pleased to announce the addition of the following Program Specialists to our team.

### **Katherine M. Wittig, M.Ed.** **Program Specialist for Secondary Transition Region 1 Office**

Kathe Wittig received her master's degree in special education from Rhode Island College. She comes to the T/TAC from Henrico County Schools, where she has served as the Education for Employment Coordinator at Virginia Randolph Special Education Center for six years. Previously, Kathe served as the Director of Project Transition in Bangor, Maine. Kathe lives in Ashland, VA with her husband and their two sons.



### **Fran G. Smith, Ed.S., CVE** **Program Specialist Instructional Technology & Distance Education Region 1 Office**

Fran joins the T/TAC team from Fairfax County Public Schools where she has been the vocational technology specialist for the Department of Student Services and Special Education since 1991. She holds an M.A. and Ed.S. from the George Washington University. Fran's interests include assistive and instructional technology, distance education, vocational evaluation and transition services.





# New Materials

## ***Ultimate Switch.* Hastings-On-Hudson, NY: Enabling Devices and Toys for Special Children, Inc.**

Requires only the slightest touch for activation and is designed to be used by the most profoundly challenged or neurologically impaired. Complete with gooseneck and universal clamp.

## ***Personal Talker.* Verona, WI: Attainment Company, Inc.**

A pocket sized, one message, ten second communication device.

## ***Family Literacy.* (1998). Taylor, D. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.**

This book documents Taylor's three-year study of six families, each of which included a child who was considered by his or her parent to be successfully learning to read and write. Taylor offers an engaging story of the often complex interaction within each family and how that interaction contributed to the children's literacy development.

## ***Follow-Up Studies: A Practitioner's Handbook.* (1998). Sitlington, P. & Frank, A. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.**

The chapters in this book take you step-by-step through the process of designing and carrying out a follow-up study, from deciding what you want to know about the young adults you are surveying, to putting your collected information to work for you.

## ***Understanding the Nature of Autism.* (1996). Janzen, J., San Antonio, TX: Therapy Skill Builders.**

This book provides information about autism from its definition through a review of learning styles, communication, placement, and program decisions, followed by the development of programs, management of behavioral program and assessments. It is an excellent resource for training parents, teachers, and program personnel for working with individuals of all ages.

## ***The individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997: Curriculum.* (1997). Kupper, L. (Ed.) Washington, DC: Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.**

This training packet focuses on some of the legal requirements and provisions of the individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 - IDEA 97, for short. The Curriculum binder contains background information, resources, handouts, and training scripts on the law.

## ***Time Frame Four.* Milwaukee, WI: Crestwood Company.**

A picture "talking" frame with "touch-screen" technology for 1, 2, or 4 messages. Up to 10 seconds of recording time for each of the 4 messages.

## ***Dreams Spoken Here.* (1998). Palo Alto, CA: Oberkötter Foundation.**

This videotape presents the viewpoint of persons who believe in and promote the development and use of spoken communication and the use of residual hearing. It includes examples of new technology in the use of hearing aids and cochlear implants. Based on the work described in *Windows on Learning*, this 20-minute video shows documentation in action in an urban American early childhood setting.

## ***Windows on Learning: Documenting Young Children's Work.* (1998). Harris Helm, J., Beneke, S., & Seinheimer, K. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.**

This book shows a variety of ways to document; how to collect, analyze, and display children's work; how to develop individualized portfolios; and how to meet the demands for accountability prevalent in U. S. schools.

## ***Sourcebook of Phonological Awareness Activities.* (1998). Goldsworthy, C. San Diego, CA: Singular Publishing Group, Inc.**

Provides phonological awareness activities at the word, syllable, and phoneme level. Includes techniques for adapting existing reading materials for use in phonological training.

## ***Interactive Teaching Network.* (1999). McLaughlin, P. Athens, GA: University of Georgia.**

### **Language Arts for At-Risk and ESL Students Enhancing Emerging Literacy Skills**

In this video series, viewers will see how to expand students vocabularies, learn how to implement phonemic awareness training, develop methods which result in increases in reading and listening comprehension, learn developmental sequences of literacy and language skills and identify components of emerging literacy skills.

## ***One Step Communicator.* Minneapolis, MN: AbleNet, Inc.**

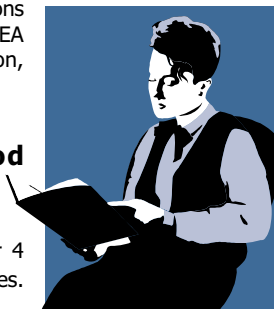
Students can give a series of step-by-step instructions up to the 75 second limit. It has an applied switch surface with a detachable mounting base.

## ***Cordless Big Red Switch.* Minneapolis, MN: AbleNet, Inc.**

Can be used to activate many battery or electrically operated devices because it eliminates the switch cord and connectors needed to turn devices on and off. (Must be used with a cordless receiver or small appliance receiver).

## ***How to Teach Through Modeling and Imitation (2nd Ed.)* (1998). Striefel, S. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.**

This manual was written for parents, teachers, and others who want to teach or learn by using modeling and imitation. It includes information, procedures, examples, and exercises to simplify the understanding of modeling and imitation.





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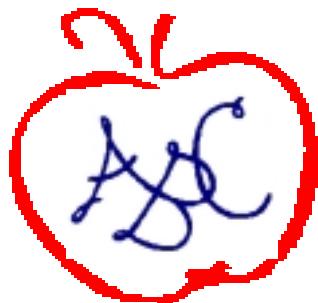
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[www.vcu.edu/eduweb/ttac.htm](http://www.vcu.edu/eduweb/ttac.htm)



**BACK  
 TO  
 SCHOOL**

The Training and Technical Assistance Center (T/TAC) at Virginia Commonwealth University is one of a network of regional T/TACs funded by the Virginia Department of Education.