

Hi, and welcome to the Adaptation Station podcast. This is your host, Nicole. I'm a former special education teacher and currently an ABA therapist at a private center. This podcast is filled with tips and tricks for not only being the best special education teacher you can be in the classroom, but living the best life you can live outside of the classroom as well. After all, I'm all about balance. Hope you guys are excited. Let's jump on it.

Nicole-I would like to welcome Jenn from Teach Love Autism onto the podcast. Of course, you guys knew I was going to bring her in for this series because I think she knows so much about so many things. So welcome, Jenn.

Jenn-Hi, thank you for having me.

Nicole-So one of the things that Jenn and I wanted to talk about was reading and specifically, we're going to talk about comprehension. I know when I was in the classroom, I often found that my students could decode at a much higher level than what they could comprehend that. So I might have a child able to read a third grade level text, but they could only comprehend it kindergarten level text. And a lot of that had to do with the fact that when you're pulling in comprehension, it's pulling in skills like story structure, you have to make inferences. A lot of times you tie your prior knowledge in, and those are really abstract things for my students. Jen, did you find similar struggles with comprehension and your students?

Jenn-Absolutely. And I think that sometimes we forget, or sometimes we need to be reminded that students with autism have difficulty processing large amounts of information. I mean, you can see that happening when you give a direction, not just when you're doing some kind of a reading activity, uh, when we're giving them large amounts of information, it can be hard for them to kind of take all of that information in. And then after that, even to recall, some of that information can be difficult. I've seen students in my classroom who can listen to a sentence I say, but only maybe can recall or repeat back the last word that they heard, which cannot always be sometimes it is. But typically isn't always the answer that we're looking for. If we ask like a comprehension question.

Nicole-Absolutely. And so that's pretty much the groundwork of today's podcast. So we won't be diving into working on basic literacy skills or decoding. We're really going to be tackling that comprehension component. So we're going to lay out to supports and strategies that you can use with your students. And I definitely was not using these strategies in the beginning and that really impacted my students' ability to participate in reading lessons. So one of the biggest things that I did, and I think that's a common one that's done is I used the visuals for answer choices, as well as writing out the questions. So if I was just sitting in a reading group and we had read that Adam gets a dog and I asked my student, what pet did Adam get? If I just asked him that I was probably not going to get a response. If I wrote out the question, what pet did Adam get, I was more likely to get a response, but if I gave him visuals to answer with that, I was much more likely to get a response. And I know Jen, you have a couple of other strategies that you can use as well.

Jenn- Absolutely. In a lot of the strategies I used, I kind of paired some of the things that you just talked about. So we would use things such as just having multiple choice answers instead of open ended

questions. So giving students the opportunity to pick from a couple choices and not just saying, Hey, what did the boy do in the story? And expecting an answer to be recalled very quickly. I would also provide students with verbal prompts. So if, say I was asking the whole question and the answer or the question might've been, you know, who is in the story. And I wanted the answer to be, boy, I might start by saying the initial sound to that word, which would technically be considered a form of verbal prompting. Um, so obviously that's something you would want to make sure you're taking note of as you're doing it with the student, because technically then they're not doing it independently, but that's a way to prompt them to help them get to that right answer.

Nicole-Absolutely. And then one other thing I wanted to tie in is this is a great way to embed any AAC devices that you're using in your classroom, because you can have your students use their AAC device to answer these comprehension questions as well. I know sometimes with students with AAC devices. We get a little stuck with only using them during a morning calendar routine or during a preferred activity, but you can have it out during your reading lesson and they can be answering that way as well.

Jenn-Absolutely. And you know, it can be stressful for teachers, myself included. I've had many students where they see devices in my classroom and I've seen the struggle of making sure everything's in the device that you need for maybe that lesson. And that can be challenging, but I mean, you can go for simplified answers of things that maybe already are in that device and make sure you ask those students that question. I would typically try ahead of time to make sure I knew what questions I would ask those students and then go to my other students for some different types of questions so they could still participate.

Nicole-That's an awesome strategy. If you're just doing some of that pre-planning it can make it run well. Okay. So before we talk about the next part, I want to let you all know that Jenn has a wonderful line called Reading Visually and she has a free copy that I've linked in the show notes. I want you guys to go in and download that because what we're going to talk about in this next part of the podcast, she does a really good job at showcasing what that looks like in the product, but we're going to talk about some of the strategies that we can use. So we know that we should use visuals, but chances are, if you have five kids sitting around the table, you can't get all five of them, the same exact visual setup and have at work. You might have to do more differentiation within that. So Jenn, why don't you talk us through kind of like how you approach that product and those different layers of support that you can use?

Jenn-Absolutely. So the product name is writing visually comprehension. And so basically what I did is I took, um, you know, just a simple passage that you might read with your students and provided a lot of the supports and strategies that Nicole and I kind of already talked about the visuals, the multiple choice questions, um, having a, it actually also has a communication board to be able to incorporate those AAC learners. So, um, if you are struggling with that piece that I was talking about where you were struggling to get all the information into the device, there's a communication board that you can use, um, in place of it. Or you can use it to know what to put into the device. Um, so you're ready for that, but really what I did with this and the foundation part of it was to making sure that there was multiple levels, making sure it was accessible for all the students that I know I have seen in my classroom or in my experience and how could I make this accessible for all of them. So within this, there is four different levels. Um, there's an errorless version. Um, there's a version that typically has the answers almost faded for you. They're there, but the student would almost match the answers. Then there's in the level three, the

answers aren't there, but there's multiple choices for you to choose from. And then the last version, um, has the answers, but it's only in word form. So trying to really hit a bunch of different types of learners, but you can still use the same product if you want to use it in whole group. If you want to use it, you know, with just one student alone, you can do that.

Nicole-Perfect. So one of the things that I think teachers struggle a little bit with these multilevel products, although they're wonderful, it's knowing where to start. And I know even with unique learning systems, people have this struggle. So if you are having a new student come to your reading group and you don't know their background, how do you know what level to start them off on?

Jenn-Absolutely. Well, I kind of go with the philosophy of, you can never go wrong, starting a student at the lowest level and working up from there. So, you know, these, this material is designed to be, you know, maybe a 10, 15 minute lesson with a student. So you're not wasting a ton of time just starting at the lowest level. So I don't want anyone to think, you know, Oh, well, if I put them at the lowest level, how long is it going to take me to figure out they need to move on? You can easily read through probably one of these passages, do a couple of worksheets in a 15 minute lesson and know if this is a right place for your student or not. Um, you know, if you're prompting them a lot to answer questions, that probably means you might be in the right place for them. If they're doing it almost independently, you probably know that they need to move on. Uh, it's, it's the same as use that teacher instinct and, you know, figuring out what your students know and can they can do and just kind of watch them and see how they're working. Um, but you know, it, it kinda just is more on you as the teacher to look at the student and, and see what they're able to do. However, I think, um, you know, it wouldn't take you long to figure that out and it wouldn't be too hard to start at the bottom and work up.

Nicole- Absolutely. And you kinda mentioned on this, but we'll expand it. It's also important, like Jenn said to be monitoring your students. So if you start them off with the errorless level in September, hopefully they're not still at the errorless level in February. They might be, it's important that you be watching them and then progressing them. Jenn, I know you have a little bit of a criteria that you use when you're looking to move a student to a more difficult level.

Jenn-Absolutely. So, I mean, I always tell them too, you got to look for the IEP goals first and, and see what your students are doing with that. Um, and then when you're seeing consistent results at that level, you might be ready to transition to another. Um, I typically suggest that if you see a student completing an activity and by an activity, especially with this product in mind, I would say whether it's reading the passage or completing a certain type of worksheet, um, I would look for at least three times consecutively being consistent and completing that to a certain degree. So I can't give you an exact number. So I wouldn't ever give you a certain percentage because you know that student best. But if you have a comprehension goal that you have that student working at 80% accuracy, 90% accuracy or eight out of 10 times, they will do it. Then that's what I mean by those three times consecutively, before you might move on to a more difficult level, that's a really good tip.

Nicole-And absolutely it might change even from student to student. And that absolutely is just knowing each individual one. And then I know at the very end, I know we briefly mentioned this, but we both had questions on how we use unique learning systems. So Jenn and I used it a little bit differently. Well, first Jenn works at a secondary level and I worked at an elementary level and she used unique lending

systems a lot. I did not use ULS as much as news to you, but we'll briefly talk about both and how we used them. So Jenn, I'll let you start.

Jenn- Okay. So just for reference, like Nicole said, I am secondary and you, I used both unique and new 2 you in my classroom, but I'm going to speak more to unique At the secondary level. It's a little different than the elementary. So if anyone's familiar with the elementary, you see things like there is letter recognition. There is some phonics in there. There is some sight words in there, easy readers, and there's a lot more, um, at the secondary level, you don't quite see there's no phonics. Um, there isn't letter recognition. Um, they do have sight words. They call it more vocabulary than they do sight words and they have books, but they're actually chapter books. So they're all based on whatever that monthly theme is and are six different chapters that kind of go together. So they tell a big story altogether surrounding that scene. And then from there, uh, and I believe elementary has this as well. They do have comprehension questions that are also at some different levels based on what you feel your students would need. And I found it easiest to do it two ways. I did it whole group where everybody had, I picked one level that I felt like everybody could get access to, you know, easily. And we read it whole group together as a class. And then we would complete a worksheet together as a class. And I would just pick a different one every day to do so that we weren't doing the same thing over and over again. And then the other way I did it was working one on one with students. So when I was working on those IEP goals or progress monitoring, um, we would do this a similar, but just more one-on-one. So I could focus in on what that individual needed.

Nicole- Absolutely. And I actually did a similar thing with news to you. One of the nice things about ULS and news to you and Jen actually does this in her product as well. It's it has visuals along with the text at some of the levels and helps support some of that comprehension. And so for news to you, I had all of my students use that level. Cause I kind of went from the philosophy of, I could ask questions that made the lesson a little bit more difficult for students that can handle it, but it was easiest for all of us to use that one level that all of my students can access. And one thing with news to you that I think a lot of people miss is when you go in, you can download there's the article and that handful of activities that are with it. There's a recipe, there's a quiz, there's some activities. But when you're in that page, you can find a link to supplemental worksheets. And it's like an 87 page document where there's a ton of additional writing there's math activities. So that's a great way, especially with news to you, since it's nonfiction, I could take whatever we're learning about. Like, I certainly remember there being an article about the super bowl. And so we were reading about the super bowl in our reading group, but then I used those math worksheets during our math lesson to reinforce all the concepts that we were learning.

Jenn- So I think yeah its an underutilized tool that they have in there. Yeah. I think it goes, you just miss it because it's not in with the regular edition news article that you would get every day. But I pulled worksheets every week from that two to three that we would do in the whole group. Um, and there was like a wh question web in there that was really awesome. There was some sentence completion. They had some geography stuff that was nice. So it would, whatever the topic was, they would figure out a way to have like a map and then you could teach map skills with the students. So I really, if you don't know about those extra activities, you need to go on news to you and find them because they are really nice.

Nicole-Absolutely. Did you have anything else that you wanted to share relating to comprehension or any of the topics? Um, I don't think so. The only thing I want to say is I hope that you guys utilize the download that Nicole's going to stick in there. The, the dinosaurs unit, um, I think dinosaurs are super fun and I think it works with all age groups. So I highly suggest you check that out. It is a full product, so you're not just getting a piece of it. You're getting an actual glance at what a full piece of the product looks like so that you can make a best decision. If it would be a good fit for your classroom, all the levels are included. All the passages are included. So I really hope you guys download it.

Nicole- Yes, absolutely. So I'll have that in the show notes. I'll also have this transcript to this podcast in the show notes. I know we threw a lot of strategies at you, so if it's easier for you to download and read through what Jenn suggested that'll be available for you to use as well. Thank you so much for coming on Jen. I know we could talk forever about every time. I think we did a really good job with this one.

Jenn-Thank you.

Nicole-Thank you for listening to this week's episode of the podcast. If you like, what you heard, I would greatly appreciate if you love me some feedback. And if you want to hear more, go ahead and give me a follow while you're at it. Come say hi on social media, you can find me at adaptation station on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and adaptation station.net. It's taco night in my house. So I'm going to go have a delicious dinner and a margarita. And I will talk to you guys again next Friday.