VB-MAPP CASE STUDY: Tonya

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**BASIC STUDENT INFORMATION:**

Tonya is an 8-year-old girl attending a local public elementary school and has been receiving educational services since early childhood based upon her autism diagnosis. Tonya presents with “limited verbal language, some echolalia, and generally uses gestures to communicate…wants and needs.” Currently, Tonya has begun learning to use a PECs for communicating her wants and needs. Tonya also presents with transitionary issues which result in behavioral manifestations “surrounding the relinquishment of preferred items or the ending of preferred activities.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Currently, Tonya’s teachers “are only able to maintain instructional control by using high-preference reinforcers at a high rate” which creates its own set of unique issues within the educational environment that Tonya is currently in. In a unified effort, both Tonya’s teachers and her parents “have decided to use the VB-MAPP to identify her current language functioning levels and to track her progress over time.” The VB-MAPP is based on B.F. Skinner’s analysis of verbal behavior and stands for Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program, which is criterion-referenced and can be used as an assessment tool, curriculum guide, or a progress monitoring tool.

**VB-MAPP DATA:**

Assessment data indicates that Tonya’s current level of functioning and performance in most tasks remains at a Level 1. Further data indicates that Tonya can function and perform some tasks at a Level 2 (with limitations, while not fully reaching Level 2) and is unable to meet the assessment requirements for achieving Level 3. Each level adds skills that Tonya is required to meet in order to measure whether she can meet that new level’s skillset through the assessment. Tonya has yet to acquire the skills needed for completing Level 1 and advancing on to Level 2.

The typical development of the skills needed to advance within each level is rooted in a baseline of balance between each skillset. Tonya’s strength rests in her echoic skill, primarily due to her echolalia, which was corroborated by the assessment data. Additionally, Tonya presented with skillsets in listening, independent play, imitating, visual perception, manding, and matching. Due to the fact that Tonya presents with an uneven baseline of skillsets, the assessment data reflects her being delayed in her skillsets. In contrast, a student presenting with a mastery of skillsets throughout the assessment would reflect a balance of skills and move up to the next level.

Tacting remains Tonya’s greatest area of weakness, as she struggles to name and/or identify items in her immediate environment. Additionally, Tonya presents weaknesses in both verbal and non-verbal behavior (which is rooted in basic communication).[[2]](#footnote-2)

Development age skillsets corresponding to Level 1 of the VB-MAPP are 0 to 18 months of age, with the subject tested in 9 separate skillsets in an effort to assess both language and social skills based upon their current development. The 9 skillsets covered by the VB-MAPP for Level 1 are: 1) ***Mand*: which is the ability initiate a request or command such as asking for more snacks; 2) *Tact*: which is the ability to identify objects within the immediate environment, such as the days of the week on a calendar, or a desired activity or toy on a shelf; 3) *Listener*: which is the ability react when prompted by a request, such as handing someone a pencil when asked; 4) *Visual*: which is the ability to visually match, such as matching shapes and colors, or similar items; 5) *Play*: which is the ability to play independently without the need for any outside reinforcement, such playing with Legos or cars as the reward is simply playing independently; 6) *Social*: which is the ability to interact with peers in a social setting, such as sharing toys and playing a board game or with dolls; 7) *Imitation*: which is the ability to imitate the actions of others, such as with learning sign language, or learning to use a spoon or a fork; 8) *Echoic*: which is the ability to repeat the words, such repeating “red” when the teacher says “red”**[[3]](#footnote-3)**; 9) *Vocal*: which is the ability to vocalize sounds that eventually become words.**

**RESULTS OF MULTIPLE ASSESSMENTS:**

**An examination of multiple assessments indicates that between the first assessment and the second assessment** Tonya showed progress in gaining more skillsets, with the greatest progress and improvement in skills being with vocalizing and tacting skillsets. Having previously struggled in her ability to identify basic objects in her surroundings, Tonya was able to utilize limited verbal skillsets and vocalize sounds and words to identify objects. The interventions and supports that Tonya receives have shown to be successful in increasing her skillsets and her ability to demonstrate her skillsets and her developmental milestones over a period of time. Theoretically, if Tonya continues to receive the interventions she is currently receiving, she will inevitably gain additional and/or increased skillsets allowing her to assess at higher levels on the VB-MAPP. Furthermore, as the goal for life skills is typically rooted in the ability to communicate wants and needs, Tonya has shown great ability and improvement in her ability to effectively communicate her wants and needs. The development of these specific skillsets will further allow her to increase all aspects of her communication skills which will result in a decrease in behavioral manifestations due to a previous inability or difficulty in communicating her wants and needs.

**CONCLUSION:**

Understanding the VB-MAPP, its purpose, its scoring criteria, and how it applies to specific skillsets and the development of those specific skillsets throughout the assessment of a student struggling with verbal communication deficits in combination with behavioral manifestations is fundamental to understanding where to focus interventions over time in order to provide opportunities for a student to gain functional verbal acuity. Further understanding how to convert the definitions of each skillset and its applications so that parents may better understand what they mean is important for effective communication as an educator, who relies on the ability to communicate with parents as a means of maintaining continuous relationships that form the basis for student success.

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1. Behavior very similar to preschool where young students learn to adhere to rigid routines and structures and are denied preferred activities through transition to other activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This may be a trigger for behavioral manifestations during transitions because of an inability to adequately communicate wants and needs. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This the basic foundation of Haggerty Curriculum in Kindergarten. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)