

Structured teaching in practice: Applying the principles of structured teaching in standard school environment

TUCKERMANN, A., HÄUßLER, A., LAUSMANN, E. Strukturované učení v praxi: Uplatnění principů Strukturovaného učení v prostředí běžné školy. Praha: Pasparta, 2014.

Reviewed by Lucie Schwarzová

The publication presents one of the methods for the education and teaching of individuals with the autism spectrum disorder – Structured Teaching. The methodology, according to Čadilová, Žampachová (2008), is based on the TEACH program and Lovaas' intervention theory and thus on the learning theories and behavioral theories based on behavioral intervention (focusing on the modification of the external conditions of learning and conduct of the individual) and cognitive-behavioral intervention (focusing on the change of the person's way of thinking).

Cottini and Vivanti (2017, p. 21) provide the definition of autism as follows: "Autism is an organic disorder caused by genetic predisposition, which together with the risk factors in the environment result in modified development of the brain that manifests itself later on in disturbed cognitive development of various levels and consequently abnormal behavior." Říhová, Urbanovská and Pastieriková (2011) describe the autism spectrum disorder as a life-long disorder which critically impacts the whole development of a child. Čadilová et al. (2012) adds that the presence of the disorder substantially changes the life of not only the person with autism but his or her whole family. The autism symptoms may vary, however, they tend to be permanent. In cases of appropriate educational intervention it is possible to observe some reduction of the symptoms in several areas of development. The specific symptoms, the so called diagnostic triad, include an impairment of imagination, social interaction, and communication. The method of structured teaching is grounded in the development of strong features of the individuals with PAS as well as in eliminating the deficiencies caused by the diagnosis.

The publication may be viewed as a collection of tools for teachers and teaching assistants working with children with autism spectrum disorder who are educated in the main stream schools. In connection with the amendment of the education law which brought about some principal changes to the area of education of special needs students, there emerged the need to react promptly to the methodological support when applying the supportive measures specified in the regulation no. 27/2016 of the Code. One of the possible supportive measures is the modification of methods and forms of the teaching process where it is possible to include the use of structured teaching.

The team of authors of German nationality has longtime experience acquired through their therapeutic work with people with autism spectrum disorder as well as through the provision of counseling services to their teachers, close relatives, and friends. This fact runs throughout the whole work which can be practically utilized and applied by elementary school teachers who should be able to prepare various materials according to the instructions in the publication for educating children with autism. The original German edition of the work titled „*Praxis TEACCH – herausforderung Regelschule*“ was translated to Czech by Jitka Hakenová.

The publication is logically segmented into several chapters. The first one comprises the fundamental ideas of structured teaching and its use in the conditions of the main stream education.

The second chapter contains the theoretical anchoring of the structured teaching and takes a closer look at specific areas of the structure at school, i.e. structuralizing the space, time, tasks, and instructions. This part also includes numerous pictures depicting specific tips how the components of structure may be utilized in the class and when preparing various tasks. The structured assignments that are included respect the basic rule which sets the system of work moving from left to right and from top to bottom. A sub-chapter can be also found here that presents the aids for time organization and individual work.

In the introduction to the third chapter, the authors explain the term of a hidden curriculum which they view as a pitfall in a standard school. Furthermore, they focus on the general definition of the qualification and tasks of the teaching assistant. They also present a time-tested teaching aid, the so called “box that everyone needs to have”. It contains some fundamental materials for an immediate modification of teaching materials.

The fourth chapter targets the area of communication with a student with autism spectrum disorder. The practical recommendations and illustrations depict the act of asking for help, making decisions, and accessing communication.

Chapter number five suggests several ways how to announce the diagnosis and explain autism to the class. It includes a power point presentation of a student with Asperger's, Max, who presents himself to the class through such presentation.

The last three chapters of the book explain the necessity of motivation in the teaching-educational process and the strategies of coping with changes during the day at school. The conclusion of the publication provides various references to specialized literature and information sources.

I would like to recommend this book to all teaching and counseling staff who work with children and students with autism spectrum disorder since it offers a number of useful and specific recommendations how to work with these students using the methodology of the structured teaching. The publication may be regarded as a collection of practical inspiration helping achieve the fundamental priorities of education, i.e. to provide the student with sufficient support for the development of all parts of his or her personality.

References

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