



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA

**TEACCH**  
**Autism Program**  
*Services Across the Lifespan*

## Five-day Hands-on Classroom Training

**1) Nature of the Intervention:** TEACCH developed the intervention approach called “Structured TEACCHing”, which is based on understanding the learning characteristics of individuals with autism and the use of visual supports to promote meaning and independence. TEACCH services are supported by empirical research, enriched by extensive clinical expertise, and notable for its flexible and individualized support of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families.

TEACCH developed the concept of the “Culture of Autism” to convey the idea that like cultures, autism spectrum disorders yield characteristic patterns of learning, thinking, communicating, and behaving. TEACCH proposes that teachers, parents, and therapists can function as “cross-cultural interpreters” who use specialized strategies to work back and forth between the expectations of the neuro-typical world and the ways individuals with autism understand and communicate.

Features of Autism that Impact Learning Style:

- Relative strength in and preference for processing **visual** information (compared to difficulties with auditory processing of language)
- Heightened attention to **details** but difficulty with sequencing, connecting, or deriving meaning from them
- Enormous variability in **attention** (Individuals can be very distractible at times but at other times are intensely focused, with difficulties shifting attention efficiently.)
- **Communication** problems which vary by developmental level, but always include impairments in the social use of language, called pragmatics
- Difficulty with concepts of **time** including completing activities too quickly or too slowly and having problems recognizing the beginning or end of an activity, how long the activity will last, and when it will be finished
- Tendency to become **attached to routines** and the settings where they are established, so that activities may be difficult to transfer or generalize from the original learning situation, and disruptions in routines can be uncomfortable, confusing, or upsetting
- Very **intense interests and impulses** to engage in favored activities and difficulties disengaging once engaged
- Marked **sensory** preferences and aversions

The overall TEACCH approach is called *Structured TEACCHing*. The fundamental principles of Structured TEACCHing address the learning styles of individuals with ASD

- **Individualize** interventions based on the individual’s learning styles, strengths, difficulties and special interests.
- Use of **visual or written supports** to supplement auditory language-based information.
- Make the sequence of daily activities **predictable and understandable** using visual supports, such as a schedule of upcoming activities. Depending on the individual’s developmental level, this may take the form of objects, picture, or written words.

- **Organize the physical environment** and visually highlight important features of both the surroundings (such as where to sit, stand, walk, etc.) and activities (such as where to focus attention or put materials).
- Work specifically on **flexibility and generalization** by changing the sequence of activities and introducing new elements (e.g., location, materials, staff or peers, etc.).
- Stimulate and support meaningful, **self-initiated** communication (in contrast to prompted speech or rote memory).
- **Collaborate with families**, which include teaching parents Structured TEACCHing strategies as well as incorporating parents' concerns, needs, and wisdom into interventions.

Structured TEACCHing is appropriate for individuals with ASD at all ages and functioning levels because the general principles are applied flexibly for each individual. That is, visual answers to these questions for a young or developmentally delayed child would look very different from those for a high school student or adult with average intelligence, but the general principles of using visual or written supports to organize time and space would still apply. Structured TEACCHing can help individuals with ASD learn new skills or participate appropriately in any setting, including but not limited to schools, home, community as well as employment.

The TEACCH Autism Program has been training professionals in the field for decades to help prepare them to use the principles and practices of Structured TEACCHing in their work settings. The most comprehensive training model is the Five-Day Hands-on Training Course.

**2) Training Details:** This five-day (Monday –Friday, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm) hands-on training course provides a theoretical foundation as well as hands-on opportunities to assess and teach children and adolescents with ASD in a classroom setting. The premise of this foundation is an understanding of the learning characteristics of individuals with ASD and the development of individualized structure. An emphasis is placed on the use of **Structured TEACCHing** principles to teach skills to individuals with ASD in the curriculum areas of academics (literacy and numeracy), communication, independence, social engagement, leisure, relaxation and coping strategies, and behavior management. Participants have an opportunity to apply these strategies with five students with ASD who vary by age (3 – 21 years), cognitive ability and severity of autism symptoms.

Participants spend a small portion of each day in lecture, but the bulk of their learning takes place in small teams as they observe the TEACCH staff, develop activities for the student-trainers, implement these activities with the student-trainers, and reflect on their collective experiences. Teams work with a different student and trainer each day, ensuring that they have broad exposure to the diversity of the autism spectrum. Most training participants report that the opportunity to teach in the model classroom and interact with the students with ASD is the most memorable and meaningful component of this training experience.

#### *Efficacy Information on the Five-Day Hands-On Classroom Training*

Informal program evaluation takes place at the end of the Five-Day Hands-On Classroom Training. Participants complete rating scales, answer written questions, and are generally encouraged to provide feedback to TEACCH staff. These responses have been universally positive. It is not uncommon for participants to report that their TEACCH training experience

has proven more valuable than any other training program in which they have participated. Sometimes, participants also offer constructive criticism. Suggestions are always taken seriously and have sometimes resulted in a helpful revision to the delivery of the training model.

There have been two formal evaluations of TEACCH's in-service training efforts, designed to compare the relative efficacy of the Five-day Hand-on Classroom Training versus the two-day workshop that did not include a hands-on component (Grindstaff, 1998; Grindstaff, 2000). Outcomes were compared across the participants' 1) knowledge of the training content, 2) attributions of controllability with regard to the extreme behavior of students with autism, 3) self-efficacy, 4) negative affect, and 5) use of structured teaching. Measures were completed at the very start of the respective training programs and again six weeks post-training. Results indicated that both training models effectively conveyed the philosophy and principles of Structured TEACCHing, but only the Five-day Hands-on Classroom training achieved the more elusive goal of helping participants apply Structured TEACCHing strategies to their classroom, clinic or other work setting.

a. **Trainer:** The Director of the training team is a TEACCH Director who is a Ph.D. licensed clinical psychologist. The training team consists of TEACCH Autism Specialists who have served the TEACCH program for a number of years and have demonstrated mastery of the principles of Structured TEACCHing strategies and an ability to communicate effectively. The training staff may also include teachers, consultants and other autism professionals who are Certified TEACCH trainers. There is a process for becoming a TEACCH trainer that applies to TEACCH staff as well as interested professionals from other organizations. In the near future, TEACCH will be implementing a new Professional Certification Program that will include a detailed process for certifying trainers.

b. **Trainees:** This one-week course can accommodate 25 participants. The target audience is teachers, psychologists, speech and language therapists, as well as clinicians interested in educating students with Autism Spectrum disorders in a classroom setting. There is no specific educational degree required.

c. **Frequency and Location of Training:** Five-day Hands-on Classroom Training is offered by the TEACCH Autism Program in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and at other North Carolina sites during the months of July and August

d. **Train the Trainer:**

Because of the complexity and comprehensiveness of the TEACCH intervention and training models, "training the trainers" requires multiple experiences over a lengthy period of time under close supervision. Minimum experiences include attending the five day classroom training, followed by participation in one or more advanced topics workshops, a series of "shadow trainings" during which the trainer-in-training has increasing levels of responsibility in implementing the various aspects of the model. There is no set number of required shadow experiences, but they typically range from two to four trainings. Once the TEACCH Director and team verify that the trainer-in-training has met standards, the professional is considered to be qualified to provide training independently as part of a TEACCH training team. In the near future, TEACCH

will be implementing a new Professional Certification Program that will include a detailed process for certifying trainers.

e. **Manual:** Participants receive a notebook with course material, a reference and resource list, and documents for assessment and data collection. There is no published manual for this training program.

### 3) Evidence-base for the Intervention:

Structured TEACCHing as developed by TEACCH Autism Program consists of *visual supports* and *individual work systems*. Visual supports are any tool presented visually that supports an individual as he or she moves through the day. Visual supports might include, but are not limited to, pictures, written words, and objects within the environment, arrangement of the environment or visual boundaries, schedules, maps, labels, organization systems, timelines and scripts. They are used across settings to support individuals with ASD (National Research Council, 2001). Visual supports meet the evidence-based practice criteria within the early childhood, elementary and middle/high school age groups. For more information:

<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/visual-supports>

An individual work system visually communicates at least four pieces of information to the individual.

1. What am I supposed to do?
2. How much am I supposed to do?
3. How do I know when I am finished? (Can I see my progress?)
4. What do I do when I am finished?

Structured work systems meet the evidence-based practice criteria within the early childhood, elementary and middle/high school age groups. Structured Work systems are a proven EBP per the NPDC. For more information: <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/content/structured-work-systems>

For information on the intervention of Structured TEACCHing please refer to these articles.

Mesibov, G. B., & Shea, V. (2010). The TEACCH program in the era of evidence-based practice. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 40(5), 570-579.

Ozonoff, S., & Cathcart, K. (1998). Effectiveness of a home program intervention for young children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 28, 25-32.

Panerai, S., Ferrante, L., Caputo, V., & Impellizzeri, C. (1998). Use of structured teaching for treatment of children with autism and severe and profound mental retardation. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 33, 367-374.

Panerai, S., Ferrante, L., & Zingale, M. (2002). Benefits of the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) programme [sic] as compared with a non-specific approach. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 46, 318-327.

Tsang, S.K.M., Shek, D.T.L., Lam, L.L., Yang, F.L., & Cheung, P.M.P (in press). Brief report. Application of the TEACCH program on Chinese children with autism—Does culture make a difference? *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

**4) Provisions for Cultural Adaptation:**

A major strength of the Five-Day Classroom Training Model is its adaptability to many cultures. Professionals from across the world attend the trainings and learn because there is a strong emphasis on active participation and knowledge taught through visual forms of communication. The model is “portable” and has been successfully implemented in many non-English speaking countries, with the help of translation. The materials are easily adapted to other cultures.

**5) Contact information:**

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