**COMMUNICATION PROJECT WRITTEN REPORT**

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SPED 800: Teaching Language and Communication Skills to Learners with Autism and Developmental Disabilities

The University of Kansas

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**COMMUNICATION PROJECT: WRITTEN REPORT 1**

**Featured Student:**

Bobby is an 11-year-old student in the 6th grade. Bobby started out the year spending time in the class and doing activities with his peers, however, he often leaves the classroom when he feels overwhelmed or uncomfortable. He prefers to be in a separate, familiar space with students he knows. Bobby met WAC special education eligibility under the category of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Bobby’s conditions adversely impact his social skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior. He demonstrated a need for specially designed instruction in social skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior. While Bobby is verbal, he struggles with social interaction and communicates in a very limited capacity with peers. With adults, Bobby communicates easily, but typically any communication with adults is limited to wants or needs or vocalizations relevant to work avoidance or verbal precursors to elopement. Bobby does have a 1:1 instructional paraeducator assigned to him, but Bobby rarely completes academic work and rarely attends general education classes. While Bobby is verbal, Bobby struggles with both peer and adult communication and social interactions.

Communication is fundamental to daily life in numerous ways, serving as the cornerstone of how individuals interact, express themselves, build relationships, and navigate the world around them. Developing functional communicative language requires an individual to engage with others and adapt language skills to the situations around them which are always changing. When one possesses the ability to verbally communicate, as opposed to individuals who rely on PECs or AAC devices to communicate, working on developing verbal communication is fundamental to future independence and success.

For Bobby, honing his ability to verbally express himself to both adults and peers will be a definitive function to his ability to independently convey thoughts, emotions, feelings, needs,

wants and ideas. Such communication is not limited to only an educational environment but is conducive to successful communicative abilities outside of the classroom. Bobby’s family currently struggles with his inability to effectively communicate, despite him being verbal, and the inevitable behavioral manifestations and outbursts and aggression which he engages in when frustrated, or when demands are placed on him.

When Bobby is engaged in a preferred activity, or interacting with preferred adults or peers,

Bobby becomes much more verbal and interactive. When Bobby is provided a new task to which he shows an interest, Bobby will engage with said task for extended periods of time which is atypical of Bobby’s engagement with other activities, particularly social or academic. Bobby’s limited verbal interaction with peers creates a communicative deficit for Bobby in academic and/or classroom environments and social situations. If Bobby is able to learn how to communicate more effectively and in a more consistent manner, Bobby will find himself better able to interact with peers which may alleviate some of Bobby’s frustration and elopement behavior. Bobby would benefit greatly from increasing his social skills communication and interaction which will transition him to better communication at home as well as an academic environment.

**RECORD REVIEW:**

Bobby, an 11-year-old student in the sixth grade, presents with above-average intellectual abilities, as indicated by his IQ scores which fall well within the superior range (Full-Scale IQ: 120). While Bobby does not demonstrate severe impairments in communication, he does present with significant deficits in social skills and peer interaction which directly impede his communicative abilities, as Bobby prefers specific adult interactions over peer interactions. Bobby demonstrates impairments in social skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior, reflected

by his Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) scores placing him at a Level 1 severity (requiring support).

Bobby’s communication is primarily verbal, and Bobby is able to communicate wants and needs, but tends to be affected and impacted by his environment and the presence of others (especially peers and adults he does not know) and work or task demands. Bobby’s previous IEP goal in the area of social emotional learning focused on self-efficacy and the ability to engage with his learning environment. Bobby is most engaged in his learning when he feels that it is benefiting him and is useful content. For example, when learning math, if he feels I will help him learn to code better, he may have a desire to learn it. However, if he feels a topic is boring or not useful, he tends to refuse work. Currently, Bobby has a schedule that incorporates some choice, but has structured parts of his day. Bobby does really well with having a private space to regulate when he becomes frustrated or upset. There are some days when he is able to follow his schedule and engage in learning activities with 90% accuracy, and there are some days he does so with about 30% accuracy. Bobby also benefits from consistency and predictability, so change in routine or unexpected things can upset him.

Moving forward, the focus will be on collaborating with Bobby to establish and follow a schedule that allows him access to regulation tools and reinforcement, while also providing instruction.

**TARGET BEHAVIOR:**

Bobby’s communication need (incorporating social skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior) can be operationally defined as: During the first 20 minutes of independent work, Bobby will attend class and be present within the structured classroom environment and not

requesting to leave to engage in an alternate or preferred activity. Bobby will sit at his desk and engage in directed activity independently without requesting to leave the classroom. The evidence-based practice of reinforcement will be used to aid Bobby regarding the target behavior. Based upon previous efforts of utilizing reinforcement through Avian-Assisted Intervention, which were successful in mitigating the target behavior and facilitated Bobby remaining in the structured academic environment and focused on independent work, the EBP selected aligns with classroom structure and academics as well as with Bobby’s IEP goals and the conditions which adversely impact his social skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior, all of which were either reduced or experienced a complete cessation when reinforcement through Avian-Assisted Intervention was used previously.

**CHILD AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS:**

Bobby’s strength in communication is also his greatest weakness, as his communication is directly linked to his environment and the individuals in that environment. Bobby has a high IQ and above-average to superior comprehension skills. Bobby does not experience any communicative deficits regarding instruction or the communication of others, rather, based upon the demand and his mood, he either chooses compliance or defiance. Defiance specifically presents in elopement to a preferred space. Bobby enjoys social interaction, but only with preferred adults and a limited number of preferred peers with whom he is familiar. When engaged in reinforcement through the use of Avian-Assisted Intervention, Bobby has the ability to socially interact with anyone in any environment outside of his structured environment. Bobby enjoys the attention he receives when he is handling birds during the EBP of reinforcement. This facilitates his desire to remain in his structured environment, engage in social activities with peers, and academics.

Bobby is capable of learning new concepts, especially if provided reinforcement. Bobby’s family struggles with many of the same issues witnessed in the classroom which include emotional regulation and adaptive behavior. Bobby’s parents make repeated efforts to establish routines and expectations at home, but struggle with Bobby’s emotions and his frustrations which can at time manifest as aggression. Bobby’s medications also impact his ability to manage a full day of academics and Bobby typically arrives to school late and begins with a soft start. There are days when Bobby sleeps for most of the day in a preferred space. While Bobby can communicate wants and needs, demands placed upon him will prompt verbal and at times, physical aggression (cussing, screaming, hitting). Repeated demands, or expectations placed upon Bobby do not work well if Bobby is not interested or if Bobby does not feel a benefit exists in complying with a demand or expectation. Denying access to preferred activities (such as computers) does also not work and being told “no” results in frustration which can manifest as aggression and even greater noncompliance.

Being told “no” at school, or being denied a preferred activity or space can be highly problematic but given Bobby’s current IEP which allows Bobby access to a preferred space if and when desired, Bobby simply goes there. The instructional staff will make efforts at redirection or see if Bobby is willing to negotiate his elopement to a preferred space, or even do some academics while in the preferred space, but this does not always work. Bobby needs a constant for of reinforcement, and the reward of attention to motivate him to remain in the structured classroom environment and focused on academics rather than elopement to a preferred space.

**TEACHER AND TEAM CHARACTERISTICS:**

This is Bobby’s first year in middle school and Bobby’s teacher is still working on

reviewing and updating Bobby’s current IEP and determining the best way to manage his annual goals regarding social skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior. Bobby’s teacher has been teaching special education resource for over a decade and has a firm grasp on evidence-based practices and the functions of autism as well as supports needed for her students to be successful in all academic areas. The paraprofessionals that work with Bobby directly have over two decades of experience in resource and special education and working with students with autism. Bobby’s mother also works at the middle school and is a constant support to both the teacher and paraprofessionals. The teacher and paraprofessionals utilize EBPs in a variety of ways and in doing so, determine the most functional and adaptive EBPs to implement with Bobby. The most successful to date has been reinforcement through the use of Avian-Assisted Intervention, which not only prompted Bobby to remain in the classroom for the entirety of the day but facilitated Bobby going out to his general education classes, completing academic demands, and helped Bobby to engage in social skills and peer communications with individuals he was unfamiliar with.

**CLUES FOUND IN IEP GOALS OR OUTCOMES:**

Bobbys three goals are focused directly on his conditions adverse impact to his social skills, emotional regulation, and adaptive behavior, identified in his IEP under Social/Emotion (Skill: Self-Efficacy), and Adaptive (Skill: Self-Awareness). As stated previously, the focus for Bobby, moving forward, will be on collaborating with Bobby to establish and follow a schedule that allows him access to regulation tools, and reinforcement, while also providing instruction.

**OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE:**

The supports that are most effective with Bobby are reinforcement in the form of Avian-

Assisted Intervention, which Bobby absolutely loves. Through the use of this reinforcement, Bobby is able to self-regulate, manage his anxiety, maintain a less-stressed demeanor, remain in the classroom, engage in social activities with unfamiliar peers, attend general education classes, and engage in academic demands. Reinforcement (R+) is a foundational practice that is used with other evidence-based practices. Reinforcement describes the relationship between learner behavior and a consequence that follows the behavior. This relationship is reinforcing only if the consequence increases the likelihood the learner will perform the skill or behavior in the future (Sam & AFIRM Team, 2015).

To support implementation, Bobby only needs to be allowed exposure to the Conures (small parrots) which have been integrated into the classroom environment as Avian-Assisted Intervention tools. Bobby is capable of self-efficacy with limited support when interacting with the Conures specific to this program. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and intervention specialists are able to assist throughout the intervention process. Most of the time, Bobby is simply seated at his table with the Conure present on the table in front of him. Bobby is able to interact through touch and verbal communication throughout the intervention. Bobby is also able to facilitate interactions with other peers, both those familiar to him and unfamiliar to him, around instructional time, in order to develop adaptive behaviors and greater social interactions.

Bobby’s communication needs will be assessed using the ASCS-2. The teacher and parent will both fill out the questionnaires. The teacher will email the parent a copy of the questionnaires that she will complete, and the teacher will be using the parent questionnaire as a comparison, noting similarities and differences in scores between what is observed at school and at home.

The teacher will complete the questionnaire and observations during class time when the students are in small groups, observing what the student is doing and using her own knowledge about the student as well.

**ASCS-2 ASSESSMENT PLANS:**

The ASCS-2 will be completed yearly to monitor Bobby’s progress of skill acquisition, skill mastery, and skill generalization across multiple domains. The ASCS-2 will continue to help the IEP team to assess Bobby’s skills, prioritize his needs, target goals, and plan effective interventions for him (Quill & Stansberry-Brusnahan, 2017).

Bobby is an amazing student who needs an adaptable environment conducive to his support needs and his further successful development of social skills, his functional interaction with peers, his ability to emotionally self-regulate, and break away from rigid thought into more adaptive and flexible scheduling. Bobby has shown the ability to benefit greatly from the EBP of reinforcement in the use of Avian-Assisted Intervention. Over the course of the next year, with the help of observational data, and the ASCS-2, Bobby will be able to meet interventional needs and IEP goals and develop a successful method by which to engage with peers socially and minimize his need for a preferred space outside of his structured academic environment.

**REFERENCES:**

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