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JFK Center-FREE VSA WEBINAR SERIES
SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS IN THE ARTS:
A GUIDE FOR TEACHING ARTISTS
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>> LISA DAMICO: Hello, everyone, and welcome. This is Lisa Damico. I am the VSA Affiliates Coordinator here at the Kennedy Center. This is a part of a monthly webinar series we offer at the Kennedy Center with topics related to arts, disability and education.

I'm very excited to have Dr. Sharon Malley, who works here with me at the Kennedy Center in the Office of VSA and Accessibility. She is our Special Education Specialist, and this is the second webinar on which she has been a presenter. I'm going to turn it over to Sharon now.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Lisa. Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak with you today about autism and the arts, a subject which is near and dear to me. This is intended to provide you with a base for work that you might be doing with students with autism in your offerings as a teaching artist, and as you can see, the title is: Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the Arts.

We have a preliminary poll to start with, and so Lisa, if you would like to conduct that.

>> LISA DAMICO: Our first question is: How many years of experience do you have teaching students? Your options are: Zero to one, two to four, or more than four.

Please select which option applies to you. I'll give you about 15 more seconds. Looks like we have about 82% of our participants that have voted. Sharon, 7% of our participants said zero to one. 17% said two to four, and then 75% said more than four.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay. Wonderful. All right, for the second question --

>> LISA DAMICO: Okay, for our second question: Have you had opportunities to teach students with autism?

Please select yes or no.

All right. We'll share the results of this one. So we had 76% of our participants say "yes," and then 24% said "no."

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, great. And then the last question?

>> LISA DAMICO: How confident are you about teaching students with autism?

Please select one of the following: Not at all, somewhat, or very.

I'll give you about 5 more seconds, if you haven't voted, and then I'll share the results.

Okay, 15% of our participants said not at all. 66% said "somewhat." And 19% said "very."

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, all right, well, that's very helpful, and I'm going to enlist the 19% to co-present this. Actually, I'm just teasing.

So let's take a look at the next slide. Now, here's a quote that I really like. "Intelligence manifests itself in myriad ways when there are obstacles to someone who is unable to communicate verbally. Intelligence manifests itself and should be celebrated."

And I like this quote because it reminds us that we communicate in many ways, and that through the arts, students with autism and other disabilities can find their voices, and just as a note, I will provide references for the items that I've referenced at the end of the slide presentation.

We will learn three basic categories of information. First, the definition of autism, the challenges associated with having autism, and teaching strategies that you, as teaching artists, can use when working with students with autism. And there will be a natural break for questions after we go through the challenges associated with having autism.

Okay, the autism definition, this is a general definition -it's a group of complex disorders of brain development. And the first part is that it's a pervasive developmental disorder. Pervasive mean that it's across many areas of functioning, and developmental means that it affects typical development and the changes as the child develops.

Also it's characterized by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, and repetitive behaviors. And I want to stress that each individual with autism is unique, and there is a wide range of abilities and differences associated with autism, just as we are all different within the scope of humanity, so are students with autism.

So I'm providing you with general information and characteristics as we go along, with an understanding that each student you work with autism will have some degree of some of

these characteristics, but not necessarily all of them.

Autism is a group of disorders, and it's important that you know that these various terms come under the definition of autism. Autistic disorder is the general term characterized by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication, sensory sensitivities, repetitive behaviors, and the most obvious signs emerge between 2 and 3 years old.

Rett syndrome mainly occurs in girls, and it's characterized by regression beginning at about age 3, and it's similar to autism.

Childhood disintegrative disorder. The child develops normally through age 3 or 4 and then over a few months begins to lose language, motor and social and other learning skills so by age 10 they have regressed to having significant autism. Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified. This means that the student doesn't meet the full criteria for autism but has similar communication, socialization or behavior issues.

And then lastly, Asperger syndrome which is a very mild form of autism, characterized by social awkwardness, odd use of language, repetitive behaviors, but not necessarily cognitive delays.

And autism can also be associated with intellectual disability. About 40% of students with autism have an intellectual disability. Also, difficulties in motor coordination, attention difficulties, physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances.

As you might know, scientists are still studying the exact cause of autism, and currently are not finding one cause. They are finding that there are rare gene changes that have been identified over the last 5 years that can cause a predisposition to autism, and that there are environmental stresses that add to that, such as advanced parental age, difficulties during birth, especially oxygen deprivation to baby's brain. And they're also looking at examining immune system influences.

The prevalence of autism currently, 1 child in 88 is diagnosed with autism. And that's 1 in 54 boys, and 1 in 252 girls according to a current Center for Disease Control estimate.

I've grouped the challenges that students with autism have into three main categories that we're now going to discuss in more detail. They are sensory challenges, communication challenges, and social/emotional challenges.

The first is sensory challenges. And according to neurobiological theories, people with autism are hypersensitive to the world, because the synapses, and those are the nerve connectors, so the connections between nerves are not pruning information, so basically there's information overload.

And so if you have worked with students with autism, which it seems that most of you have, then if you think about it, that makes sense. They're basically dealing with information overload.

So there's an inability to sort out the important information

from the background information. And this causes students to fixate on and capture exceptional amount of information, from minimal exposure, so it's just all coming in at once, and they're not able -- it makes it difficult for them to generalize the abstract information they're taking in and to put it into categories. It's like their brain is not categorizing.

People with autism choose to look at or attend to the item that changes the least and that's because it's less overload for their brains. So looking at faces can be highly stimulating and overwhelming compared to inanimate objects.

Not looking at people is an unconscious defense mechanism. You can think over time, in a child's development, he or she does not develop attachments, and that can be partly attributed to the fact that when they're very young, it's very difficult for them to look at faces. This is not intentional on the part of the child. Withdrawal from activities doesn't mean ignorance or insolence; again it's so much to take in.

Inability to ignore background stimuli. There are things in the environment, background stimuli that we would ignore. For a student with autism, it can be overwhelming, such as a buzz in a fluorescent fixture, a chair scraping on the floor, a waffle of colorful posters and projects, the teacher's voice, or other students milling around and talking, even. So that leads to difficulty in general classrooms. A normal classroom can be too stimulating for a child with autism to be engaged. He or she may be able to learn the content but need specialized teaching methods and strategies.

Okay, the next is communication challenges. So communication can be affected in many ways, such as nonverbal. That's when a student is not communicating verbally at all, or very little. Echolalic speech. That refers to when a student repeats what you say. So, for instance, if you say: Do you know what time it is? And the student says: What time it is? Difficulty interpreting nonverbal communication, or language. So gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice might not be understood.

Difficulties processing what others have said. So you might say something in a complex sentence that is not understood. That means you might need to simplify your language, and make it more concrete.

And then focusing on one or only a few topics in conversation, to the exclusion of all others. Okay, the topic is usually something that's really interesting to the student, and one that he or she has been able to narrow down with success, and to the point of learning a lot of details about. Again, it's sort of like they're pruning the environment in the way that they can, so they can zero in on one topic.

The student might want to engage in conversation with you about that, so for example, dogs. Do you have a dog? What's your dog's

name? When was your dog born? And then in subsequent conversations with the student, the student's likely to never forget the name and birth date of your dog.

Okay, so here's a student who does have great difficulties with verbal communication, but I want you to see the wonderful painting that he's done. And I've sprinkled some photographs like this in the presentation, because I want you to see how students with autism engage in the arts in various ways.

And so -- and here is his self-portrait. He's done a really nice job of capturing himself and his feelings.

To continue with communication challenges, some other things to consider are that some students with autism have difficulties with body space, maybe standing too close to you when they're talking. Also difficulties with the pitch, tone, inflection and volume of their voice. A student can be highly verbal, but have communication discrepancies. Examples of that would be that comprehension may be lacking especially that this is seen in the ability to read fluently, but not understand the content of what they're reading.

Or they might have unusual interests expressed in conversation, like I said, to the exclusion of all others. Or the conversation is not reciprocal, in that the student doesn't engage in two-way conversations, which can affect social skills. So you might say: How was your weekend? And the student will say: Good. And then that's the end of the conversation.

Students with speech difficulties can still have normal IQs, and that's important to remember. So a student can have pretty significant speech difficulties, but is still able to learn academically in classes that are maybe in separate classes from students in the general population. The student is learning similar material, but might not be learning at the same pace. Also, it's important to know that skills in the arts can exist independently of verbal and written skills.

Okay, so the last is social/emotional challenges, and as I said, there can be difficulties with reciprocal social interactions, and some examples would be total aloofness or inability to initiate a conversation, so a student can engage in conversations when you talk with them, but they don't initiate conversations.

Or inability to shift conversational topics, as I said, wanting to stay on one topic or not understanding nonverbal cues and that would be facial expressions or gestures. And it's important to understand that behaviors are a form of communication. So students with autism might have the following behaviors. And I do emphasize "might," because again, it's very different from student to student.

So you might see a student flapping hands or spinning around, and it's important to know that's not a sign of lack of

intelligence, and the student might be just taking a break. Sometimes students with autism need to disassociate from everything that's going on, so they might go off into an area where they can be alone, and so you might see that behavior when they do, and they might just be thinking and in their own world.

Rituals such as arranging things neatly, again, students with autism need to have things in order, and this cuts down on the stimulation. So they might enter a room, and if some things have been arranged differently from what they're used to, they might want to rearrange, or a ritual might be to, when the student enters a room, always fixing a certain pillow or something.

Self-injurious behavior, this can occur with students with significant disabilities, and it's usually younger students, and it can be a habit that a student has, and there are behavioral supports that address these.

And this is when communication with teachers is key, and when I talk about strategies, I'll be talking more about the importance of communication with the teachers that you're working with.

And the same with meltdowns, they're very rare. And again, knowledge about the student is key. A meltdown can occur in direct relation to the student not getting the communication that he or she needs, so when there's a lack of consistency, a lack of understanding what's going on, that's when a meltdown is likely to occur. Okay? And again, communication with teachers, knowing if a student with autism has the potential to have a meltdown is important to know. And I would say that in every case that there is a student who might have that situation, then a teacher or an aide should be with the student while you're conducting your residency.

So all of this leads into teaching strategies, although I have some other things to share with you first. But leading into teaching strategies, and looking at this, you want to be thoughtful, organized, and structured. Okay? And that will greatly help.

Okay, so I'm just going to go over the theories of social cognition, and then unique strengths of students with autism, and that will be the end of this section, and then we can entertain questions, and then we will move on to teaching strategies. Okay?

So for theories of social cognition, I bring these up because these help you understand the developmental delay of students with autism. These are social/psychological theories, and for those of us working with autism, this sort of helps us make sense, make more sense of maybe some behaviors and some of the ways that students with autism learn. Okay?

The first is theory of mind, and that's the ability to see things from another perspective. And that is developed by -- or starts to develop by age 4, and that tends to be lacking in students with autism. So they have difficulty predicting the

behavior of others, reading the intent of others and understanding that intent, and difficulty reading and understanding emotions.

There's also difficulty understanding how their own behavior impacts others, and difficulty reading and understanding the interests of others. So reciprocity.

The next is theory of central coherence. And that's the ability to draw together diverse information this order to construct a higher level of meaning in context, and I'll explain that. And again, that's developed by age 4.

So what that means is -- and to go further, this is lacking in autism. So what that means is that the student isn't able to synthesize the diverse information or different kinds of information that are coming in, what I've also touched on in terms of pruning the environment, so they're not able to generalize or understand abstractions. So there's a preference --

>> LISA DAMICO: Sharon, we just had a question asking if you could repeat the theory of central coherence definition.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, I'll say it again and then I have some explanation that will help, because it's a little bit dense. So the ability to draw together diverse information in order to construct a higher level of meaning in context.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, so as I was saying, basically, the student is not able to generalize or understand abstractions, and so -- and I'm going to give you some examples of the difficulties, and this will help to make sense of this.

There's a preference for the known and expected, so there's confusion, for instance, if a setting of a classroom has changed. There's difficulty in choosing and prioritizing. This is basically what's happening in the brain.

An example would be the student's not able to summarize a story. They can give the facts in straight order, but not be able to give you the theme, or just an overall summarization.

Difficulty in generalizing. Now, to further explain that, that is -- so generalizing a skill would be when you go grocery shopping, you can transfer the skill of grocery shopping to any store that you're in, more or less, right? Sometimes stores can be more confusing than others. But when you go to any store, you can grocery-shop, okay? The student with autism might need to learn how to grocery-shop in one store, and not be able to transfer that information to another store.

A simple explanation is a student is taught to draw with a pencil, but they can't draw with a piece of chalk. They can't transfer that information.

And then lastly -- actually, I said that before, understanding the facts of a story, but not the central theme or the main idea. So just focusing on facts. And then the last is the theory of executive functioning, and that's the ability to maintain an appropriate problem-solving set to attain a future goal. Okay,

I'll say that again. The ability to maintain an appropriate problem-solving set to attain a future goal.

How this is affected is planning. Not being able to think in advance about what is needed to do a task. Self-monitoring, not aware -- the student's not aware that they need to monitor their behavior. Behavioral flexibility. The student has to keep to routines. Organization of a task and difficulty starting or stopping a task. So in general, it causes a student to be rigid, inflexible, and perseverative in behaviors, by that I mean repetitive. Any other questions about this? Because I know this was dense. Lisa, any other questions?

>> LISA DAMICO: Not at this moment.

>> SHARON MALLEY: So we're on the last two slides of the information for this section. And the first -- both of the slides basically are about the unique strengths of students with autism. And I really want to emphasize this, because working with students with autism can really be quite joyful, and these are some of the cool things about students with autism.

First of all, there's an enjoyment of routines and chores. Again because routines are predictable and the student can control the outcome and know what's going to happen, in routines and in chores that they do on a daily basis, they do them really well.

And again accuracy, consistent accuracy in performing tasks. Students with autism will do rote tasks very well, they'll memorize how to do them and do them well.

A recall of visual images. An example is a student who's able to look briefly out the window at a building across the street, and then able to execute a line drawing of the building with the correct number of windows, et cetera.

Recall of historical facts and again it depends on interests, but I've known students who are very good with certain aspects of history that they're interested in or other facts that have dates and times connected with them. Following concrete rules. And it's helpful that they are written. And I'll be going over more of that in the strategies.

Precision and attention to detail. Ability to quickly learn and maintain time schedules, skills in the arts, in many instances, and I'll have some more examples of those. And also, what I really have appreciated, and I think a lot of us who work with students with autism have experienced this, is there's -- because of some of the areas that I pointed out that had to do with the theories of social cognition, theory of mind and so on, this tends to influence a student's ability to have integrity, honesty, and authenticity, because the student is not judgmental.

Okay, so I'm going to show you a couple of pictures. Here's a painting by a student with autism who at the time she painted this was just really interested in Egypt.

And here is a young man who greatly enjoyed at the time, and he

might still, this has been a while ago -- creating works out of Sculpey. These are really tiny what he's created. These are less than an inch tall, and he has created whole scenes, and I'm going to go back to these guys here.

He was really interested in having stories around them, so he decided that he wanted to do clay animation, and he took a course at a local arts school here in D.C., and on videoing and so on, and so he made some clay animation out of his work, so this is an example of how students with autism can be gifted in the arts.

All right, does anybody have any questions?

>> LISA DAMICO: I had a general question.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay.

>> LISA DAMICO: This is from Katherine. I'm a special educator and very much appreciate the use of person-first language throughout this webinar. For those who are not special educators, could you please quickly explain what person-first language is, and why we use it?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Thank you, Katherine. Yes, I am saying "students with autism," and that's because we focus on the student first, and not on the label, and the label happens to be "autism."

Sometimes I actually will say students who happen to have autism. Disability's just a label, and we all -- all of us in our humanity have all different kinds of traits and characteristics, and for our students with autism, having autism is just one. And as I said, we also have students who have wonderful gifts in the arts, and in other areas. So thank you, Katherine.

Okay, any other questions?

>> LISA DAMICO: Real quickly this is more administrative. I've had several people asking if a recording of the webinar will be available afterwards, and it will. There's an automatic e-mail that's generated by the GoToWebinar service, so about an hour after the presentation ends, everyone who is registered for the webinar will receive that link, so you watch it again yourself or share it with your colleagues. I will also, as a follow-up, send out a copy of the PowerPoint, and if Sharon has any notes that she might want to include, I can send those out as well.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Thanks, Lisa.

>> LISA DAMICO: Sure.

>> SHARON MALLEY: I know that I'm saying a lot with each slide, and people are probably trying to take notes, so not to worry, it will be available.

>> LISA DAMICO: Actually, I have one more question.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Yes.

>> LISA DAMICO: This is from Katya. You mentioned faces earlier as being a focal point for students with autism, but also that they don't look at faces. Can you clarify.

>> SHARON MALLEY: I don't think I said -- or at least I did not mean to say that faces are a focal point, because in essence,

it can be difficult for students with autism for faces to be a focal point. So the clarification is that: No, students with autism have difficulties looking at faces, because they're animated, and it's easier the focus on things that are inanimate. It's like difficult for a student with autism to read what's happening on a face, on our faces. Okay?

>> LISA DAMICO: All right, no questions.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, so teaching strategies. Moving right along. Basically, I have 3 pointers, and then 4 general strategies, and I'm going to go into details with the 4 general strategies.

So starting with the 3 pointers, these are overall pointers. Every student is different, as I had said before, so there is no one approach for teaching students with autism. However, I am giving you strategies, and the strategies that you use will depend on each individual student, and depend on conversations that you have with teachers, so that leads us into:

Learn as much as you can from the student's teachers, and if you use universal design for learning, UDL, as a framework, it will reduce the amount of differentiation you might need for a particular student. Because with UDL, you'll be using multimodal approaches, and as you'll see with the strategies, that's a lot of what we'll be doing with students with autism.

So -- and I just want to add that to remember that every student is creative in his or her own way, and students with autism will have different ways of knowing, and that's the beauty and the fun of working with them.

Okay, so we have 4 general strategies: Reduce the amount of stimulation, focus on visual learning, maintain clear structure, and use positive behavior supports.

>> LISA DAMICO: Sharon, could I ask you to quickly backtrack and share with us what UDL is?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay. Yes, universal design for learning is a framework that focuses on teaching in such a way that you're using multiple presentations of the material, so that the students are given multiple options for responding to the material, so that students with multiple ways of learning can all access the material. That's the short of it in a nutshell.

And we hope to have a webinar on universal design for learning at some point.

Okay, so I went over the 4 general strategies, or actually, I just read them, and so we're going to go into detail about each one. The first one, reduce stimulation. As you can -- actually, this presentation is an example of that, because I've tried to keep the slides very simple, and that's basically what you want to do, is you want to keep your lessons, texts, media, anything that you use should be focused on the task, with little extraneous stimuli.

You can use task analyses for skill development and directions. And my next slide is an example of a task analysis, and I will go over that.

And lastly, this is as the neurobiologist Huesmann has said, basically you want to prune the environment because the brain cannot prune the input.

So here's a sample task analysis I've actually used. This is just the beginning part which is the preparation of watercolor painting. A task analysis is a series of steps for a given task broken down so that each step represents a simple action that can be followed to complete the task. Basically, that's my definition.

So students with autism can often learn best if tasks are broken down very simply. If a student has fairly high ability and is reading, sometimes all the student might need is a check sheet with this list of what to do. There are other ways to teach, and it's to teach using a task analysis, and it's systematic teaching methods, and you use them to teach students one on one or in small groups, and if you're interested in learning more, because it would take a long time to explain exactly the process, you can Google, for instance, "system of least prompts" or "response prompting procedures."

So just to read this, it's, number 1, select paper. 2, get box of supplies -- I'm sorry, let me backtrack.

This is a watercolor painting preparation. Okay? So the first step, select paper. Number 2, get box of supplies. 3, get cup. 4, fill cup with water. 5, get paper towel. 6, arrange materials on table. 7, select color. 8, twist open tube of paint. 9, squeeze small amount of paint on palette. And, 10, put cap on tube. So what you would be doing is you might be verbalizing each step to the student.

You might say: First, select your paper, and then the student would select the paper. And then you would say: Now, get the box of supplies and the student would get the box of supplies, and so on. Okay? So the next is focus on visual learning. Is there a question?

>> LISA DAMICO: There is. If you could repeat the terms that you mentioned before for what could be Googled.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Sure. "system of least prompts." Or "response prompting procedures."

Also, if you just Google "task analysis," you can get more information.

So focus on visual learning. This is important, also. You want to provide a visual schedule of the activity, and I'm going to have an example of that on the next slide. The schedule can be on an interactive white board, if there's one in the classroom, so you could bring it on your flash drive. And, of course, this involves conversations with the teacher. Or you can have it on a

poster that you just always have prepared. If you're doing residencies and you're repeating the same thing across schools, then you just need to have one poster that you always bring.

And as I said, on the next slide, I'll have an example. Use graphic organizers in reading and writing activities. For example, you could have a storyboard template to aid in sequencing, a writing activity. All directions should be written, as well as verbal. Use pictures to illustrate your written directions, if needed. And again, that would be a conversation with a teacher as to what the student requires.

And use the student's preferred technology. And I'm going to provide more information on technology near the end of the presentation. Okay?

Okay, so this is a sample schedule that you would post. So it's a sample schedule for an art activity. And as you can see, it's both written and illustrated. You can use a photo of yourself; you can use graphic symbols or pictures. You can use symbols that are used in picture exchange communication systems, such as Boardmaker. There are many ways to get the images that you need. If you're using an interactive white board, the teacher might have images on a picture exchange communication system.

When each part of the activity is complete, you can move the picture to the "finished" column. Let's see if I can get this to work. Yeah, there it goes, okay.

And you would say something like: Okay, now I have finished giving teacher directions and then you move the picture over, as I just did.

So remember, the directions are explicit, written, visually demonstrated, clear, and concise. So as you see for this, we have: Listen to teacher directions, draw your portrait with a partner, color your portrait, put your portrait on the wall, take a break.

So what you would do is you'd be referring to this posted schedule directions as you're going through your activity.

>> LISA DAMICO: Sharon, we have a quick question. Is one visual best when you have 5 or more students at one time?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Yes, yes. And, in fact, yes, this would be posted for all of the students, definitely. And some students might be using iPads, and I'm going to talk more about that when I talk about technology, because there's other ways to do this besides having it posted.

Okay, so maintain clear structure. It's important that you have clear structure. I want you to know that you can have clear structure and spontaneity in your art form. I know it almost sounds like an oxymoron, but if you follow along with this, you'll see that this type of structure usually then frees you up, and the students, to be more creative in other ways. So you can have the structure, and it still enables them to be creative. It doesn't

hinder the creative process.

So you want to have organized materials, segments of time, and clear directions. You also want the students to have clear directions for the organization of assignments and materials in the physical space, so orderliness is the name of the game.

And again, you want to provide a written schedule for the lessons, as we saw in the prior slide. Prepare for transitions. This is really important. Students with autism like to know what's going on, like to have information in advance of when things are happening.

So you're going to verbalize, as you point to the written schedule, and provide reminders in advance of what's going to be happening. For instance, "after we do this, whatever, then we will be moving into the auditorium."

You want to have clear, concise rules posted, and two slides from now you'll see an example of that.

Rule cards. Some students with autism rely on rule cards, and that's a written rule that's on a card to give a student a reminder. And it might also have a picture of the rule if the student is not reading. And when I show you the posted rules, then you'll see better what I'm talking about in regards to rule cards. I'll mention it again.

Okay, you also can use social narratives which are also known as social stories as developed by Carol Grey, and you can find examples of those on the internet if you Google "social stories." Those are a series of pictures and words, like a story board, that provides a clear sequence of events that will happen, and usually are written in the first person.

So it would be like: Today I'm going to... and it then it will have the things the student will be doing that day, very clearly one item on each page and it can be in a small, little booklet. Provide a checklist for organization for the student. They could have an individual checklist. Pre-teach vocabulary and key concepts, so you want to pre-teach -- for instance, if you're using the word "illustration," or the word "portrait," thinking again of an art activity, a visual art activity, you might need to break down what that word means before you keep using it in your lesson.

And also, just let me say that a lot of these -- going back to the rule cards and social narratives, checklist and pre-teaching vocabulary, again, it's really important to have a conversation with the teacher so that you know what the students need.

Okay, so here's an example of classroom rules. And these are photographs from clip art, but you can personalize these. Again, you can use a picture of yourself for the teacher. You can use picture symbols, such as found on picture exchange communication systems. Or however you want to do it.

And this is just the set rules that are stationary, and you

need to go over them. If the teacher already has rules like this in the classroom, then -- and you like those rules, then you can, of course -- or if the students actually are used to having those kinds of rules, and they have their set rules, then you want to follow those rules.

So if you're teaching a classroom of all students with autism, it is highly likely that they would have something like this. You want to keep it to 4 or 5 rules. Very clear, very concise.

And the reason, if you look at my last one, the reason why I have "walk in the halls and classroom" rather than "don't run," is because if you say "don't run," then students might skip or hop on one foot or whatever. So these rules need to be taken very literally, because they will be by your students.

And also, for some students, you might need to have specific rules, such as: We will not talk about rockets during drama. And this would be if a student has an obsession with talking about rockets all the time. So "we will not talk about rockets during drama. We will talk about rockets when the class ends at 11:00," but then you have to make sure the class does end right at 11:00, because the student who likes to talk about rockets might just jump right in at 11:00.

The other important thing is you want to apply these rules consistently. And back to the rule cards. If there is a student who tends not to raise his or her hand, and this is something that you want the students to do, then maybe you have -- again, you would know this in advance from the teacher, you would have a little rule card that says this. And when the student keeps doing that, you can just sort of hand them the card, put it on their desk, and that will help them to remember.

And I've used rule cards quite successfully, because it becomes like a little secret you have between you and the student, and they like that, because then they're not being called out in front of all of their friends.

>> LISA DAMICO: Question for you, Sharon, about the rule cards. This comes from Cassie. I'm a teaching artist, do I bring in a rule card for every student? Most of the classes she visits have students with autism mainstreamed.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, again, Cassie, it's really important to have that conversation with the teacher. A lot of this information I'm giving you is so that you can bring it up with the teachers you're working with, and they know their students well enough to know that Johnny's going to always be talking about rockets, so you might want to figure out how you want to address that.

And for you, even if the teacher doesn't use rule cards, maybe if they have a different way, but for you, rule cards will work, you think it will work, then you might want to try it. But again, you don't make them up in advance. It's something that after

you've familiarized yourself with the students. And that can be having that dialogue with a teacher up front, and then maybe if you're doing a two-week residency, maybe after the first day or two, you realize, oh my gosh, I've heard enough about rockets. I think I'm going to write up a little rule card.

And of course then you have to have a conversation with the student about it. "Let's try this, because you know how you talk a lot about rockets and you know how that's one of our rules? How about if we try using this rule card? I'm going to give this to you each time, and then that will help you remember." And then you can take it from there.

Anything else?

>> LISA DAMICO: I have a few general questions for you that I think I'll save for when you open up the floor again.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay. Yeah, I have actually not too much left, and we do go till 4:30, so how about if I get through the rest, and then we can just converse with the time that we have left.

>> LISA DAMICO: Sounds great.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay. So here we go, use positive behavior supports, and this is the last of the 4 strategies.

I'm going to give you a definition of "positive behavior supports," and I'll say it slowly.

And then I will describe it. This is an intervention, or interventions, that change the deficient contexts, thus making the problem behavior irrelevant. Okay, so a positive behavior support is an intervention that changes deficient contexts, thus making the problem behavior irrelevant.

What that means is that if there are problems -- problems do exist, okay? And so when a problem occurs with a student with autism, 99% of the time it is because the context, which is the environment that the student is in is not supportive or understanding of what the student needs in order to have clear communication. There's confusion. There are different ways that you can work with students with autism that enable -- and again, all the strategies I've given you thus far really should alleviate problem behaviors.

But some more are: Providing two clear choices for an activity, both of which have a desired outcome. Okay, for instance, if you want a student to do a particular activity, engage in a certain little piece of an activity, you provide two choices. Instead of saying "do this." So you're not giving hard-core directives, but anyway, I'll just give the example.

So for instance, you would say: Which do you prefer to sketch with, a crayon or a pencil? So you're giving two choices, and both of those are a good choice. Okay?

Or for instance, you would demonstrate two different movements in dance, and both of those would be something that you would

want -- that the student could do in the choreography of a dance or a movement that they're doing.

What you want to avoid -- you don't want to give a choice if there's not an option. For instance, if it's 20 degrees outside, you don't say: Would you like to put your coat on now? Because what will the student say? The student will say "no."

So that's how basically giving choices works. The next is that you want to provide opportunities to take breaks. Students might need to get up and walk around frequently. Often this helps the student regulate their sensory system. Whatever the student is used to doing, if they need to distance themselves from the group, then allow them to do so.

Allow opportunities for breaks, and again, it's important to have conversations with the teachers to know, basically, how long can a student with autism engage in an activity before they're going to need to take a break?

If a student engages in inappropriate behavior, ask yourself why. What might have contributed to the confusion? So instead of punishing for, quote, unquote, non-compliant behavior, help the student by addressing the confusion or the misperception. Okay?

Does anybody have any questions?

>> LISA DAMICO: We have general questions, but not specific ones.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, so helpful hints. Teach in small chunks. And again, these are just the four helpful hints that I have. I'm going to talk about technology, and then that wraps it up, okay?

So for helpful hints, you want to teach in small chunks. And this helps the students to stay focused on the current task, and allows them to take breaks. So whatever activity, you just want to keep it sort of self-contained within an activity. And as you notice, I said: Okay, I've got this slide, and then I'm going to talk to you about technology. Well, unless you've presented that very succinctly to students with autism, you wouldn't want to do that. You just want to stay focused on the task at hand.

You will have, like I said a visual schedule overall, but whatever it is you're teaching, just focus on that, and not try to make a bunch of connections with things that are going to happen next. Okay?

You want to accommodate before modify. For example, if a student doesn't understand when you say "illustrate your story," then you say, "draw a picture on each page that shows what's happening on that page." So by that, often you might not understand how much the student knows and is able to do. You're just not communicating it in the right way, so you want to apply accommodations rather than totally modifying your lesson because you think that the student won't be able to do it.

So empower rather than enable. You want to understand and

capitalize on interests and the student's particular ways of working, and you need to be flexible.

And basically, the connections that students with autism make should be honored, and not lost. And again, that's what's great about the arts. It allows those unusual connections students with autism have and make to actually be expressed, and they can be a part of the creative process. So it can be delightful. Something you want to empower.

>> LISA DAMICO: Sharon, we've had a couple questions about breaks. Amy is wondering, what are some appropriate times that we should expect different ages to be able to maintain attention without a break?

And then how long should a break be?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay. It's totally individualized. I'm sorry I can't be more specific than that. And it just really depends on each individual student, and my personal experience has been a lot of students work well for maybe 20 minutes, and then they just -- students with autism -- and this is just general -- and then they might need to take like, a 5-minute break. It's very individualized. So the break might just be to stand up from their desk and walk across the room and sharpen their pencil and then they can sit down and work.

The breaks are always -- I mean, tend to be pretty short. One particular student I've worked with could work really well for 45 minutes, but then he needed a longer break, and he would pace in the back of the room a little while. And then just reminded: Okay, it's time. Break's over, and he would be certainly happy to go and sit back down. He'd just be like: Oh, okay, and then he would go and sit back down and finish what he was doing. I'm sorry I can't be more helpful, but again, it really does pertain to dialoguing with the teachers.

>> LISA DAMICO: Also on the break question, what sorts of breaks are possible in an inclusive classroom? How do other kids in class react to the break-taker privilege?

>> SHARON MALLEY: That's a good question. Well, first of all, the students are all used to being together, so they're used to each other's habits. So if there is one particular student with autism in a general inclusive classroom, students are probably used to he or she doing whatever it is they do to take a break, and -- what was the rest of the question? The break? No, tell me.

>> LISA DAMICO: What sort of breaks are possible in an inclusive classroom?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Yeah, okay. So it would be whatever the teacher has allowed, which might be, again, the student -- say you're doing a drama or dance-type activity and so you're all up together in a group. And this particular student needs to distance themselves -- distance himself occasionally from the

group, so he might just go off to the side. That would be the break, and just disengage for a little while.

And just for maybe a few minutes, and then you can invite the student to join the group again. And again, just talking with the teacher and finding out what the student is used to doing.

>> LISA DAMICO: How do you feel about using break time to work one on one with other children still focused on the task at hand?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Oh, that's fine, certainly. Yeah, I mean, there's all different kinds of configurations as to -- a lot of times when we're saying "break," it's not this big formalized thing. It can often just be what the student with autism is used to doing, and no one really pays any attention to the fact that they're taking that break. It's not like big break with a capital B, so to speak.

>> LISA DAMICO: And then going back to your slides, we had a few people who were asking if you could explain the "accommodate before modify" again, and give an example of it.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Right, okay. so when you accommodate -- hold on, I just blanked out. So when you are accommodating the student in the lesson, what you're doing is you're -- you are providing the tools that the student needs to access the material. Okay? So like I said, when you say "illustrate your story," and you realize the student isn't responding, then you realize that maybe the student doesn't understand the word "illustrate," so you break it down. That's accommodating. That's making an accommodation for that student so they can still do the same work that everyone else is doing.

And for modify, when you modify something, then you're actually oftentimes making it simpler so the student isn't doing the work that everyone else is doing.

So if you say, "illustrate your story," and you don't realize that the student just doesn't understand the word "illustrate," and you think that they can't draw, you might say, "okay, you don't have to do that part," so it's like your modification. Does that make sense?

>> LISA DAMICO: I believe so. I'm not being told otherwise.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay. so the last is capitalize on the limited interests. So as I had said before, some students with autism do have what we would call limited interests. And I don't even like to use "limited," but just for a better way of explaining it. So for instance, like I gave the example of the student who really likes dogs, or a student who likes trains or whatever, and so they have these interests that they want to keep pursuing and talking about and so on. So to shape -- you want to capitalize on their interests when they're doing activities, but you can also shape new interests using their interests, okay?

So for an example, if a student likes trains, you can pretend to ride on the train to visit a farm, and then you can talk about

the farm animals that you wanted to address in your lesson. So think of creative ways, and you're teaching artists, so you're creative, so think of ways to use what the student likes to segue into what it is you want them to learn.

Also, you want to capitalize on interests that are age-appropriate, and just in general, tap into their talents, their strengths, and their social interactions that they are able to have. You want to provide time to discuss the interests. If a student really wants to talk about whatever that interest is, you do want to acknowledge it and provide time, if it's not during your lesson, maybe before you leave or when you first come in, because that's how they are connecting with you.

Here is a young adult who has created soft sculptures, and she has a Captain of a ship and a couple of other characters, plus that blue item over to the side is a ship that she's created, and she developed a story around these characters, and she created them with scraps from her mother's sewing. As you can see, I've worked a lot with students in the visual arts who have autism, and I wanted to give you examples of just some of the cool things that they're able to do, that they do, because they can be quite gifted.

I've also worked in other modalities. It was just easier to show you visual arts, can be quite gifted in drama, music, and in dance, as well.

Okay, so use of technology. We've learned a lot about sort of characteristics of autism, so as you can see that because technology limits focus, many students with autism embrace today's technology tools, I can't state that enough. We're all looking at a screen right now actually, and it really does limit your focus. You can control it. There's not as much going on, although some of us will complain about all the ads we get sometimes.

But you can really control where you go to on it, and what you can see. And so students with autism really do just readily grasp technology. They also -- many, many students with autism learn how to navigate technology, and I've had many students who can do things that I can't do on the computer, and teach their parents various things, et cetera.

So now, technology is widely used as communication accommodations, so that includes computers, iPads, and other smart notebooks, interactive white boards such as Smartboards in the classroom. Students with autism just love all of the applications on white boards, and they're widely used now by Special Education teachers. And there are many apps that are specifically designed for students with autism, for their communication, for their schedules, et cetera.

There's a list of apps on Autism Speaks, and this is not to endorse Autism Speaks. It's a separate organization. But they do happen to have what seems to be a pretty comprehensive list of

apps. There are also other websites where you can find apps.

And again, these are apps that are used for iPads, and they include schedules, picture exchange communication systems on them that you can make individualized schedules and many of the apps -- I mean, I've downloaded some for just like \$9 that do scheduling. And so they're not expensive. They're easy to use. Students with autism readily grasp them.

There are picture exchange communication systems that are used, and one of them is Boardmaker that you have probably seen. That's the one that is the most ubiquitous, and it has all these different symbols for words.

You can use it on hard copies of things that you want to post, or it's also used on iPads and on interactive white boards.

If the teacher already has it in their classroom, then you can ask to use it.

Okay, and then final thoughts: Each individual has a creative spirit. The student with autism brings a unique and beautiful perspective to the world.

And if you give the student the tools they need to explore and express interests and take their creations seriously, then you can enjoy the sheer beauty of presence undimmed by social dictates. And I just really like this - it's a combination of a couple of authors, I've paraphrased what they've said.

And because I firmly believe that working with students with autism in the arts is a really wonderful opportunity. And a final-final note.

Just because students with autism need things to be structured and tend to remember facts versus abstract concepts, it doesn't mean that they don't have a sense of humor. So this is my friend James' drawing, and he's done several. I'm going to show you some. Heroical James, also known as Super James, and he knows he's being funny when he does his various cartoons.

Magical James, also known as the great Jamesini. Strong James. Silly James also known as Jamester, the circus clown. What a trickster he is. And regular James himself: A boy who can imagine and create things.

And next to the last picture, I wanted to show you another example of a different art form, and this is the National Dance Institute in New York City doing a residency, partnering students with and without disabilities, including students with autism. And the residency culminates in a final performance.

And then, so you can see students performing. And then I just really like this. Here's the cover of a card I received once from one of my students with autism. To Dr. Malley, not love. That's a wisdom tooth.

And I have two pages of endnotes, and I really want to especially attribute some of my resources to the book "Understanding Students with Autism Through Art." So these are

endnotes, and since you'll be getting a copy of the presentation, you can have further access to these endnotes if you would like to cross-reference from the presentation.

Okay, and that's it. And we have time for questions. .

>> LISA DAMICO: We have about 5 minutes left, Sharon, and the questions have been pouring in.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Oh, no! Okay.

>> LISA DAMICO: Before I start, I will say that all of your questions are archived, so we'll have them even if Sharon isn't able to answer them on the air today. I can share them with her, and she'll be able to get back with you on an individual basis.

>> SHARON MALLEY: I can, yes.

>> LISA DAMICO: We'll start with the people who have been most patient. This comes from Cassie: My son, who has Asperger's, loves ballet theater as well as acting. He feels relieved not having to initiate interaction because he can follow scripts and choreography. He doesn't have to make up interaction on his own.

Do you have any experience with dance and/or acting with students with autism? And do you have any pointers for those of us who work with students with autism in acting and dance? Thank you.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Yes, I do have experiences especially with acting with students with autism. And some dance, actually. Well, what I have found is to allow -- a lot of the students I've worked with have wanted to perform, and so to allow them to express their creativity in the way that works best for them. And just to be open to their own versions of dance, and with acting, I've basically done readers theater -- I'm sorry, process drama that enabled students to create their own plays based on their own personalities and social interactions with each other, and that's worked really well. okay?

>> LISA DAMICO: Okay. We have a lot of questions here.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, we'll just dive right in.

>> LISA DAMICO: Sure. This is from Cameron: What are some interesting art projects you would recommend or have had success with in your practice with students with autism?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Oh, my, okay. Let's see.

>> LISA DAMICO: I put you on the spot.

>> SHARON MALLEY: I know. [Laughter]

One would be -- let's see. This is one that I just -- that just recently resurfaced. It's multi-- it's just takes over multiple forms here. But starting with doing full-body self-portraits that you can do from a shadow on the wall. You put a large sheet of paper up, shine a light on the student, and their partner traces that, and then the student gets to color it all in.

And then that can be used -- that background can be used for a student to also do a story about themselves that then is videotaped, so it's a way of increasing self-actualization, so to

speak.

Trying to think what else. Let me just say one more thing about that, with visual arts, is that what I have found is that they really -- a lot of the students I've worked with, you can just get them started with materials, and they'll just really do some cool things, because they just have it in them. So you don't always have to be that structured.

>> LISA DAMICO: Okay, this is from Amy: How would you concretely reduce sensory overload for students in a visual arts classroom?

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, that's a good one. Get rid of all the junk that's in the room.

[Laughter]

Seriously, that is -- students with autism work best in a non-cluttered environment. Another would be to play gentle music, soft, just not too stressful-sounding classical music, so just playing soft music, and just sort of setting the tone. If it's a classroom with a lot of other students with and without disabilities, setting a tone of quietness, so that people aren't jumping around and being loud, but just trying to keep that tone throughout.

Oh, and it's important to have art supplies well organized and labeled.

>> LISA DAMICO: All right, Sharon, we have about 15 seconds left.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Oh my goodness.

>> LISA DAMICO: It's gone very quickly, but like I said before, we have your questions and Sharon will get back to you if we're not able to address them today.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Will I be able to e-mail folks?

>> LISA DAMICO: You will. We have the e-mail address of everyone who's registered.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Okay, good.

>> LISA DAMICO: Then I'm going to go to our final slide. Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. A post-webinar survey will be sent out in an hour that will give us some feedback on today's presentation. It would be really helpful if you all could fill that out. It will only takes a few moments. A transcript of today's webinar is available upon request if you send me an e-mail at LVDamico@Kennedy-Center.org. Thank you, goodbye.

>> SHARON MALLEY: Thank you!

[End of webinar]

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