

How Do Visuals Affect Challenging Behaviors in the Preschool Classroom?

Shadley Grimes, Dr. Sara Waring-Tiedeman
Master of Education, Northwestern College



INTRODUCTION

Studies show that participation in quality preschool can directly affect the outcomes of children. There is a push towards inclusion in the preschool classroom. With this push comes the need to consider accessibility. Accessibility for preschool students with special needs such as autism or other language delays is especially challenging. While an inclusive environment has been shown beneficial to all students, many students struggle in an inclusive environment because they are lacking the communication skills to navigate the typical preschool environment (Hill & Flores, 2014). Students with language delays are more likely to display difficult behaviors in the classroom (Frea, Arnold, & Vittimberga, 2001). To prevent this, students must have access to communication. When staff can anticipate the needs of the student and provide alternative methods of communication, giving the child a voice, negative behaviors can be greatly decreased. The research presented here is a review of what is known about the use of visual supports for young children in the preschool setting, particularly those who have significant discrepancies in their receptive and expressive communication abilities.

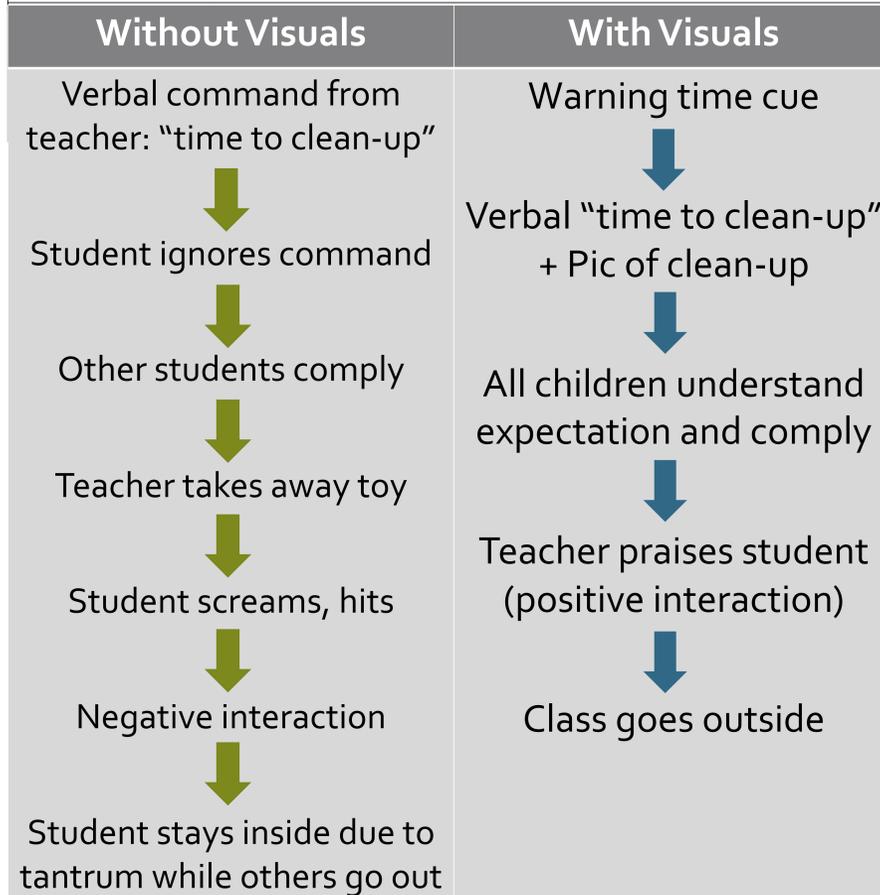
COMMUNICATION IN PRESCHOOL

The typical preschool class routine consists of alternating times of child-led and adult-directed activities. At large group time, the expectation is to sit, pay attention, listen, and participate in group activities. During centers, preschoolers choose activities and navigate social situations such as sharing. Small group time requires students to imitate or follow directions. All of these demands are problematic for students with delayed communication. They may exhibit behaviors during these times such as screaming, hitting, biting or other displays of aggression or disruption. These behaviors can result in a mislabeling of the child as intentionally defiant, off-task, and distractible (Hodgdon, 1995). To prevent this, teachers must use communication methods that are accessible and can be understood by the child with the delay. When a child has no voice, frustration occurs. Without access to choices, a child feels out of control (Dunlap et al., 1994). This impairs the child's learning and keeps them from forging healthy relationships with peers and teachers. To be fully included in the preschool classroom, students with language delays must have access to the curriculum through intentional interventions and preventions.

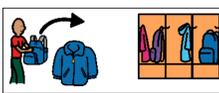
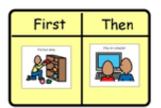
VISUAL SUPPORTS

How Can Visual Supports Help a Student?

- Anticipating changes
- Staying on task
- Organizing schedule or work
- Help them remember multiple steps
- Request, comment, protest, greet appropriately
- Allows student choices



EXAMPLES

	Visual schedule in a binder		Functional Routines
	Core Vocabulary Board		Alternative Augmented Communication (AAC)
	First-Then Chart with visuals		Picture Exchange Comm. System

CONCLUSION

Quality preschool can positively impact a child's education (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). Today, more preschool settings are moving toward an integrated model, where children with and without special needs are educated side-by-side. Research has shown positive outcomes for all children in integrated environments (Holahan & Costenbader, 2000). Challenging behaviors arise in students with special needs due to their inability to express their needs and wants, and because of the anxiety that surrounds schedule changes and expectations (Hill & Flores, 2014; Frea, Arnold, & Vittimberga, 2001; Kern, et al., 1998). While there is an abundance of research showing the use of visuals increases a child's attempts to communicate, more research is needed to see the relationship between visual supports and challenging behaviors. Visuals appear to aid students in basic communication skills when taught explicitly and implemented properly. This support lowers anxiety in the child and promotes better more positive student to student and student to teacher interactions (Kern et al., 1998).

Sources

Charlop-Christy, M., Carpenter, M., Le, L., LeBlanc, L., Kellet, K. (2002). Using the picture exchange communication system (PECS) with children with autism: Assessment of PECS acquisition, speech, social-communicative behavior, and problem behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 35*(3), 213-231.

Dobbs, J. & Arnold, D. (2009). Relationship between preschool teachers' reports of children's behavior and their behavior toward those children. *School Psychology Quarterly, 24*(2), 95-105.

Frea, W., Arnold, C., & Vittimberga, G. (2001). A demonstration of the effects of augmentative communication on the extreme aggressive behavior of a child with autism within an integrated preschool setting. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 3*(4), 194.

Ganz, J., Bourgeois, B., Flores, M., Campos, B. (2008). Implementing visually cued imitation training with children with autism spectrum disorders and developmental delays. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 10*(1), 56-66.

Hill, D. & Flores, M. (2014). Comparing the picture exchange communication system and the iPad™ for communication of students with autism spectrum disorder and developmental delay. *Tech Trends, 58*(3), 45-53.

Hodgdon, L. (1995). Solving social-behavioral problems through the use of visually supported communication. In K.A. Quill (Ed.), *Teaching children with autism: Strategies to enhance communication and socialization* (pp. 265-285). New York: Delmar.

Holahan, A., & Costenbader, V. (2000). A comparison of developmental gains for preschool children with disabilities in inclusive and self-contained classrooms. *Topics in Early Childhood Education, 20*(4), 224-235.

Kern, L., Vorndran, C., Hilt, A., Ringdahl, J., Adelman, B., & Dunlap, G. (1998) Choice as an intervention to improve behavior: A review of the literature. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 8*, 151-169.

Preis, J. (2006). The effect of picture communication symbols on the verbal comprehension of commands by young children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 21*(4).

Quill, K. (1997). Instructional considerations for young children with autism: The rationale for visually cued instruction. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders 27*(6), 697-714.