



TX Sense Abilities

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PROGRAMMING

Special Students Special Moments

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Abstract: The student in this article has multiple disabilities. He was born with Cerebral Palsy and uses a wheel chair. He is visually impaired with limited communication skills.

Keywords: Visually impaired, routines, bonding, cooking

I am an itinerant teacher of students with visual impairment in the Birdville ISD outside of Fort Worth, Texas. As itinerant teachers, we never know what experiences we will encounter each day as we travel from school to school. On some days, we are fortunate when we suddenly experience those “Aha” moments. On this day, several special moments would occur for my student, Jacob, and me.

The Birdville ISD VI team, including myself, recognizes the importance of modifying the traditional routines. We acknowledge that carefully structured routines allow consistency and repetition, which are essential for students with multiple disabilities. More important than our carefully planned lessons, we should first develop relationships with our students and allow our routines to develop over time. Allowing bonding and communication to become part of our lessons is a valid teaching approach and just as important as the carefully planned steps in our routines. Using this approach, Jacob and I were about to experience our “Aha” moments.

My day began as I arrived at the high school. Jacob is in a self-contained special education class in which students are challenged each day with supportive teachers. Jacob arrived new to our district at the end of last year. On my previous visit with Jacob, I introduced myself to him and we engaged in vocal and hand-play interactions. Bonding and communication was still my challenge, but I knew that it was a necessary action that needed to happen.

Beginning our routine, I placed Jacob close to the cooking area of the classroom. Our materials consisted of a large container that held a mixing bowl, a whisk, and a measuring cup. All of these were necessary for making pancakes. I greeted Jacob and told him we could make pancakes. Then we clapped our hands and exchanged hugs. We had communicated enough that I felt he was comfortable with his setting and me. I slowly assisted him using hand under hand technique and encouraged him to explore our materials. Surprisingly, before I knew it, he had grasped the mixing bowl and it was suddenly on my head! With the bowl on my head, Jacob instantly extended his arm and used his hand to sweep across my back. He was searching for my head. He communicated to me that he wasn't sure where my head gone! I took the bowl from my head and offered it to him by placing it on his head. In a

playful manner, I would say the words “My bowl” and then say “Your bowl!” As we imitated each other, I realized we had bonded and an “Aha” moment had just occurred.

Next, with the bowl still on my head, Jacob began to explore and pat the bowl. His curious little fingers probed and investigated under the bowl and “Aha for him”! He had found my head. It was a very special moment. He continued exploring for a long time and he did not become tired of the interaction. We had bonded and now I felt that we were friends! What an accomplishment for Jacob and a realization for me. Jacob had demonstrated mastery of Piaget’s milestone of Object Permanence. This action allowed me to recognize that Jacob was demonstrating Secondary Circular Reactions, well into the cognitive development of the Sensorimotor stage. Jacob’s ability to tactually explore objects allowed him to exhibit this essential developmental stage and allowed me more knowledge about my student.

Was my pancake routine completed? Absolutely not! Was this interaction the better lesson for my student? Absolutely yes! Will I eventually get to make pancakes with Jacob? On the next visit we repeated our pancake routine. Using the same materials, I offered him the mixing bowl with the whisk inside. He explored the bowl, but on this day he grabbed the whisk. With the whisk in his hand, he made a stirring motion inside the mixing bowl. I felt he was making progress and the carefully structured routine allowed this progress, which is a necessary step for students with multiple disabilities.

As itinerant teachers, we truly never know what our day will bring. In order to get anywhere with our students, bonding is necessary. Without these bonding experiences, our students may reject the routines we are trying to initiate. Creating a fun way to get to know the student and his skill level is necessary to meaningful learning! I know by allowing a bonding experience to take place, I was part of a special moment with a very special student. I was acknowledging the opportunity to let my student tell me more about himself!
