

Visual Schedule Systems

Visual schedule systems are an easy way to provide students with consistent cues about their daily activities. They provide a structure that allows a student to anticipate what will happen next, reduce anxiety by providing the student with a vision of his/her day and promote calmness between transitions. They are especially important for students who have a profile that includes difficulties with the understanding of oral language and directions. The **consistency** provided by a visual schedule is crucial in establishing an atmosphere of trust and security. Visual supports can also provide motivation to work through a less favoured activity knowing a favoured activity is to follow.

For example, using the **First This /Then That** strategy in visual form can provide high motivation for the student to work through one activity to get to a preferred activity. When dealing with students with behavioural difficulties, this can be a powerful strategy in maintaining appropriate classroom behaviour. For non-verbal students a visual schedule can be a way to introduce symbols that the student can eventually use as an alternate form of **communication**. Through the consistent use of the schedule, the student can begin to pair the symbols presented with the activities that are occurring. A sure sign that this association is developing is seeing the student begin to rearrange their schedule to include all of their favorite activities. Establishing a visual schedule can also provide a structure for the student to begin to do some **choice making** as they are encouraged to provide some input as to the order of some of the day's events. The student may also be introduced to choosing a specific activity from a teacher-selected group of activities.

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The ultimate goal for all of our students is the development of **independence** and the enhancement of **self esteem**. This can be an automatic result of allowing students to participate in the design of their day. The ability to look at a schedule, find the materials for the next activity and get started with that activity without adult support is a big step toward a student's independence. Visual supports can be a way to work toward this goal.

Each system developed is unique to the student and is created after a careful examination of the following factors:

- the student's strengths and abilities
- the classroom teacher's orientation toward the concept
- the teacher assistant's commitment to its consistent use
- the classroom environment (the logistics, size, location and application of the schedule)
- parental attitudes and home support
- classmates' involvement

It has been our experience that when these factors are ignored or when any one factor does not receive adequate consideration as a system is created, the system may not succeed. Each system must be **uniquely tailored** to the student and the environment in which it is being used.

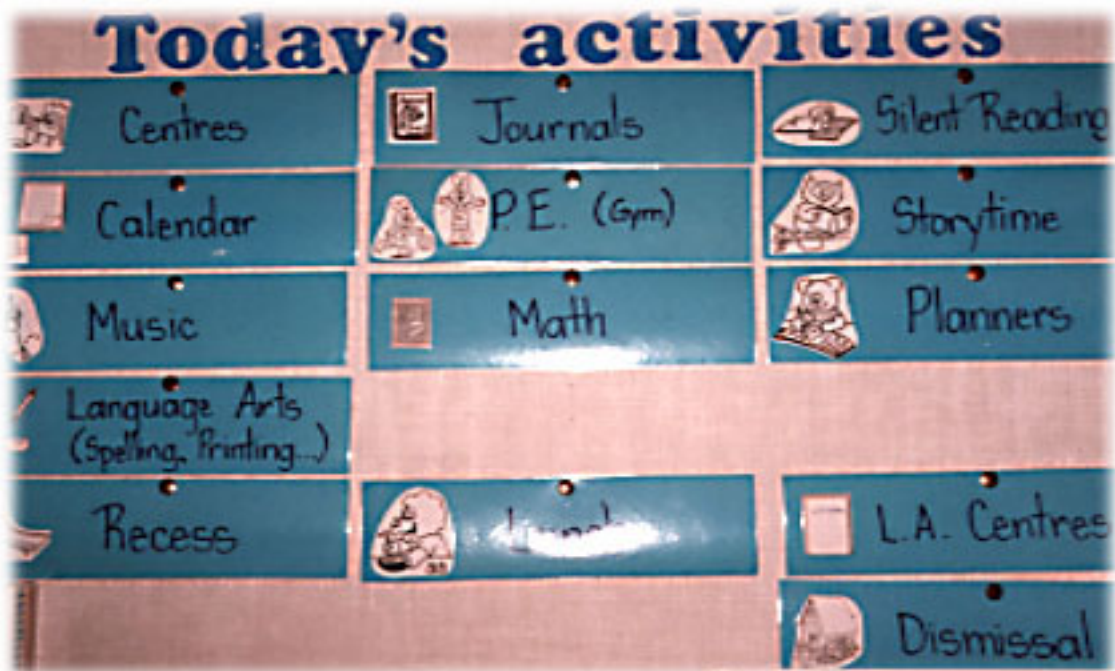
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Support personnel can be instrumental in assisting with the setup of the system but it is essential that the **class has ownership** of it. Providing a framework for the design and examples of several successful systems, can assist in creating a model that will work in a specific classroom.

Continued support will be needed to provide the **modifications** in design and the development of the appropriate strategies for its implementation. As a system gets up and running it will require many adjustments as it is moulded to a particular student and environment. Despite the best of designs, many systems fail because of lack of support and understanding at this crucial stage.

The following are some unique examples of individual visual schedule systems that have been established for students in the Surrey School District. These examples were selected to demonstrate a variety of considerations which must be addressed when designing a system for any student.

The following pages contain a number of picture and text examples of Visual Schedule Systems.



Many teachers choose to use a schedule system that can be tailored to benefit the **whole class**. The student with special needs may require a duplicate of the classroom schedule at his/her desk. If this is the case, the individual schedule could accommodate specific necessary adaptations.



This particular system is designed to fit into a three ring binder. It allows for **portability** for both the student and the educational team. This is important when the student is moving between classrooms and/or environments and is finding these transitions difficult. This system contains a break symbol, located on the inside flap, which is always visible and available to the student to indicate when he/she needs a break. Very often, additional symbols are stored on the back of the schedule or on subsequent pages in the binder.



Garret's system is attached to the front of the classroom teacher's desk with the finished box on top. Integrating teachers often comment that they would like more frequent and consistent contact with the student with special needs. This design can facilitate such requests by promoting frequent **interaction** between student and teacher, ranging from a simple greeting to a comment about a finished or upcoming activity.



Aaron's pocket chart schedule system contains calendar information as well as his schedule. The assembling of his schedule for the day can be combined with a calendar lesson and/or discussion as an initial morning activity. **Assembling the schedule** as a joint activity between student and teacher or teacher assistant is an excellent way to ensure that the student understands which activities he/she can anticipate throughout the day. This schedule includes morning and afternoon activities which are clearly labelled.



Sometimes a **pocket chart** can be used to house a schedule system. This system is designed for a student who is developing literacy skills. As vocabulary is mastered, symbols can be removed leaving just the written word.



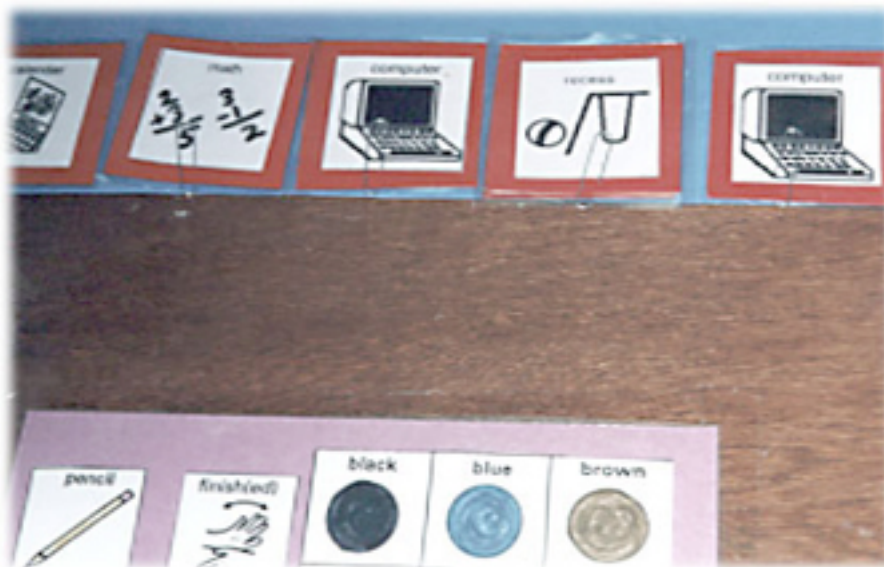
Brett's schedule is displayed in a **desk top pocket chart**. The smaller sized pocket chart allows for portability as well as manipulation at the student's desk.



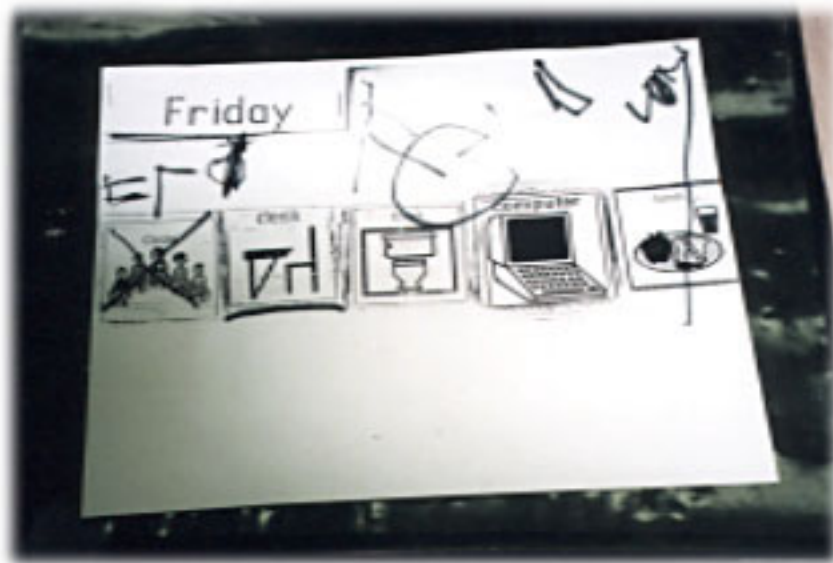
In this classroom, the schedule system takes up a large portion of the classroom wall space and is quite comprehensive. It presents not just a day at a time but the **entire week**. Some children may find the presentation of an entire week overwhelming while others may find it reassuring to know when music or gym, for example, will occur during the week. This type of schedule may curtail the incessant questioning about when an activity will occur.



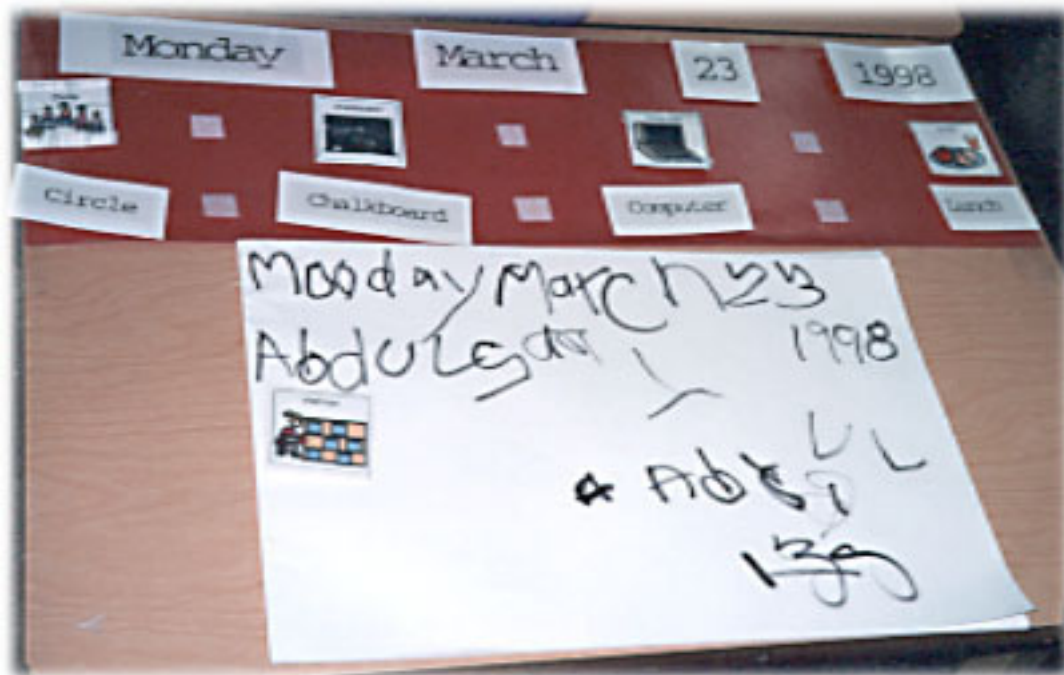
Colby's desk is near the blackboard and thus this system is mounted with magnets on the board. Colby's **symbols** often appear **in pairs** with the bottom row of symbols providing further information as to what the activity entails. For example, this particular "circle" will be for "calendar" and his first "work" session will be "spelling".



For the student with physical disabilities who is also nonverbal, the **placement of the schedule system** may compete with the placement of a communication system. For Brandon, some basic vocabulary is attached to his desk within his limited pointing range. This means that the calendar has to be placed outside of his range and manipulated by the teacher assistant. What is important for Brandon is that he can see and refer back to his schedule system independently. Because of Brandon's physical disability, placement of his schedule away from his desk (for example, on a wall) would have prevented him from referring to it independently.



Abdul's system is customized to his **individual learning style**. Abdul learns best when he is visually and kinesthetically involved with an activity. To this end, his system was designed so that he crosses out a finished activity and underlines the one that comes next. Identifying and accommodating a student's learning style will enhance the system's effectiveness.



As Abdul's literacy skills develop, his schedule system changes. In this most updated system, Abdul writes calendar information and the word beside the symbol for the next activity. It is important the system **grow and change** as the student's skills develop.



In Robby's classroom, the picture/concrete schedule system is displayed vertically alongside the basket system. It is attached to the wall with a velcro strip with each of Robby's schedule cards having a corresponding strip of velcro on the back. This allows Robby and the educational team to place and remove the cards with ease. Considerable thought was given as to the **schedule's placement** in the classroom and compromises were made by the teacher to free up the necessary space.



Robby's system consists of photographs paired with **concrete objects**. This combination is used to promote the understanding of photographs and as Robby's understanding of the photograph symbols increases, the concrete objects can be phased out.



It is best if schedules include written words on the symbol cards. This ensures consistency of language and promotes literacy. The use of consistent language, especially when working with a student with a language disorder, promotes the development of language comprehension and use. Written words also provide cues for consistent language when new staff join the team or when substitutes need to be called in.

Time	Skill/Activity	Expectation
10:15	Arrive	- hang backpack - hang jacket - zipper down
10:20	Workbook	- get workbook - pick colour - hobby colours
10:30	Break	- use timer - R chooses - from break - basket
10:35	Round Ring	- sort by colour - count
10:45	Break	-
10:50	Name	- R identifies - name
11:00	Break	-
11:05	Cubes	- Sort by - colour
11:15	Break	-
11:20	Numerical rec. Number	- 1-5

Robby's symbol schedule is supported by a **written schedule** displayed for the benefit of the teacher and teacher assistant. This is an easily read guide which ensures that the teacher assistant is being extremely consistent as she sets up Robby's schedule during the busy hustle of arrival activities.



Each of Connor's activities has the symbol for the activity attached to it. Using the skill of Match to Same, Connor matches the symbol on his schedule to the **symbol on the container**. This process begins with the simple pairing of the activity and the symbol.



Having a basket system which is well **organized** and easily **accessible** will help a student's day to run more smoothly. This particular system has the activity baskets clearly labelled and on shelves that are at the right level for the student. Activity baskets of the same size and colour allow for the symbols to be the most salient feature in this system.



Robby's activities are housed in a **basket system** where photographs of each activity are attached to the front of each basket. The Match to Same skill is reinforced as Robby matches the schedule symbol cards to symbols on the baskets containing the activities. The bookcase and baskets are great organizational tools for Robby as well as his educational team and they are easily transferred between classrooms as Robby moves through the grades.



With some students, using a schedule system needs to **begin slowly**. As an initial step in learning to use his schedule, Bobby is handed the symbol for his favourite activity which he matches to the symbol on the door where the activity is stored. Initially, this is done with lots of prompt support from his teacher or teacher assistant.



One of the necessary skills children need in order to use a schedule system effectively is the ability to recognize symbols. A common strategy to develop this skill is to **label the environment** with symbols (and words) in much the same way that teachers label their classrooms for literacy development.



Connor removes the symbol for snack from his schedule and places it on the desktop while he eats his snack. His teacher assistant points to the symbol and names the activity several times during snack time. This helps Connor **learn** what **the symbol** stands for.



Transitions are difficult for Robby and the use of a **timer** to signify the end of an activity provides for easier transitions. Using the timer consistently is crucial. The teacher assistant uses the timer to signal the end of all activities including snack, break times, recess and lunch. Frequently, the setting of a timer can provide a needed warning that an activity is coming to an end. A timer can frequently be a necessary addition to a schedule system and can facilitate success.



When Robby takes his symbol to his desk to begin an activity, it is secured to the desk with a velcro strip. Placing the symbol card in a consistent spot establishes it as the symbol for the activity, not the activity itself. The **placement of the symbol** in the upper right hand corner of the desk keeps it out of the way and makes it less likely to be tossed or dropped off the desk.



A **finished box** is an essential element in any schedule system and in this example an envelope labelled with an "all done" symbol was the most successful solution. Having a formal ending to an activity is a necessary component of the routine.



A **finished box** is incorporated into Robby's system. This provides a formal closure to each activity and becomes part of the routine for moving on to the next activity. It is important that Robby, himself, physically places the symbol card in this box as this signifies the end of the activity to him. The teacher assistant repeats the phrase, "Finished, Robby." providing him with the language to support his actions.



Colby's finished box doubles as a storage box for all his symbols. When Colby places a symbol for a completed activity in the box, the teacher assistant helps him to place it in the appropriate spot so it can be easily retrieved next time. The most effective schedules have well thought out **symbol storage** procedures.



Effective **symbol storage** is evident here with Brett's system. His symbols and symbol words are stored in a binder in the order in which they occur. Photo album pages work well for this system.

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The information contained in
these pages was originally
developed by

Lorraine Kamp and
Therese McErlean

Integration Support
Surrey School District

