

Strategies for Teaching based-on Autism Research: The STAR Program

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The STAR Program, Strategies for Teaching based-on Autism Research (Arick, Loos, Falco and Krug, 2004) is a nationally used curriculum based on the applied behavior analysis strategies of discrete trial training, pivotal response training and teaching functional routines. The curriculum is designed to teach children with autism skills in the areas of expressive and receptive language, spontaneous language, pre-academic skills, play and social skills and to generalize their skills within functional routines. The instructional strategies used in the STAR program are based-on numerous research studies examining their effectiveness. These strategies and other complementary strategies are described in the National Standards Report by the National Autism Center (2009) as effective treatments. The STAR Program is designed to be individualized for each child. The Student Learning Profile allows the instructor to identify the appropriate lessons needed for the child. Once the Student Learning Profile is completed the instructor is able to identify specific lessons for instruction in each of the six curricular areas appropriate for the child. Positive behavior supports are used to teach the child new skills. As the student learns new skills they are encouraged to practice their skills in daily functional routines. A state-wide outcome study in Oregon (Autism Spectrum Disorders Outcome Study and Training Project Final Report: Arick, Young, Loos, Falco, Krug, Loos, Gense and Johnson 2004) was conducted using the STAR Program and found that students made progress in all curricular areas. In addition the majority of parents of the children in the Outcome Study agreed that their children's skills and behaviors had increased each school year.

The STAR Program, as well as many other research based programs, is used as part of the Oregon Program Autism Training Sites (ORPATS) project. The ORPATS project is funded by the Oregon Department of Education to Portland State University's Department of Research and Sponsored Projects and Northwest Regional ESD. This project was designed to develop a network of public school programs that can model the use of effective research-based curricula and instructional strategies. The ORPATS training sites serve students with autism and train special education teachers, speech pathologists, autism specialists and instructional assistants to use these research based methods. At each ORPATS site the project has worked with an Autism Specialist to be able to serve as a coach to other teachers. Over 40 ORPATS sites have been developed throughout Oregon. The project has been evolving for several years and now has established training sites for pre-school, elementary and middle school programs. Further information is available on the project website including a list of upcoming workshops, how school district staff can access training and how to contact project staff at www.rpats.ed.pdx.edu.