

10 Things I Can Do for Myself

and then some...

By Kristin McKeown and Dawn Rainey



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When looking for functional activities for children with severe multiple disabilities, parents and teachers are often at a loss for what to do. We know that providing these children with the greatest level of independence possible improves their self-esteem, helps them become active participants in their home and school lives and contributes to their overall growth and development. We are constantly looking for ways for our students to participate in everyday activities with the greatest level of independence possible. Accomplishing this task can seem insurmountable, but given the right tools, these students can learn the skills necessary to become independent with many of their daily activities. Activities that foster independence will be shared by going through a day in the life of a student with severe cognitive and physical disabilities.

EQUIPMENT

Before we begin discussing school activities, we need to talk about equipment. Throughout the day, we use a variety of lite-tech and high-tech equipment to help our students access their environments. You should be able to find activities that you can set up using equipment you already have. However, there are a few specific pieces of equipment that we find extremely helpful to have.

The first is a device into which you can record multiple messages. We typically use the Little or Big Step-by-Step Communicator, available from AbleNet (www.ablenetinc.com).



Record any series of messages directly into the BIG Step by Step Communicator and press its activation surface for the first message. Press it again and BIG Step by Step automatically steps to the next message.

com) for \$165. With this one device, a child can participate in a multitude of activities. An Internet search of “things I can do with a step by step communicator” yields numerous top ten lists of potential activities. One of the favorites among our students is telling knock-knock jokes.

Second is a switch-adapted pourer. These measuring cups are switch accessible, giving a student with limited hand skills the ability to access many different activities. It is available from Enabling Devices (www.enablingdevices.com) for \$139.95.

A Powerlink 4 allows switch users to control up to two electrical appliances with

single switches. It has numerous settings to control how long the appliance remains activated. It is available from AbleNet (www.ablenetinc.com) for \$229.

The switch-activated All-Turn-It Spinner allows students to make random selections for choosing groups or playing games of chance, like bingo. It can be controlled directly or using a switch. It is available from AbleNet (www.ablenetinc.com) for \$119.

There are other types of equipment that you may already have that are similar to the above mentioned equipment. You will also need single switches to operate many of these items. The equipment list we provided is just a guide of things we like to use, it is certainly not all that is available, just a starting point.

SCHOOL DAY ACTIVITIES

ARRIVAL AT SCHOOL

The following is a list of 10 different activities that occur in many elementary school classrooms that can be quickly set up on a Step-by-Step for one or more students to do everyday. These tasks can also be divided amongst all the students, allowing the children with and without disabilities to share in the classroom/school assignments.

1. Greet staff and peers
2. Take attendance/roll call
3. Share news from home
4. Lead the Pledge of Allegiance
5. Give the weather report
6. Lead calendar activities
7. Ask about the day's schedule
8. Report on the lunch menu
9. Clap at assemblies (record applause on the Big Mac)
10. Give instructions for a classroom project

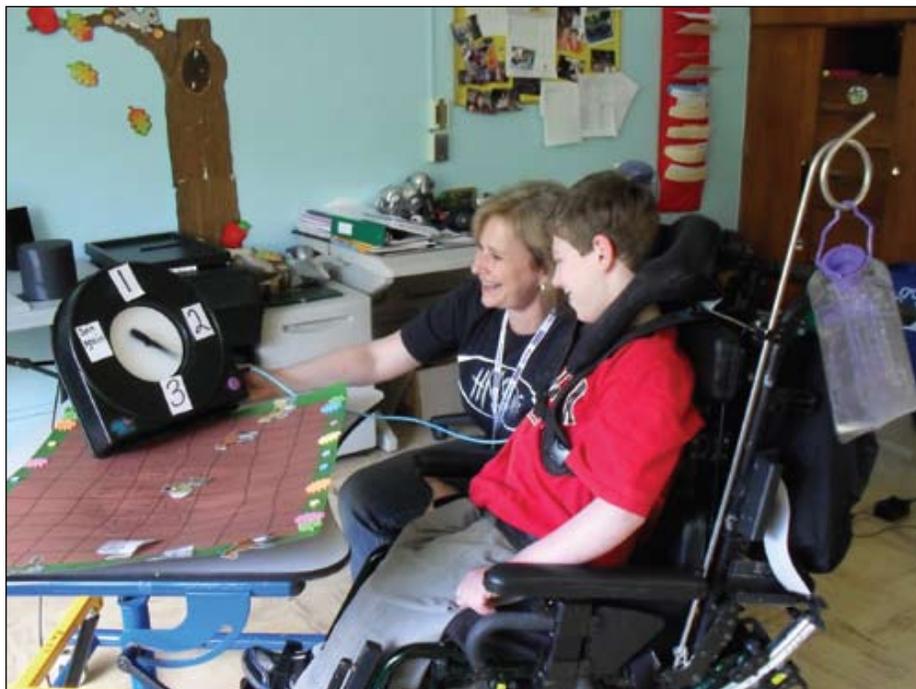
JOBS, JOBS AND MORE JOBS

Having a job at school can really promote a child's self-esteem. Many elementary school classrooms have many jobs available for students to complete. Finding ways for our students to have meaningful jobs within the school can be challenging, but it is not impossible. Again, we need to look at the types of jobs that exist naturally in a school and modify those activities for the child with multiple disabilities. Some examples of jobs that can be easily modified are:

1. Making deliveries through out the building
2. Watering classroom plants using a switch adapted pourer
3. Shredding documents using a paper shredder and a Powerlink



The Pouring Cup on Flex Mount #24 by Enabling Devices.



The switch-activated All-Turn-It Spinner allows students to make random selections for choosing groups or playing games of chance, like bingo.

4. Cutting coupons or BoxTops for Education using switch adapted scissors
5. Delivering messages between classrooms
6. Greeting visitors to the school
7. Feeding classroom pets (fish, hamster, etc.) using a switch adapted pourer
8. Pour detergent into sink to help wash dishes
9. Pour drinks for the class

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

One of the hallmarks of childhood is the birthday party. Whether at home or at school, celebrating birthdays is a high point in any child's year. Finding ways to make these celebrations more meaningful for our students is another way to help in their overall development and growth. Here are just a few ways that a child can be a more active participant in his/her own birthday celebration.

1. Helping to make the birthday cake
 - a. Use a switch adapted pourer to add ingredients
 - b. Use a Powerlink and hand mixer to stir the batter
2. Starting and stopping the music for musical chairs
3. Using a fan and a Powerlink to "blow" out the candles on the cake
4. Use the switch adapted spinner and some numbers or photos to select which gift to open next
5. Use the switch adapted spinner to call out the colors for Twister

OTHER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

1. Make announcements over the PA system
2. Using the infrared capabilities of a communication device to control music and "DJ" at a dance
3. Use single switch software to create an adapted voting booth for student government elections
4. Use a switch adapted pourer to put paint on a canvas in art class
5. Use the spinner for the next question to be asked in a quiz, test or game (Velcro question on to wheel)

CAUSE AND EFFECT 2.0

Finding new and interesting ways to teach cause and effect can be a struggle. A great way to teach cause and effect can be through movement. For a child with severe physical impairments, the ability to control their own movement is something they have never experienced. We are fortunate to be able to put our students into power wheelchairs and give them a single switch to control it, but there are ways to perform these activities that don't require any special equipment at all. Pushing a child in a swing as they say "Go" with a single message communication device or having them point to an icon on their tray to continue a walk through the neighborhood while you push their wheelchair are excellent examples of the power of movement as a teaching tool.

AFTER SCHOOL

After school is often a time for students to unwind from a hectic day. It can also be a chance to work on some independent leisure activities in the home. Setting up leisure activities that your child can do independently can have a dramatic impact on both the child and the family as a whole. If John can entertain himself while Dad makes dinner, it can remove a level of stress from the family.

1. Plug in a radio and turn on/off music with a Powerlink
2. Turn on/off the light in room with a Powerlink
3. Turn on/off fan with a Powerlink

4. Turn on mixer/blender/food processor for cooking activities with a Powerlink
5. Turn on Christmas tree lights with a Powerlink
6. Use a communication device to operate the television
7. Messages stored in a Step-by-Step to comment on a TV show or sporting event
8. Spin the wheel to choose outfit for the day (Velcro pictures of student in various outfits)
9. Use the pourer to plant seeds in a flowerpot
10. Pour ingredients to help cook dinner

FAMILY GAME NIGHT

Finding ways to include your child in events with his/her siblings can help to bring them all closer together. A family game night can easily be modified to include your child with disabilities.

1. Use a pourer to roll the dice for a board game
2. Spin the wheel for Twister
3. Spin the wheel to select person whose turn is next (Velcro names of people on wheel)
4. Spin the dice
5. Create an adapted cardholder to play card games
6. Modify Uno, use the spinner to determine how many cards a player has to draw
7. Spin the wheel for Candyland (Velcro cards on wheel)

Taking everyday activities and adapting them so everyone is included can be as simple as adding a switch. Hopefully, with the information provided, you will be able to enable your students to be more independent throughout their day-to-day lives. Through independence, we are creating students with higher self-esteem and more confidence, opening up a world of possibilities. ■

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