

Autism & Drama: Lessons from Integrated Residencies Celebrating Neurodiversity



SPEAKER



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ADAPTS

Autism and Drama with Artists, Parents, Teachers, and Students

Agenda



- History of ADAPTS program
- Research
- Neurodiversity
- ADAPTS Curriculum
- Inclusive Strategies
- Evaluation
- Pandemic Response
- Celebration

History of ADAPTS

SUPERHEROES & SIDEKICKS



WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE



Research



What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

A complex neurobiological disorder which can affect many parts of a person's life.

Research

1 in 54 children are diagnosed with autism



Occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups
(but is under-identified in some)



Research

3-4 times more likely to be identified in boys than girls



Comes with a measure of severity



Research

Can be diagnosed with or without a language impairment



Children may have a range of cognitive levels



No two children (or humans!)
are exactly alike

Research



What causes autism?

Research



Research

What causes autism?

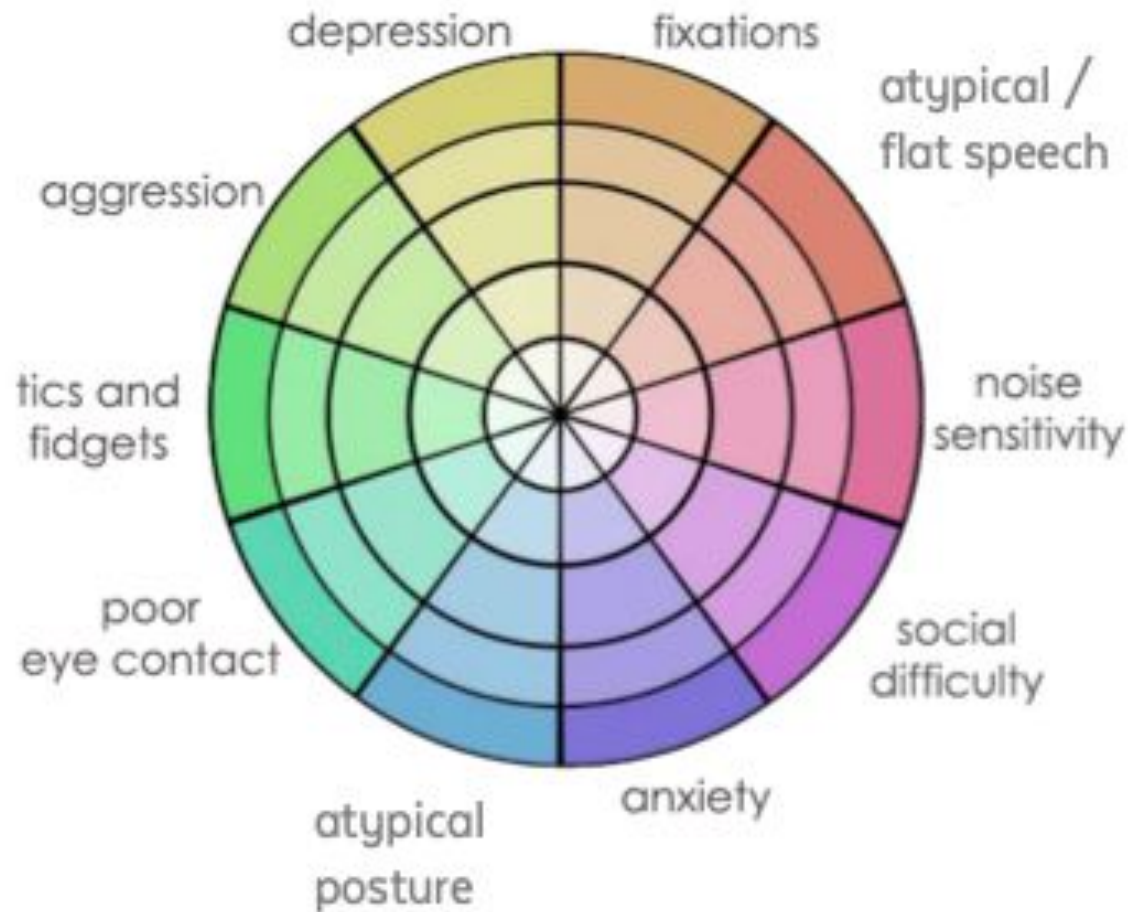
Not vaccines!



What people think the autism spectrum looks like:



What it can actually look like:



Research

Is drama a logical choice for autism intervention?

“At first sight, the notion of drama in relation to many children with severe and complex learning needs may seem inappropriate – beyond their representational capabilities and level of social understanding”

Peter, 2003

Research

Is drama a logical choice for autism intervention?

“YES! Drama, with its reliance on narrative, action, and character, provides a structured way for children with ASD to take on and try out new social roles, or to explore the world from another person’s point of view, something which they typically have difficulty doing.”

Peter, 2003

Research

Drama & Autism: Older Studies

Goldstein and Cisar (1992)

- Trained children with autism on three scripts which contained target social behaviors
 - Frequency of targeted behaviors and overall social behavior increased for all target children, but little novel behavior was observed.

Thorp, Stahmer, and Schreibman (1995)

- Used pivotal-response techniques to teach sociodramatic play skills to children with ASD.
- All children increased their role-playing, and generalized it across toys and settings, but not play partners.

Karnezi & Tierney (2009)

- Used a “hero’s quest” to help a little boy with Asperger’s Syndrome who was terrified of hair dryers--systematic desensitization with an imaginative component.
- Child was successful, and improvements generalized to new physical settings and types of hair dryers.

Research

Drama & Autism: Newer Studies

Corbett et al. (2011)

- Paired 8 children with ASD and 8 neurotypical children in the SENSE Theatre program (combined behavior intervention with drama, video modeling, and social skills training) for a musical version of *The Jungle Book*
- Children with ASD showed improvement in social understanding, and neurotypical children showed increased empathy, social referencing, and communication towards the children with ASD
- Overall reduction in anxiety and stress for participants

Neufeld (2012)

- Used a mixed-method design to examine the efficacy of Integrated Drama Groups, an adult-facilitated (but child-centered) drama program for children with autism.
- All three subjects showed improvement in their social and symbolic play skills, willingness to accept the ideas of others, and spontaneous joint engagement.

D'Amico, Lalonde, & Snow (2015)

- Used drama therapy techniques with pre-adolescents, focusing on improving social interaction.
- Combined student and parent reports showed improvement in engagement, hyperactivity, inattention, and challenging behaviors.

Research

Why use drama with children with autism?

A “Learning How to Do It While Doing It” Approach

Drama provides a safe, structured environment for exploring social roles, participating more meaningfully in a social world, and increasing social awareness and understanding.
(Peter, 2003).

+

Learning both by doing (actor) and watching (audience member).

+

Several studies have shown that modeling can be used to teach children with autism to initiate and sustain cooperative play
(e.g. Tryon & Keane, 1987; Jahr, Eldevik, & Eikesteh, 2000; D’Ateno, Mangiapanello, & Taylor, 2003).

Research

Four goals that drama can help children with autism achieve

Developing social understanding, awareness/tolerance of others, empathy/awareness of feelings and perspectives of others, sharing

Adopting and accepting different roles for different settings

Gaining, maintaining, and directing the attention of others (initiating social interactions)

Recognizing a common purpose

+

Research

Why Inclusion / Integration?

To lift up, normalize, and celebrate difference in the classroom

Typical peers help generate, organize, and expand upon ideas which are part of the peer culture.

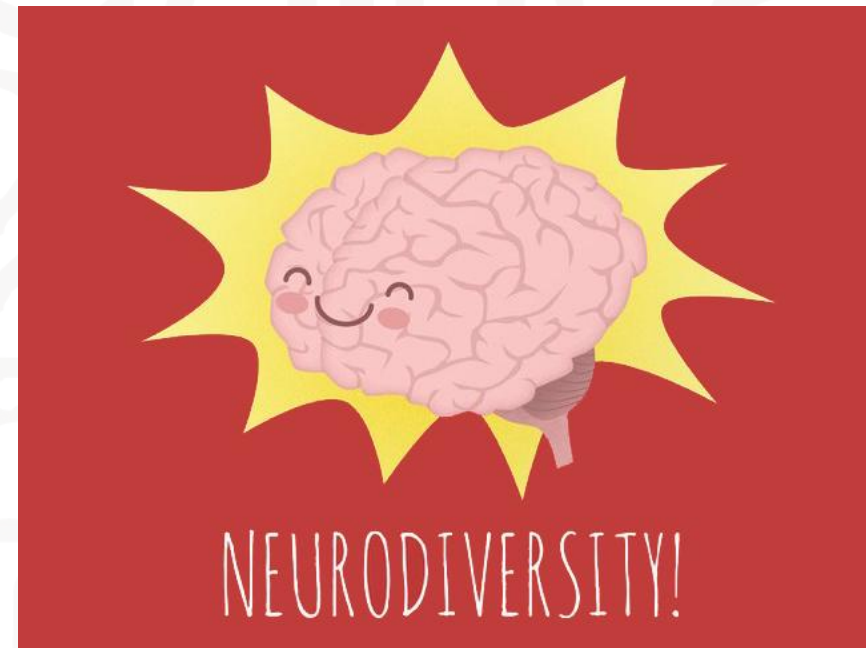
Neurotypical children demonstrate increased empathy for and understanding of their buddies

Typical peers scaffold social interaction

Typical peers can “anchor” a scene and help it move forward.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is an approach to learning and disability that suggests that diverse neurological conditions appear as a result of normal variations in the human genome.



Curriculum

Curriculum

ADAPTS: *Harold and the Purple Crayon* Sample Curricular Day

Objectives:

- *To build connections between partners*
- *To explore the next part of the story dramatically*

Warm-Ups:

Mirroring to Music (2 minutes) (*Music: Bobby McFerrin - Bang! Zoom*)

- In circle, TA leads a series of slow, fluid movements to music. Gestures are inspired by today's activities (balloon, view, windows, think, building, shapes). Students copy these movements as a calming entry activity.

Clap, Lap (3 minutes)

- In a circle, everyone on the same beat, "*Clap, lap, clap, lap, clap, lap and here we go... Hello, Hello, and your name is...*"
- Each student shares name when pointed to and everyone greets them with a big wave, "*Hello Javani!*"

Transition to Story (1 minute) (*Music: Baby Elephant Walk*)

- Establish ritual for entering storytime and using our imaginations (Play music and 'walk' in our seats to the beat of the music while TAs quickly swoosh the purple fabric around the circle).

The Story

- Read next section of *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (2 minutes)
“Harold had made a balloon and he grabbed on to it. And he made a basket under the balloon big enough to stand in. He had a fine view from the balloon but he couldn’t see his window. He couldn’t even see a house. So he made a house, with windows. And he landed the balloon on the grass in the front yard. None of the windows was his window. He tried to think where his window ought to be. He made some more windows. He made a big building full of windows. He made lots of buildings full of windows. He made a whole city full of windows. But none of the windows was his window. He couldn’t think where it might be.”
- **Window Tableaux** (Music: *Les jours tristes*) - “Harold made so many windows. Let’s all become some of the people who live in the buildings full of windows!” Set up the window shape and offer photo booth props in a basket/bag. Let each pair take a turn creating a tableau and getting a picture taken of them. (7 minutes)

Class Imagination Story Ritual (8 minutes) (Music: Bobby McFerrin - Kids’ Toys)

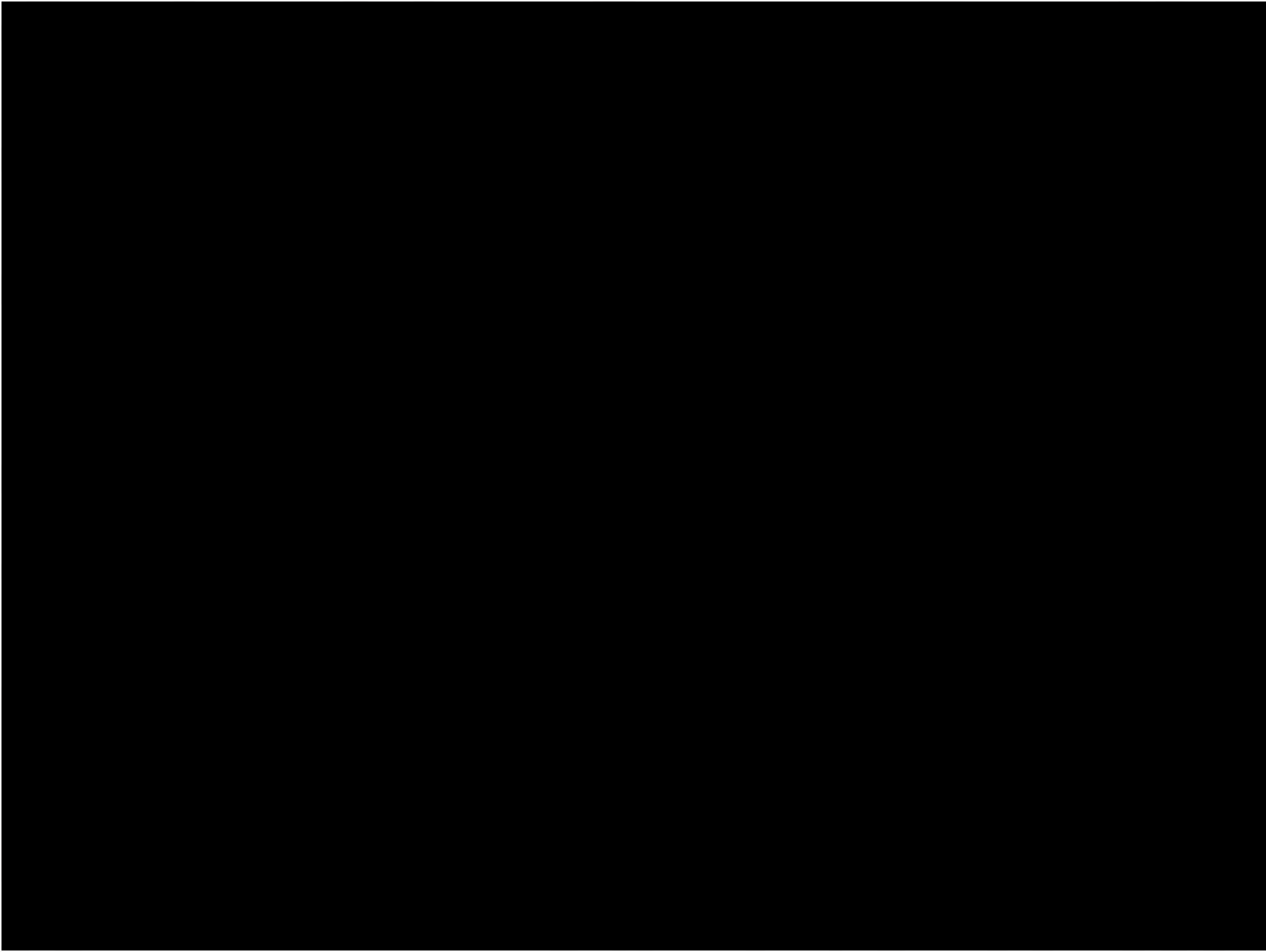
- Present the giant stuffed pencil (“It’s time to create *our own* imagination artwork!”)
- **Create** our own shape artwork in pairs with shapes and a piece of paper. Create title. Everyone says “Ooooh” after each piece is presented.

Shape Freeze Dance (2 minutes) (Music: Bunny Hop)

- When the music stops, the partners freeze in a collaborative shape (TA can start by declaring which shape to make, and then can shift into inviting them to make whatever shape they want).

Closure: (5 minutes)

- **Partner Mirrors** (Music: *Mirror* by Justin Timberlake)
- **Fabric Breeze** (Music: Bobby McFerrin - *Kalimba Suite*) TAs go over each student with a gentle breeze of purple fabric.
- **Goodbye Song & Partner high-fives**



Inclusive Strategies

Inclusive Strategies



Bottom Line:

All programming can be inclusive - we don't need to save these strategies to just engage disabled populations. Using *Universal Design* practices strengthens engagement for ALL.

- What differences might we expect to see in a neurodiverse classroom setting?
- What are appropriate inclusive supports we can offer?

Inclusive Strategies

Sensory Differences

7 Senses: Sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch, vestibular, proprioceptive



Folks can be *over-reactive* (sensory-avoiding) or *under-reactive* (sensory-seeking) to sensory stimuli

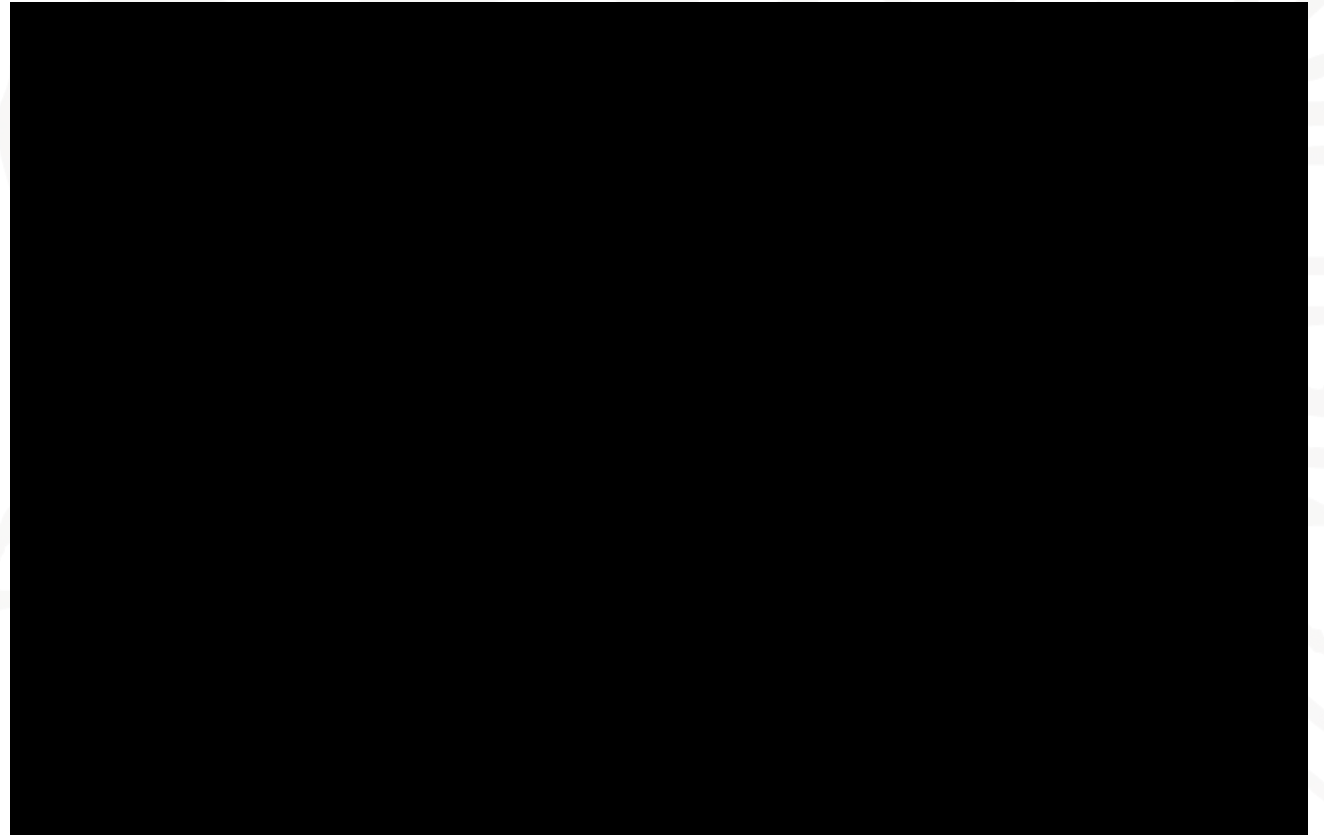
Inclusive Strategies

Sensory Differences

What does support look like?

Sensory tools:

- music/sounds/instruments
- bouncy/squishy balls
- feathers
- arts and crafts supplies
- spritzes of water
- scents
- fans or breeze from fabric



Inclusive Strategies

Differences in ...

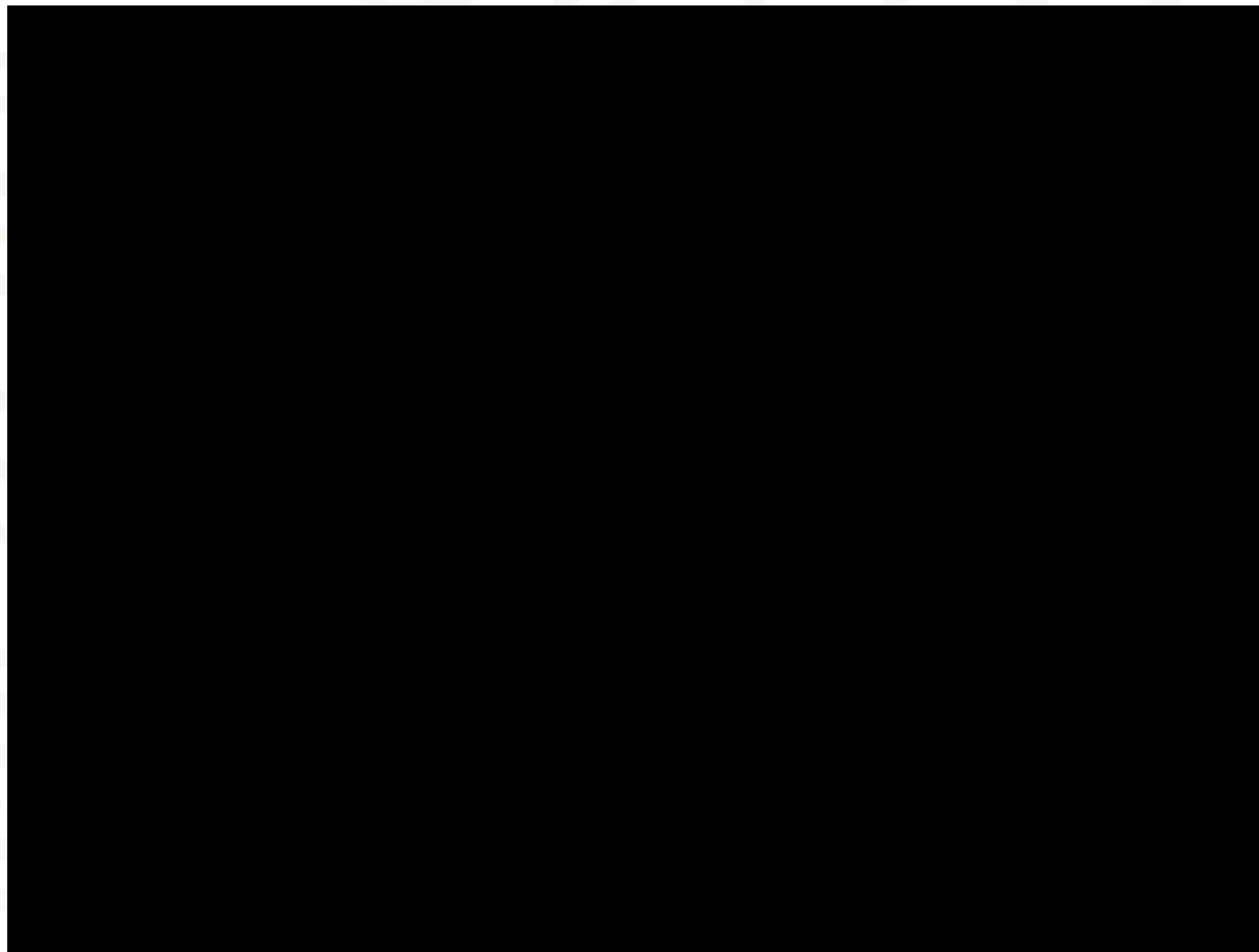
- **Executive function:** skills that allow us to follow instructions and complete a task or multi-step tasks
- **Sequencing:** skills that allow us to organize our language, thoughts, information, and actions in an effective order
- **Motor Planning:** skills that allow us to plan and carry out physical tasks

What does support look like?

- Offer built-in modifications for physical activities
- Allow time to generate ideas or responses
- Be mindful of how to give information or instructions

Inclusive Strategies

Social Story



Inclusive Strategies

Communication Differences

- Processing delays
- Idiosyncratic expressive language
- Repetition (echolalia) or scripted speech
- Communication variances - AAC devices (augmentative and alternative communication)



What does support look like?

- Offer and *encourage* a diversity of communication from all students
- Dare to wait
- Remember that *all behavior is communication!*

Inclusive Strategies

Universal Design Learning

Multiple Means of Engagement

Stimulate motivation and sustained enthusiasm for learning by promoting various ways of engaging with material.



Multiple Means of Representation

Present information and content in a variety of ways to support understanding by students with different learning styles/abilities.



Multiple Means of Action/Expression

Offer options for students to demonstrate their learning in various ways (e.g. allow choice of assessment type).



Evaluation

Evaluation

StageWrite ADAPTS Teacher Evaluation Form - Pre-Kindergarten & K-2nd

Inclusion → focus on SDC students	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My students participated in activities with their partner.					
2. My students engaged and connected with their peer partner. <i>(This only applies for SDC students who are able to.)</i>					
Inclusion → focus on Gen Ed students	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
3. Gen Ed students connected physically and emotionally, demonstrating a commitment to their SDC partner.					
Creative Play → focus on SDC students	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
4. My students actively participated through collaborative play in drama activities.					
5. My students connected with their partner using joint attention through play.					
6. My students increased their engagement with creative activities in drama using the sensory tools of dancing, singing, and use of props.					
Creative Play → focus on Gen Ed students	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
7. Gen Ed students actively participated through collaborative play in drama activities.					

Evaluation

StageWrite ADAPTS Teacher Evaluation Form - Pre-Kindergarten & K-2nd

Social Emotional Development → focus on SDC students	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
8. My students expressed or mirrored emotions during drama.					
9. My students connected with their partner physically and/or verbally.					
10. My students increased their ability with turn-taking in group work.					
11. My students used expressive language or PECS (for non-verbal students) to communicate their thoughts and ideas.					
Social Emotional Development → focus on GenEd students	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
12. Gen Ed students connected with their partner physically and/or verbally.					
13. Gen Ed students exaggerated emotions to model for their SDC partner.					
14. Gen Ed students articulated appreciation for personal strengths of peers.					

Comments:

Pandemic Response

Pandemic Response



Celebration

“This is Inclusion at its finest!!! It is rare that someone like my son, who has little time to be with a typical peer, gets to actually intimately interact with another, looking eye-to-eye, holding hands, and mirroring movement. A waterfall of tears came when I saw how well he was sitting independently and actually participated in the appropriate movements without prompting!”

Parent of a 5th grade student





Celebration

Wild Power

StageWrite's Annual Professional Production



THANK YOU!

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