

It's In the Box
“An Educational Approach”
By Tina McGrevy

After failing to reach several milestones, our five-year old son Garrett was diagnosed just before his second birthday. He began his first year of special education preschool at age three and was fortunate enough to receive an extra hour a week of in-home tutoring from Anne Conley. She introduced us to a "shoebox system" that has worked miracles for Garrett in his IEP and therapy goals.

Although this system is extremely easy to use and inexpensive to implement, it is difficult to describe. It involves a shelf that holds six plastic shoeboxes with a colored square velcroed on the outside of each box. The schedule is a strip of colored squares with velcroed backs that Garrett attaches next to the matching square and then removes the box.

These boxes each contain a separate activity. Every evening, we sit down at the dining room table and Garrett spends twenty minutes doing real work. In the photo, Garrett is matching bears. We have worked this summer on "same and different" and he finally understands. The shoe boxes keep Garrett focused because he knows that an activity has to be completed before moving on to the next box. We rotate the new things he is learning (like matching) in with goals he has already accomplished. If Garrett has a "victory" every other box, then he is less likely to meltdown on the tough ones. He loves them so much that we use them as a bribe on those SMS days!

CREATING YOUR OWN “SHOEBOX” LEARNING SYSTEM AT HOME
By Ms. Anne Conley, Garrett McGrevy's Itinerant Preschool Teacher

I learned about the "shoebox system" at several TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped children) workshops presented by folks from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC., and from Troy City Schools, Troy, Ohio, where they have used TEACCH for years. One can become familiar with TEACCH by accessing their website: <http://www.teacch.com/>

TEACCH stresses the importance of structure, consistency, predictability and visual cuing when teaching people with autism and related communication handicaps. The shoebox system is a "slice" of the "TEACCH pizza."

Garrett, who was 3 when I first met him, had difficulty sitting at a small table for more than 2-3 minutes; transitioning from one activity or place to another without protest (or meltdown), was unable to focus on developmentally appropriate

activities for more than about a minute; did not speak, but used about 25 signs with his mom and gradually with me; LOVED books and would sit with Mom or Dad to be read to; LOVED Barney.

All of the above gave me reason to suggest using the shoeboxes at home with Garrett... to increase his in-seat time, to transition from one shoebox to the next smoothly, to focus on each activity to completion and to increase his expressive communication skills...both in signing and vocalizations... all with activities he enjoyed, especially books and Barney!

Shoebox System Requirements

1 fiberboard shoe shelf, approx. 12" x 23" (typically found in discount stores in "household-closet"dept. They come unassembled. When assembled, you have 3 "shelves" for shoes (in our case, shoeboxes). They cost about \$10. This shelf unit will fit on a card table, on a kitchen table or possibly on a child's table.

6 plastic shoeboxes with lids... found in those same discount stores as well as in the dollar stores... about \$1 each.

1 rectangular laundry basket, empty cardboard box or plastic lidded tote, to use as the "finished" basket/box.

1 file folder, which you'll be cutting.

1 roll of Velcro "coins"... precut round pieces, available at Staples or Office Max. I usually shop Staples on-line.

You use a lot of Velcro with the activities.

6 pieces of colored paper... copying paper doesn't fade like construction paper does. With preschoolers I used the basic colors. Make sure the colors are obviously different.

(As your child matures, you can use shapes, letters, numbers, etc. etc. instead of colors.)

You will need 2 1 1/2" X 2" rectangles, covered with clear plastic covering to preserve.

1 roll of clear plastic covering or laminate to preserve paper items for activities.

1 piece of cloth, towel or baby blanket to cover shoe shelf when not in use. (outa sight, outa mind!)

Activities to put into the Shoeboxes

Activities and the number of shoeboxes you use at each sitting are arbitrary. You

create activities that are simple, have a defined beginning and end, and, most important, that interest your child. They could also be pre-academic and consistent with your child's IEP goals and objectives. Seek ideas from teachers, PT's, OT's and ST's... but all activities must fit into a shoebox and require your child to do something functional with their hands to complete each activity. Many of the activities are home-made, using items like colored chips (Wal-Mart or Staples), beads for stringing (toy stores, educ. supply stores, Wal-Mart and Staples), poker chips, margarine containers with lids, snack zip bags, decks of matching picture cards (Wal-Mart or Staples), matching items from any dollar store. Once you decide what skills you want to teach or reinforce with your child, when you go shopping, things will pop out at you to accomplish this. It really happens!!!

The shoebox system has worked with a variety of children with autism, syndromes and associated delays... in their classroom and at home. Parents have reported years later to me, that their children are STILL finding the systems to be calming to them to use at home. The way to use the system never changes. The activities and number of shoeboxes do. Children have learned to do their shoebox "routine" independently, after 1-on-1 training.

Another website given to me by a mom is: <http://www.discountschoolsupply.com/> They have great manipulatives, matching and counting items, books and story puppets and art supplies.



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