

Rubric/Guidelines: Case Study

The purpose of this assignment and rubric is to help you (a) gain experience in relation to observations of individuals with ASD, (b) develop an understanding of the referral process according to state guidelines of ASD eligibility, and (c) summarize the information you have obtained from the classroom observations. Total points for the case study is 30.

** (You may choose to do (a) two, 30 minute observations, (b) three, 20 minute observations, or (c) four, 15 minute observations) **

Observer's name: Ashley Liedel
Date: 09/25/2013 Time Started: 9:15 AM Time Ended: 11:15 AM
Location: Lindemann Elementary ASD Classroom; Allen Park Public Schools
Activity: Calendar, Independent Work Time, Snack, Teacher Modeling of a New Task

1. Provide background information about the student you observed (e.g., grade, gender, family background, medical history, academic achievements, etc. – do NOT provide identifying information such as real name). (3 pts)

The student I observed is a male and is in Kindergarten. His mother is a teacher, but no other family background was known by the teacher. There was no mention of Autism in his family background. Much of his medical history is unknown to his teacher, but his IEP paperwork did note that symptoms of Autism were present prior to the age of three. He attended the district's Early Childhood program the year prior and was transferred to the ASD classroom this school year. He is very low academically in all areas (he qualifies for special education under cognitive impairment as well as Autism) and is being screened for ADHD as staying seated and attending to directions are very difficult for him and greatly hindering his learning and classroom achievements.

2. Briefly summarize any relevant information obtained from conversations or interviews with the student's teacher (e.g., general educator, special educator, etc.), support staff (e.g., paraprofessional) or any professional who provides ancillary services (e.g., speech/language therapist, physical therapist, etc.). (4 pts)

During my observation time, I was only able to talk with the student's special education teacher and some of the aides in her classroom. She said when he came to her at the beginning of September, when school started, he was unable to complete any tasks independently nor sit to do a task, he did not know how to play with toys (no concept of make believe play or even what to do with a toy), and he showed echolalia – repeating things others said to him or repeating unrelated things such as his teachers' names. He is now able to sit to do a task, complete a task independently, and do a task correctly after it is modeled to him. He still struggles greatly with echolalia speech.

3. Describe the student's behaviors in detail. Please include all domains relevant to ASD eligibility (e.g., communicative acts, social skills, repetitive/challenging behaviors, etc.). (6 pts)

The student has great difficulty with communication skills. He cannot carry on a short conversation, he does not respond to questions adults ask him, and he is unable to communicate his needs. For example, when he was finished with his work, he just sat there until a teacher came to him and modeled raising her hand and saying, "I'm finished." He has stereotyped and repetitive language; all but a few phrases during my observation were repeating things other people had said or saying his teachers' names over and over again. He does not engage in make-believe play when given toys, which is unusual for students of his developmental level. As for his social skills, he does not interact with peers at all even when sitting next to them. He does not interact with adults either who try to converse with him. The student fails to use eye contact or other nonverbal behaviors to interact with others. This student does not show restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior but he does show a restricted interest in the classroom, as he always wants to play with trains. His most challenging behavior is his hyperactivity and inability to attend to directions and sit to complete a prolonged task.

4. Provide your decision and rationale for whether or not the student meets eligibility for ASD. Please refer to the syllabus and note that this is never an individual decision – this assignment is just to give you practice in relation to observations and awareness of the eligibility criteria. (Refer to the form provided on ANGEL). (5 pts)

The student I observed had a qualitative impairment in social interactions which was manifested by a marked impairment in the use of facial expressions, body gestures, and nonverbal behaviors to regulate social interaction. At times, he would look people in the eyes but not when they were talking to him. He looked over at me a few times and I smiled at him but he did not make any gesture or facial expression indicating he saw me or that he wanted to interact. He also has a failure to develop peer relationships. When he was sitting next to two peers his age, he never once said anything to them or attempted to interact with them using the materials they were playing with. He also has a lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment with others. When he successfully completed a task he often just sat there and did not say or do anything. An adult would have to come over and notice he was finished and even when they heavily praised his work he did nothing, which also indicates a lack of social and emotional reciprocity.

The student also had qualitative impairments in communication. He seemed to have adequate speech but a marked impairment in the ability to initiate conversation with others. He did not converse with his peers or adults, not even when adults talked to him. He also displayed repetitive use of language as he would repeat things he heard or repeatedly say his teachers' names.

He also showed a restricted interest in trains. I only saw him pick trains for one of his breaks, but his teachers said that generally he only wants to play with trains.

5. Are any interventions being utilized to address the student's atypical/challenging behavior or skill deficits? Please describe all aspects of the interventions. (3 pts)

There are many interventions in place for this student. He has task bins which are labeled with the numbers 1-3. His teacher is also using a token economy system with him which "pays" him for the jobs that he does independently. After the completion of each job he earns a token and then replaces the bin and gets the next numbered bin. He is working for three tokens which will earn him a 5-10 minute break with the material of his choice (book, toy, etc.). The TEACCH method is used in the classroom as well which helps teach the left to right movement within tasks to help ready him for reading (among other ways this program helps children with autism). Other interventions being used are sensory breaks and wearing the weighted vest during independent work time.

6. Do you feel the interventions are appropriate and/or effective? Please explain and discuss. (3 pts)

I do feel the interventions are appropriate and effective. The teacher had told me that when the student came to her classroom at the beginning of September, he was unable to sit and do a task and was extremely overactive and inattentive. While I observed, the student wore the weighted vest during the time he was working on his tasks and he was able to sit for a prolonged time (I would even say longer than the typical student his age). When the weighted vest was removed, he was very bouncy so I could tell the weighted vest helped to calm him. I also think the numbered task bins were effective as it was teaching him independence skills as well as organizational skills. The token economy system also appeared to be very effective as it helped him to see how many tasks he needed to complete before earning a break. This was good incentive to finish tasks. The student was also shown Boardmaker pictures to help him remember expectations in class, such as working quietly. This seemed effective some of the time but often he would talk to himself and not refer to the picture.

7. If interventions are being used - how would you improve the interventions to better address the student's behavior problems or skill deficits? If interventions are not being used - discuss one you might implement to address the student's behavior problems or skill deficits. (3 pts)

I thought the interventions were very effective in addressing his behavior issues as he was able to remain seated, work independently, and complete tasks that had been previously modeled for him. Keeping in mind that 3-4 weeks prior he was unable to do any of those things. I do feel though that he should've been encouraged to stay on task more often and possibly had a time limit to complete tasks. For example, when a puzzle was his task, he would stare off for minutes at a time or put in half the pieces and then take them all out to start over and nothing was said to him. This appeared to me that they were not addressing his off task behaviors. I asked his teacher about this and she said that right now the goal was just completing the task independently and that is why they didn't correct or time his work. I suppose this makes sense but it did seem that he was aloud to "check-out" so to speak. I might suggest a visual timer so he knows how long he has to do the task and as he gets more and more skilled at completing the same task, he

should get less time to do it in. Also, his tasks were not academically focused at all; they included two puzzles and a lacing beads activity. I would have had him do an academic skill related puzzle at least or lace alphabet beads or something as this would allow him to be successful, work on independence skills, but also address the Kindergarten curriculum. The only other change I would make to his interventions was the Boardmaker visuals as they did not seem to stop the student from producing echolalic speech during quiet work times, which disturbed other students. One of my colleagues has a stop light that you can set to a certain number of decibels and it beeps loudly if the noise level exceeds that amount. This may deter him from talking constantly as the auditory stimulus may be disliked by the student. The Boardmaker visual could always be attached to the stoplight so the green light has next to it the quiet icon.

8. Reflection: Highlight what you learned from this assignment. How might this experience benefit you in your future professional work? (3 pts)

Through this observation, I was able to not only observe the Kindergarten student with Autism but since I was sitting in an ASD classroom, I saw ten students on the spectrum and all of the students had some of the same difficulties – social interaction with peers and adults, communication, and behaviors but they all acted in very different ways. This just goes to show that although we have diagnostic criteria for Autistic Disorder, this developmental disability looks different in each student who is diagnosed with it. I learned how important it is to teach students with ASD, especially at the Kindergarten level, general skills such as how to sit during a task, how to raise your hand for help or to let the teacher know you are finished, etc.; skills most other students know through observing others or through practicing the skill once. I also learned of a few interventions that may help some students with ASD, such as the weighted vest, a token economy system, and task bins. In addition, since the student's teacher mentioned the TEACCH program, I was encouraged to research the program further and although I only read a few websites with information about the program, it was interesting. The program also provides a lot of great resources for the families of children with Autism too which I feel is a great asset. Overall I think the most important thing that this observation reiterated to me was the necessity of great communication between the special education teacher/team, the child's parents, and the general education teacher(s) in order to encourage the greatest amount of growth in the child.