



# TEACCH

## Autism Program

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## Greetings from TEACCH

By Laura Klinger, Director, TEACCH Autism Program

As I started to write this letter, I realized that this week is my 1 year anniversary in North Carolina. The fact that time seems to be going so quickly certainly means that I am loving every minute of my job at TEACCH. The energy and enthusiasm of the TEACCH staff and support of our university and community is incredible. As we are moving forward with our strategic plan, I wanted to highlight a few of our accomplishments, both big and small, in the past few months.

In the last letter, I wrote that we were expanding the scope of our training programs in North Carolina through our new partnership with AHEC. I am thrilled to report that our Annual TEACCH Conference was a huge success with an attendance of more than 300 professionals, students, and parents. Personally, I left the conference energized with some fabulous new ideas about how TEACCH can meet the needs of families in the state of North Carolina and including ideas for early screening initiatives, school-based consultation programs, and college transition and support programs. Stay tuned for how we implement these ideas at TEACCH. We are planning next year's conference, on May 17, 2013, so please feel free to send us any speaker or topic recommendations.

We also continue to develop our transition and adult service programs at TEACCH. We are trying to find adults seen by TEACCH from 1965-1999 to learn more about the needs of adults with ASD. So, please contact us if you or your family member is an adult who was served by TEACCH during those "early days." Our research team has been busily working to assess the effectiveness of the terrific programs that TEACCH has developed. For example, Glenna Osborne, Assistant Director of Supported Employment at the TEACCH-Greensboro Center developed a transition

program to support high school students learn pivotal employment skills. This TEACCH-School Transition to Employment (T-STEP) program is designed to teach skills before students leave the school system and enter the employment arena. We are busily writing grants to allow us to expand the scope of this program and to develop an evidence base for its support.

TEACCH has always embraced the importance of being "family friendly" and accessible. However, as we weathered the past few years of budget reductions, we streamlined our staff and basically ignored our website. As a result, we know that families had been having difficulty accessing our services and finding out about our programs. So, we have worked hard in the past year to revamp the "face of TEACCH." We have hired a new program assistant, Megan Johnson. Megan joins TEACCH after working in the UNC Provost's Office – she is committed to helping parents locate services for their children and wanted to be part of a program that truly makes a difference in children's lives. Also, thanks to the diligent efforts of Kathy Hearsey and Michelle Jordy the website has been completely redesigned. It is still a work in progress but please visit the webpage if you want to learn more about our current service, training, and research programs.

Lastly, it is with sadness that we say goodbye to two members of our TEACCH family. Dr. Colleen Quinn, the director of the TEACCH Center in Fayetteville, is leaving to return "home" to Missouri to be near her parents. We will miss her energy and enthusiasm at TEACCH. We are searching to find a new director for the Fayetteville center and are open to any suggestions that you may have on the ideal person to lead this center. We also say goodbye to a long-time therapist at our TEACCH Center in Asheville, Catherine Faherty. Catherine leaves to pursue her writing career and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with her on her fabulous books.

# Supporting Toddlers on the Autism Spectrum with Structured Teaching Strategies

By Kara Hume<sup>1</sup>, Lauren Turner-Brown<sup>2</sup>, and the FITT Study Team<sup>2</sup>

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute<sup>1</sup>, Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities<sup>2</sup>

Structured Teaching strategies, including visual schedules and activity/work systems, are often selected as classroom interventions for children on the autism spectrum when they arrive at elementary school. Only in recent years have professionals and caregivers begun to use these same strategies with very young children with autism. Given the importance of early intervention for children with autism, a number of TEACCH staff members, including Beth Reynolds (former TEACCH therapist), Ron Faulkner, Susan Boswell, and Kaia Mates (current TEACCH Early Intervention staff), have developed and adapted many TEACCH-based strategies to be both develop-

mentally appropriate for very young children, and applicable in the home, the setting where most young children are served. These strategies, and the home-based intervention format, are now undergoing rigorous testing through a three-year research study funded by the Maternal and Children's Health Bureau in an effort to better understand how they work with very young children and their families. Pilot data, recently published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, indicates that families can learn how to implement these strategies, and that young children with autism benefit from these strategies across developmental areas.

The current study, Family Implemented TEACCH for Toddlers or FITT, continues to adapt structured teaching strategies to best meet the needs of toddlers and their families, and includes increased parent coaching, additional and lengthier sessions, and a focused emphasis on social interaction and play. Several keys in adapting structured teaching strategies to be most meaningful to toddlers are described below:

**Ensure supports are developmentally appropriate:** Presenting information visually to our young children on the spectrum is important to help support their understanding. However, visual supports should be presented in the most concrete form for our youngest learners—this typically means using objects. We often use objects to help a toddler better understand where he/she is going or what activity is coming next. For example, when it is time for bath, caregivers may hand their child a favorite bath toy or bottle of bubble bath which indicates it's bath time to the child. From the bath, caregivers may then hand their child pajamas or a favorite bedtime book indicating that it is time to get ready for bed. These transition objects can help toddlers predict what activity is coming next and reduce tantrums, worry, and other challenging behaviors associated with transitions. For older children, caregivers and professionals often use pictures or words to create visual schedules. These formats are not typically meaningful or developmentally appropriate for toddlers.

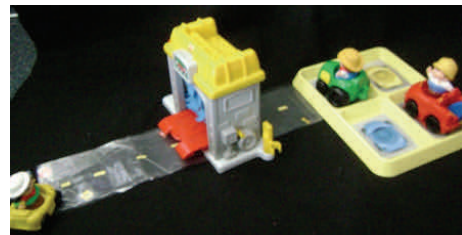


**Ensure supports are developmentally appropriate**  
Parents developed a choice board using objects that were associated with favorite toys (e.g. xylophone, farm set) so their toddler could ask for/choose a toy.

**Focus on play:** Selecting appropriate goals and developing toddler-appropriate activities is important. A toddler's job is to PLAY, so many activities developed for toddlers relate to playing with toys and playing with caregivers. Toy play can be difficult for children with autism, so favorite toys and characters are used, along with elements of visual structure to help clarify HOW and WHY to play. Play skills are explicitly taught using structured teaching strategies and then are generalized so toddlers learn to play with a variety of materials in a flexible way, and with several play partners.



**Focus on play:** These photos are examples of structured play activities developed by TEACCH staff. These were developed to teach or build on play routines, and to expand language and social interaction. The froggies "hop, hop, and SPLASH" into a bowl of water, which is often a high interest activity for toddlers, and creates a fun play routine. The car wash extends what a toddler can do with toy cars -drive down the road, get washed, and park in the parking lot.



## Supporting Toddlers on the Autism Spectrum with Structured Teaching Strategies (continued)

**Focus on interaction:** Structured teaching strategies have often been used successfully to teach individuals with autism how to complete tasks independently. For toddlers, however, independence is not a primary goal—interaction with family members is. Building social routines around a toddler's interests and supporting those routines with elements of structure is important. For example, many toddlers enjoy sensory routines such as swinging in a blanket, tickling, or spinning while their caregiver holds them. Developing these routines, then encouraging the toddler to ask for the routine to begin or continue is a nice way to begin working towards increased social interaction. Structured teaching strategies can be used to help toddlers better understand what the routine is, how long it will continue, and what may come next. Finished baskets can help toddlers transition to and from the social routine.

**Support parents in leading the intervention:** Including parents as partners in intervention is a key tenet of the TEACCH model, and has been since TEACCH began decades ago. The role of caregivers as intervention partners is especially important when working with toddlers, as the home is the most natural environment for children under age three. Supporting caregivers in implementing structured teaching strategies across the day and across routines ensures that the strategies will be used even when the TEACCH interventionist is not in the home. During intervention sessions, time must be allotted for parent coaching, and parents should be encouraged to select goals and routines that are priorities for the families (e.g. sitting with the family during meals, playing with a sibling, reading books with daddy). The interventionist may model strategies, and then encourage the caregiver to practice using the strategies while the interventionist provides support.

The use of structured teaching strategies with toddlers on the autism spectrum has great potential to both increase the skills of toddlers and to increase the intervention capacity of caregivers. Adapting materials and goals to meet the developmental needs of toddlers, and to best capture their interest, is key. In addition, including parents as intervention partners is essential. For more information about TEACCH services provided to toddlers and their families at the Chapel Hill/Raleigh TEACCH Center, please contact Susan Boswell, [Susan\\_Boswell@unc.edu](mailto:Susan_Boswell@unc.edu). If you are the parent/caregiver of a toddler with ASD or suspected ASD and are interested in participating with your toddler in a free, 6-month study of early intervention services based on the TEACCH model, please contact: [Laurie.Moses@CIDD.unc.edu](mailto:Laurie.Moses@CIDD.unc.edu) of the FITT Study.

Pilot study reference: Welterlin, A., Turner-Brown, L., Harris, S., Mesibov, G., & Demolino, L. (*in press*). The home TEACCHing program for toddlers with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, <http://www.springerlink.com/content/535383j372m32132/fulltext.pdf>

Kara Hume, Ph.D. is an Investigator at Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. She is the Co-Principal Investigator, along with Lauren Turner-Brown, Research Assistant Professor at Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities, of the FITT study, which is examining a home-based intervention for toddlers and their families based on the TEACCH model. [Kara.hume@unc.edu](mailto:Kara.hume@unc.edu) and [lauren.brown@cidd.unc.edu](mailto:lauren.brown@cidd.unc.edu)

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**Focus on interaction:** Playing hide-and-seek with an interventionist & mommy (hiding under the blanket). Use elements of structure, such as an object to indicate when it is time to play hide-and-seek or a finished basket to put the blanket in when done, to support child as needed.



Dad plays with his young son while TEACCH interventionist Ron Faulkner (on the left) provides coaching and support.

# Were you one of the first families to come to TEACCH in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s?

The Research Team at TEACCH wants to hear from you! One of the missions of TEACCH is to provide services to a growing population of adults with autism. In order to achieve this goal, we first need to know the challenges faced by adults with autism and the services and supports that are needed. If you're interested in learning more about this re-search study, please contact Allison Meyer or Patrick Powell at: [TEACCH\\_Research@med.unc.edu](mailto:TEACCH_Research@med.unc.edu) or 919-843-5259.

## From Puppies to Prom - Angela's Story

By Anne McGuire, Assistant Clinical Director - TEACCH Asheville

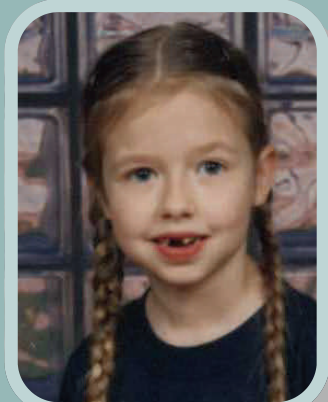
Angela first came to TEACCH Asheville when she was a 5-year-old kindergartener. Now a beautiful 18-year-old senior in high school, Angela continues to visit her therapist at TEACCH about once a month. When Angela was 9 years old, her parents, Bill and Shirley Mashburn, felt that it would be good for their family to re-connect with TEACCH as they wanted a head start in dealing with issues that might arise as Angela neared adolescence and middle school. That was nine years, many sessions, lots of learning, and a few special breakthroughs ago.

Never a big talker, Angela at first had difficulty giving information to me about her family, her interests, school, and her feelings. We began a book that at first included drawings and photographs of her family and pets. At one time Angela shared responsibility for three dogs, six fish, one cat and a rabbit. After meeting with Angela for two sessions and not really knowing from her words and body language whether she was enjoying her time at TEACCH, I wrote her a note asking her to circle the number of sessions she wanted to attend at TEACCH. Her choices were zero to nine – she chose nine, thus beginning our nine year friendship.

Angela's interests have changed over the years from her pets to "High School Musical," jewelry making, and art. I recall that when she came to the clinic at age five for an evaluation, her mother commented that Angela liked to "play with jewelry." Now she makes colorful bracelets and necklaces for her friends. I'm proud to say that I have a nice collection.

Two recent breakthroughs remind me of how gracefully Angela is growing into a young woman. First, I learned that she has a beautiful singing voice and that she recently performed solos at events in her community. When asked if she would sing for me, Angela sang loudly and proudly. This is a breakthrough for someone who barely speaks above a whisper and is still one of few words. During the same session, I asked Angela to write a story about anything she wanted to write about. With some written structure, who is the main character, what does she look like, what does she do, etc., Angela wrote a great story and read it flawlessly after it was written. This too was an exciting discovery. Her mother has said for some time that she thinks Angela's reading and writing scores would improve if she could read and write about her special interests. In this case, Angela's story was about her imaginary friend, Ruby Beetle. I haven't seen that much enthusiasm from Angela since we made a special book about "High School Musical."

Angela's original TEACCH book is now well over 50 pages long and includes photos of her senior prom attended with another of her longtime friends from TEACCH. I smile as we look at Angela's book together, me commenting on getting old and her remembering our talk about saying "excuse me" when we burp! Angela is one of many living reasons that I am where I am doing what I do at TEACCH.





# The Miggie Award Goes to Glenna Osborne

By Judy Pope, Clinical Director, TEACCH Greensboro

We seek each year to select the TEACCH therapist who best characterizes the qualities that Margaret D. Lansing, our Miggie Schopler, strived for in her professional activities and work with children and families with autism. The criteria for the Miggie Award are defined by five traits, including creativity, accomplishment, respect and concern for others, collaboration, and sensitivity, compassion and warmth.

This year's recipient, Glenna Osborne, Assistant Director of the Supported Employment Program was presented with



Glenna Osborne (left) presented with Miggie Award by Judy Pope

the kaleidoscope, which has come to signify this achievement, and cash award at May Conference on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Dr. Judy Pope, Clinical Director of the Greensboro Center, Glenna's work location at TEACCH, presented the award and spoke of Glenna's many strengths that made her a deserving candidate.

Dr. Pope indicated that Glenna embodies the creativity that we think of when we consider TEACCH therapists of old. She clearly has a command of TEACCH principles and applies them in many new and different ways to each individual with ASD with whom she comes in contact. Glenna's outward mild manner and agreeable nature make it easy for her to be seen as a role model for other therapists and for the job coaches she supervises.

She does not hesitate to jump into difficult situations when they arise. Glenna is a very warm and understanding individual and can at times, as many therapists at TEACCH can, underestimate her own worth. She will do all she can to respond to others' needs when she is aware of them or feels that an injustice has been done. She is a great advocate to have on your side! With Glenna's focus clearly on the adult population and with her involvement at times with a whole different set of outside agencies and professionals to work with, Dr. Pope said that she thought Glenna can feel left out of things at the Center at times and more alone in her job. It is a difficult balancing process, but Glenna makes the extra effort to stay connected to the rest of the staff.

## Three TEACCH Employees win Star Heels Awards: Ruth Thompson, Catherine Jones & Tia Howell



Ruth Thompson, left, Catherine Jones, center, Tia Howell, right)

The winners of Star Heels Awards are Ruth Thompson (left), Parent Services/Workshop Coordinator at TEACCH Chapel Hill, Catherine Jones (middle), Office Manager at TEACCH Chapel Hill, and Tia Howell (right), Office Manager at TEACCH Chapel Hill. Star Heels is an award program designed to allow University departments to recognize and reward excellent employees. Winners receive a Visa gift card and a certificate.

*Congratulations!*

# The TEACCH Award Goes to Maureen Morrell

By Dr. Lee Marcus

At the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual TEACCH Conference, held at the Sheraton Hotel in Chapel Hill, on May 31 and June 1, 2012, Maureen Morrell was presented with the TEACCH Award, given to an individual outside of the TEACCH Autism program who has made an outstanding contribution to the lives of persons with autism in North Carolina. Through her many years of advocacy and support to families, Maureen is a deserving recipient of this honor.



Maureen Morrell presented with TEACCH Award by Dr. Lee Marcus

Maureen is married with three sons. Justin, the oldest at 33 has autism and lives and works in a residential farm community. Maureen has a B.S. in Nursing and a Masters of Public Health, and has been active in advocacy for individuals with ASD and their families for over 30 years. She has served two terms on the Board of Directors of the Autism Society of North Carolina (ASNC) and in 1998 received ASNC's Parent of the Year Award. She is the co-author with Ann Palmer of the 2007 Autism Society of America's Outstanding Literary Work of the Year: *Parenting Across the Autism Spectrum: Unexpected Lessons We Have Learned*. Currently, Maureen holds the position of Special Projects Director with the Autism Society of North Carolina and works with ASNC's 50 support groups and chapters across the state.

In presenting the award, Lee Marcus praised Maureen for her "thoughtfulness and insight, how she speaks up and advocates so intelligently and compellingly...there has never been an instance when she did not make sense, cut to the heart of a matter, and given the wisest and soundest judgment on the matter."

# TEACCH Core Values Award Goes to Jayson Delisle

By S. Michael Chapman



Jayson Delisle (left) presented with award by Michael Chapman

Each year there is a recipient of the TEACCH Core Values award. The TEACCH Core Values award goes to a TEACCH staff member who embodies the spirit of TEACCH in their everyday activities. They exhibit a strong dedication to improving the lives of people with autism, themselves and those around them, all the while, creating a collaborative spirit that makes the seemingly impossible a reality.

This year's recipient was Jayson Delisle, a supervisor for the Chapel Hill TEACCH Supported Employment Program. Jayson has been an employee or volunteer within the TEACCH program for more than 18 years. He started as a college student who volunteered at Lenoir Dining Hall on campus supporting adults with autism at their place of

employment. Through the years as a job coach and a supervisor of job coaches, Jayson has helped numerous adults with autism find meaningful employment. Jayson brings a level of humanity to a program that prides itself on thinking of people with autism first, and has taken it to new heights. He views what others see as a difficult task or drudgery and creates opportunities to enhance the lives of the individuals with autism as well as their families, employers and support systems. Through his tireless dedication, compassion, and selfless nature, the world of autism is a brighter and better place for many people.

In presenting the award, Mike Chapman, the Director of the TEACCH Supported Employment Program commented "I have seen many people over the years that represent the Core Values of TEACCH, but few who live it as fully as Jayson. His positive attitude, superb collaborative spirit, commitment to excellence and increased self-knowledge combined with persistence and can do work ethic makes Jayson the ideal recipient of this award. The true measure that he deserves this award is that he does not see this in himself, but through his actions, he seeks out and recognizes these qualities in others and inspires them to strengthen those same core values within themselves."

# iPad Use at Carolina Living & Learning Center

By Keri Waldrop, Carolina Living and Learning Center



In 2011, Shannon, a resident of the Carolina Living and Learning Center, received an iPad from her family to expand her expressive communication. Now, one year later, the CLLC has a total of seven iPads being used to enhance the daily lives of the residents with autism. These devices serve a variety of purposes including: communication, organization, time management, and leisure activities. Three of the iPads were purchased by a specific resident's family for their personal use, two were purchased by the facility for general resident use, and two were awarded to individuals living at the CLLC through a technology grant from Autism Speaks.

The app most widely used at the CLLC for expressive communication is Proloquo2Go. It features voice output, a large symbol library, and highly customizable communication boards that can be individualized for a variety of functioning levels. A sentence strip at the top of the screen collects a series of words and images to build an entire phrase. Several of the adults living at the CLLC use this application to talk with others about upcoming special events, request needed items, or make menu choices when eating in the community. Some residents are able to have a large variety of icons visible on one screen while others need more limited options as they learn how to navigate through the screens. Proloquo2Go provides them with a visual way to easily and consistently expand their communication with others.

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"I think Shannon is less anxious and frustrated now that she can make choices and communicate better with staff with the iPad. She doesn't speak much, but when she does, it is difficult to understand. The iPad programs make it easier for the 'translation'. We find that she is actually speaking more often," said Jamezetta Bedford, Shannon's mother. "With us, she uses it to 'tell' us where she would like to go out to eat and/or shop."



Choiceworks



Pictello



Keynote

There are a variety of applications that are used to create visual structure for use on the iPad. Some of the apps currently being used at the CLLC include Choiceworks, Pictello, and Keynote. Choiceworks makes customizable pictured/word schedules or checklists so that each item can be checked off when completed.

Pictello and Keynote are primarily used at the CLLC to develop social scripts and visual instructions. Keynote allows video clips to be imbedded; a useful strategy when creating detailed sequences or interactive visuals.

The leisure possibilities are virtually endless with the iPad. There are vast libraries of music, movies, and TV shows as well as games that the residents play on their own, with staff or with each other. Some favorites at the CLLC include air hockey, checkers, pinball, word searches and coloring activities. The portable nature of the iPad as well as access to Wi-Fi is well-suited to filling downtime between activities, waiting at doctor's appointments, when riding in a vehicle, or even sitting outside on the porch swing and browsing the Internet. Relaxation apps, such as Spawn Glo, Fluid Monkey, Bloom HD, and Koi Pond, allow for open-ended creative exploration. For residents with fine motor difficulties, these apps minimize frustration by using the entire screen as a field for cause



and effect interaction, and can be easily manipulated with one or several fingers. For many of the adults living at the CLLC, the touch screen is much more intuitive than using a mouse, making the technology accessible to individuals who do not have the necessary skills to use a traditional computer.

The introduction of the iPads to the CLLC environment has been motivating for the residents and staff. Not only does it offer a wide variety of new and engaging activities, but it provides a new way to present information. It is now possible to store all of the individualized visual structure that would have been previously contained in flipbooks, communication notebooks, schedules, and picture cards, in one single, relatively small electronic device that can be used throughout the facility and easily taken into the community as well. Although there were some initial concerns about the potential for the expensive high tech gadgets to be damaged or lost, this has not been the case. The new technology has everyone eager to learn, not only the residents with autism, but also the staff members who work with them. The CLLC team continues to look for new ways to use this technology to enrich the lives of the 15 residents.



# A Letter from a Parent about the TEACCH Greenville Summer Club

Submitted by John Dougherty, Clinical Director, TEACCH Greenville

I hope this note finds you well. I wanted to take a moment to thank you and your staff for the social skills group you helped create and facilitate this summer. Our child had a great time this summer. He is so much more confident and I can see him actually putting into practice things that we have worked for years to get him to do. For example, he was concerned enough about another child in the group who was distressed, and offered him joint compressions. Or the day he gave up the tile he painted to another child who didn't have one because he was not there the day the group did that activity. He remembered some of the other children's names for the first time in his life. He's never done that! He actually made a friend! And by friend, I mean someone whom he interacted with and remembered their name. Not just a child he saw in a social setting like school, who might pass him in the hall each day, etc. I would have paid ten times the price we did to have that happen!

I don't think I have to remind you of how desperate parents are for help. There are very few programs available for children with autism where they can participate in daily activities and do typical kid stuff, and parents can feel comfortable leaving their child because they know they are going to be taken care of and be able to handle whatever comes their way. That even if their child falls apart with a crying, screaming tantrum, it's okay, because the staff will handle it and handle it appropriately.

For what's it's worth, TEACCH social skills group has been the absolute best thing we did for our child this summer. It's perfect! It occurs twice a week; not too often that he gets tired of it and not too far apart that he forgets about it. He looks forward to it. It's for a short period of time each trip. Three hours is a perfect amount of time. He doesn't get exhausted like he would if it was an all-day activity. But as a parent, I must tell you, this service was invaluable. Thank you again.

## Applying the Concepts of Structured TEACCHing: The Graphic Organizer as a Visual Strategy for Conversation

By Nancy Dieffenbach, Therapist, TEACCH Wilmington

Regardless of level of functioning, all individuals with autism have organizational difficulties that create obstacles to learning. Four decades ago, Structured TEACCHing, a conceptual model for teaching individuals with autism was developed by the TEACCH Autism Program. Structured TEACCHing aims to provide individualized, visual supports that build independence by organizing an individual's space, time, and materials. By applying the concepts of Structured TEACCHing, the learning environment becomes more meaningful, predictable, organized and visual. In essence, Structured TEACCHing is the use of visual strategies to build a bridge that connects the abstract verbal world with the more concrete, visual world for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Any individual who has organizational difficulties may benefit from using the strategies associated with the Structured TEACCHing model. In fact, one commonly used educational practice that fits well with the principles of Structured TEACCHing is graphic organizers. Many young students bring with them a readiness to learn, but they lack an organizational toolbox to assist in the development of their thinking, creativity and learning. Teachers present visual tools that students can use to organize their thoughts around a single topic, and see how all the information connects and fits together. The students' readiness to learn to effectively communicate knowledge in a social, distracting, and

verbal environment is met by this visual, educational strategy that stays put when attention strays. Graphic organizers show, not tell, a way to organize or visually outline information and build on a topic to support a higher degree of independent thinking.

It is not surprising that such a clear visual and organizational support would fit so well into the educational plan of an individual with ASD who struggles to communicate and converse in the abstract world. Autism presents a number of obstacles to having successful conversations, including the tendency to focus on details without seeing the bigger picture, difficulty integrating pieces of information into a meaningful whole, auditory processing difficulty, and the challenge of engaging in and sustaining a reciprocal conversation. Graphic organizers are a useful visual strategy for addressing these organizational thinking difficulties that often interfere with successful conversational interactions.

Many individuals with autism have good memories for facts, but struggle to organize and integrate non-factual information, for example, to answer a question about a past event. More challenging is the ability to engage in a reciprocal conversation that may include telling about a past event. A child who has autism or Asperger Syndrome often provides the shortest answer to the

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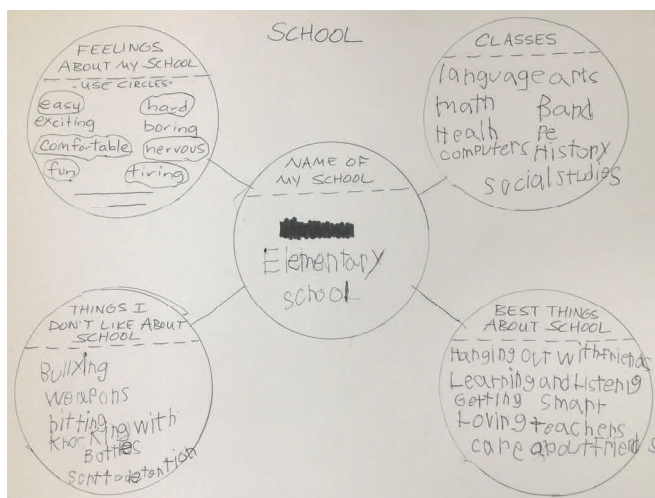
## Applying the Concepts of Structured TEACCHing: The Graphic Organizer as a Visual Strategy for Conversation *(continued)*

question, "What did you do today?" "Nothing." The desired response does not require a memory for facts; rather, the answer requires mental acrobatics- referencing, selecting, sorting and sequencing mental information to organize a response.

Communication and conversation require the ability to filter distractions to maintain focus, attention, and concentration, all without visual support. Conversation adds the social challenge of balancing the skill required to communicate with the awareness that information needs to be shared back and forth, in a turn-taking fashion with one or more people. Social butterflies find the multi-tasking of conversation effortless and fun, but for others, including many people with autism, conversation is hard work.

Graphic organizers can compensate for the organizational challenges and the lack of visual support involved in conversation. Initially introduced during a one to one teaching session, a graphic organizer shows the elements of a chosen topic of conversation. Using a completed graphic organizer as a reference during conversation may reduce anxiety associated with conversational interactions and relieve some of the stress associated with conversational "tasks" that require the integration of multiple skills.

For the visual learner, a simple "bubble map" is helpful for organizing information around a topic. A bubble map consists of a boxed or circled topic with lines that radiate out to surrounding circles representing subtopics. The map supports conversation by providing structure for organizing the information related to a topic. The picture provided by this conversation map helps to visually connect the topic to the supporting details, illustrating that all the surrounding details come together to



form a bigger picture of the topic of conversation. An individual (or a scribe, if needed) fills in the bubbles that surround the main topic with supporting details about a selected topic. Such a map may also be used to support a written expression assignment whereby each bubble of details is used to formulate a paragraph. A strong visual memory may possibly enable future conversations about practiced topics to happen without the need to view the actual concept map.

To build social awareness, individuals with autism may be taught to use a familiar graphic organizer as an interviewing tool. The tool serves as a guide for initiating questions by gathering information that may be represented by pictures. This type of interview/conversation illustrates the Structured TEACCHing concept of using a familiar skill to build a new skill. The old skill is the use of the graphic organizer; the new skill is initiating an interaction with a familiar person to gather information about a chosen topic. Care should be taken to reduce the number of new factors involved in the interview/interaction so that effort and anxiety are minimized. Consider an "interview" with a family member. The old, comfortable factors would be the use of a graphic organizer and the familiarity with the individual; initiating questions to gather information about a topic may represent a new skill. With practice, subsequent

conversations about a topic should require less teacher or parent assistance, using the graphic organizer for organizational support. Changing roles so that the initiator becomes the responder may add the element of perspective to the activity- a role play of sorts, highlighting the difference in the two roles.

Visual strategies that are used to build skills, increase meaning and predictability, or provide organizational support for an individual illustrate the principles of Structured TEACCHing. A graphic organizer is one such support. Inexpensive and easily created, this is a versatile educational tool that can be used in a variety of ways at home or in the classroom. Graphic organizers provide visual support and structure to encourage individuals with an autism spectrum disorder to participate in tasks requiring a high degree of organizational skills. By using familiar, practiced and accomplished skills to build a new skill, comfort level is often increased, anxiety is likely reduced, and the challenging task of conversation may be perceived as less difficult--maybe even fun.



## DONATION INFORMATION

Donations to TEACCH are welcome

Please send your gift to:

TEACCH Autism Program  
Campus Box 7180  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599  
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Donations allow TEACCH to expand its clinical and training programs, pilot innovative research projects, and support its financial assistance fund. As a university based program, donations to TEACCH are tax deductible.

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### TEACCH- Chapel Hill Early Childhood Make- It and Take-It Nights - Raleigh and Chapel Hill locations!

*A time for parents to meet, talk, and make activities to help their kids at home and in the community with the help of TEACCH Early Intervention Staff.*

Raleigh: Wednesday, September 26th, 6:30-8pm; Wake County CDSA, 319 Chapanoke Road Suite 101, Raleigh, NC

Chapel Hill: Wednesday, November 7th, 6:30-8pm; Chapel Hill TEACCH Center, 100 Renee Lynne Ct, Carrboro, NC

Please call 966-4885 to let Mandy or Elisabeth know at least one week in advance if you are planning to come to help us in planning.

*Please let us know . . .*

Interested in subscribing to our e-newsletter, [email.hearsey@email.unc.edu](mailto:email.hearsey@email.unc.edu)

### TEACCH Newsletter

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