Structured Learning Classroom Description

Who is a Structured Learning student?

A student attending the structured learning classroom needs intensive supports and predictable, consistent routines and structure throughout the school day to engage in learning activities in the following areas: communication, social skills, academic tasks, and behavior management. These students function significantly below grade level academically, socially, and emotionally. Not all students diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome or autism, that benefit from visual schedules or augmentative communication, require the intensive support of a Structured Learning room.

The classroom facilitates the development of language, communication, and social skills, along with self-help, sensory integration, and academic skills and to generalize skills in all settings. The curriculum addresses academics, vocational, basic living skills and work behaviors through a very highly structured environment with intense visual supports and strategies. Positive behaviors associated with the successful integration into the school and community is emphasized through a highly structured set of coordinated activities using the latest communication technologies. Students in the classroom typically exhibit a rigid regimen of thought and behavior. They have limited imaginative play, limited functional verbal or non-verbal communication skills, and difficulty in understanding emotions, gestures or ideas of others, which greatly hampers social relationships or successful spontaneous interactions in all environments.

Characteristics of Structured Learning classrooms:

• Provides clear visual and physical structure.
• Provides predictability in the learning environment through intense visual supports, consistent verbal commands, and an organized sequence of activities or events throughout the student's day.
• Provides each student with an individualized visual/object schedule which the student and staff adhere to throughout the day.
• Provides an individual workstation and work system for each student to reduce distractions during assigned tasks.
• Uses multiple evidence-based methods to meet the individual needs of the student.
• Proactively provides information to the student to prepare them for impending change in routine or activity using social stories, pictures, or rehearsed distinct verbal phases.
• Intentionally teaches social rules/skills so that the student can successfully make requests, seek attention, and obtain preferred items in multiple contexts, direct teaching of self-regulation and coping skills.
• Communication needs addressed in every activity.

Training and educational technologies employed by staff in this classroom:

Staff in this classroom will be trained in various methods emphasizing visual schedules, social stories, structured work activities, discrete trial and the use of augmentative/alternative communication devices for communication needs and CBI. They will also create an environment that greatly reduces or controls environmental stimulation. Assistive technology would be used in all aspects of communication and academic content acquisition.

Questions to ask when considering a classroom emphasizing Structured Learning

Have the autism/behavior specialists been consulted?
Does the student have other conditions or impairments that may be associated with difficulties in the school environment?
Does the student require intense structure and visual supports in all aspects of the school day (and at home) in order to participate successfully?
Is the student highly resistant to, or agitated by, minor changes in routine?
Are behaviors easily accommodated or are they significantly disruptive to the student's learning and to the learning of classmates?
Does the student persistently engage in stereotypic behaviors to the detriment of scheduled activities?
Have a variety of visual/structural supports been attempted in the current environment?