

Supporting Neurodiverse Students Using Visual Supports as a Tier 1 Intervention

The Benefits for Learners (with explanation)

When the purposes and use of visual supports are **explicitly taught, with intention, referenced regularly by staff in the classroom, co-created with learners, moved around the room** (or put away and brought back out as needed), *Supporting Neurodiverse Learners by Using Visual Supports as a Tier 1 Intervention* found evidence of:

- Increased **independence** - especially for multi-step directions, for spelling or writing words and for writing numbers or responding to numeracy questions.
- Increased **problem solving** - when students knew how to use visual supports available to them, they used the tools and persisted to try to find a solution themselves before asking a peer or adult for help.
- Increased **peer support** (peer prompting) - if lessons/activities were visually supported, especially when task steps were visually supported (i.e. written word list or sketches, or laminated visual supports for common processes and routines in a classroom), peers often referenced and pointed to visuals and steps within the process when prompting peers/answering peer questions about what to do next.
- Increased **confidence** - students commented about knowing what to do if something got hard/they were stuck; students commented about having needed to use some visual supports in the past but not needing them now (realizing that once they mastered skills they didn't need to reference the visual support as often). Students also recognized that some of their peers were still using some supports more than they were and vice versa.
- Support for students with **executive functioning challenges** or for whom following **multi-step verbal instructions** would be difficult - especially during **transition** times, students would independently reference supports that told them where they were supposed to be going or what work they were supposed to be doing.
- Increased **initiation** - some students find the executive functioning skill of initiation challenging - they have trouble knowing where to start. When teachers used a list



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(visually supported at the primary grade levels, often) or visual task strip for a common task, students understood where to start.

- **Increased comprehension** - students could process what to do when tasks were modeled and visual supports could enact the steps expected in a task/undertake the task. One participating class, in particular, was using visual supports to assist an English Language Learner with comprehension and peers were observed to quickly use the visual supports to support their communication with this student (increased **community**).
- Increased **ownership** - when interviewed, students commented things like “we made . . .” and “we made this to . . .” and would proudly show me specific components of visual anchor charts, calendars, nametags and other visuals in the classroom that they had helped to construct. Because they helped to make the items, they could explain the visual supports well, and had **pride** in their work and its applicability and usefulness.
- **Shifting of power dynamics** in a classroom to allow for more student independence from adults, contribution to visual supports used in classrooms (contributed to pride and increased use of visual supports), and successful peer prompting (**a step toward decolonization**)



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