

ABC Final Project

Problem Identification

This year I have been working closely with a first grade boy named John. John is seven years old and this is his second year at the elementary school. John has two parents that work and maintain open communication with me. John is also a big brother to a kindergartener. He loves knowing his little brother is in the same building as him and gets excited thinking of what he may be doing in his own classroom.

Having a student who was in kindergarten in my building allowed me to gain some background information about John before the school year officially started. John has entered first grade with the label “sensory issue”. Looking at John, he does not look different from any other students physically, however it’s his energy and movement that differentiates him from the rest. John is a constant mover – wiggling, fidgeting, bouncing, and chewing, at all times of the day.

Academically, John is right where he should be, or could even be considered “high average” in his abilities. Due to John’s sensory issue that causes him to move about the room or his desk area frequently, John’s work does not reflect his abilities. Often times, John’s work is left incomplete because his movements become a distraction to working on the activity. Since the beginning of the year I’ve had John’s desk in close proximity to mine and have had John be my example when I model to ensure that his work will be completed in a timely manner.

John’s behavior does not affect the other students, rather only his own work and reflection of him as a student. John is able to participate in discussions, is easily excitable over certain lessons and has motivation and a genuine curiosity about him, which works to his benefit. However, because of his constant moving, John needs many check-ins and monitoring to become successful in school. I have found that during lessons that are more monotonous, such

as writing and social studies/science, John is more distractible because it requires more independent time to write and sit at their desks. John is more focused and on task during center time because the reading and math block are broken up into shorter work times and allows for John to move about the room more freely.

Additionally, it could be said that based on observations of John during the school day, he may be classified as a student with ADHD. This was something that I felt may apply to John after reading about common behaviors of ADHD in Brophy's text. It states that these children "show excessive and almost constant movement, even when sitting. Often their movements appear to be without purpose. They squirm, wiggle, easily excitable, often out of their seats, are energetic but poorly directed etc." (Brophy, 1996, p. 259). These characteristics can be seen in John's daily behaviors.

Prior to intervention, my professional stance with John was *firm but flexible*, as described by Brophy. This effective technique is described as, "stating expectations clearly and reinforce them consistently, but keep flexible and negotiable where possible. Keep rules to a minimum, and liberalize them as students become more capable of responsible self-regulation" (Brophy, 1996, p. 23). I felt that this was the most appropriate approach and stance to take in dealing with John because I knew how capable he was as a student but I also recognize his different way of functioning on a daily basis because of his sensory issue. As his teacher I want to be able to provide him with the comfort and care he needs in the classroom so he feels able to act like himself and not get in trouble for it, but to also establish routines and expectations for John so he doesn't feel like his school day is "free time" for him.

The challenge that I saw myself during this case with John was determining how flexible I should be with him. I wanted John to have the freedom and space he needed that would allow

him to learn at his personal ability, but I didn't want him to be so consumed with "wiggling" that he would be doing at all times of the day in ways that would distract himself and others. Routines and rules are very important to me in my classroom and I feared that John's mentality would negate the way our classroom functions and be the exception to the rules.

While working with John I had some personal goals for myself. One of my personal goals was to become more knowledgeable of accommodations for students with sensory issues. I also wanted to develop appropriate ways of communicating with John that did not cause him to feel nagged or bothered by my requests. These goals were for John's benefit and for my own as I could apply my learning to future students.

Understanding the Problem

I began observing John by separating the day into the main subjects: reading, writing, math and social studies/science. I decided it would be best to observe John in these blocks of time because it gave me a better comparison between him and others as well as how John does in group work versus whole-class work time.

The focus of these observations was to see how many times John left his seat, leaving his work causing incomplete assignments. My goal was to determine ways in which I could accommodate John during these "most frequent" movements so that he could better manage his time and complete the work without as many check-ins or monitoring.

After collecting the data from John's daily patterns, I recognized that John leaves his seat during writing and social studies most often. Writer's workshop occurs for a 45 minute block right before lunch where students develop their own stories based off of a theme in a mentor text or after I model an example of a story for them to then create independently. Writing for John has been one of his struggles and insecurities. Often times John would ask for me to "underline"

words on the page for him. This is when I would take a yellow marker and provide the words on the lines for him to then trace over. I began this at the beginning of the year because I noticed that John had a difficult time writing on the lines because of how large his handwriting was and because he has trouble holding a pencil – caused by his sensory issue. In addition to his poor handwriting, this is one of the longest blocks of the day where students remain in their seats for an extended period of time.

The other part of the day where John left his seat most often was during social studies (which alternates with science). This is at the very end of the day and is typically spent reading out of a textbook or non-fiction text as a whole-class and answering questions as a group. During this time John becomes unfocused and had a higher number of leaving his seat than his classmates did. To make sense of this, I believe that it is the length of time of the lesson that was affecting John's attention. While I do try to keep students active in the classroom by moving around, there are some lessons where students have to produce paper-to-pencil work.

The observations provided me with information and insight to planning an intervention for John. I was able to find the patterns and common occurrences and the time in which they occurred to prepare a day for John that would allow him to continue moving the way in which his body "needs" him to and do so in a way that would give him the most productive time at school by completing work with less supervision. I was also able to share the information I observed with John's parents in a confidential and beneficial way so they were aware of my intentions and plans for John. John's parents are very supportive and act as teammates in this situation. See table below for data collection.

	Reading	Writing	Math	Social Studies / Science
John	3	6	4	5
Classmate	2	2	1	2

Plan Development and Implementation

The behavior that was targeted for John was his tendency to leave his seat due to the need of stimulation. John’s sensory issue requires constant movements that can take time away from completing his work. With the help of some subtle and inexpensive accommodations, the hope is that John will leave his seat less to roam the room.

To address John’s behavior, I first began by approaching his parents with some options for the classroom setting. John had used a bumpy seat in kindergarten and it traveled with him to first grade. When I received the bumpy seat, however, it was in poor condition. The seat was hardly inflated and did not serve its purpose. I spoke with John’s mother and suggested that we have two bumpy seats for John in the classroom, one for him and one for a friend. This began the “Bumpy Buddy Bag” where John would have a buddy each week sitting on a bumpy seat with him to eliminate any insecurity with sitting on the seat.

Every Monday, John pulls a numbered popsicle stick out of the Bumpy Buddy Bag and that student is his bumpy buddy for the week. John enjoys sharing and is excited each Monday to give a new student the opportunity to be his bumpy buddy. John even offers his buddy the option of color (red or blue) first. He is always thinking of others first and cares more about their feelings than his own.

The other intervention was to allow John to chew gum throughout the day to keep his mouth busy. If John is not chewing on gum, he will chew on his shirt to the point of it becoming

torn and wet. John’s parents donate bulk supplies of gum for John to keep in a bag by his gum pocket chart. This pocket chart has four different colored smiley faces on it. After John takes one piece of gum, he is to turn the smiley face card over, signifying that he has used one out of four gum pieces for the day. Once John has used up all four cards, he has to use an alternative method.

This leads me into the third intervention strategy. John has a difficult time gripping pencils, again due to his sensory issue. John’s parents sent him to school with over-sized pencil grippers so that he could better control the skinny pencil during writing. Additionally, John’s parents donated pencil toppers to be put on the eraser end of his pencils. These look similar to regular pencil grippers, but can be chewed on and are made out of rubber.

This intervention was a good fit for John because it allowed John to feel comfortable at school as he could move in the ways he needed but did not make him feel excluded or make him “different” than the other first graders. These accommodations are small and easily implemented to John’s daily routines without classmates questioning him. Below in Table A are pictures of some of these classroom accommodations.

Additionally, this plan was ideal as it fit well with my stance of firm but flexible. With these accommodations, John is still expected to do the same work as others, but is able to get there in a different way. He may be chewing gum while he’s hopping on the number line or chewing on a pencil while he’s writing a story, but these adaptations give John the focus he needs to complete work in a timely manner and stay in his seat.

Prior to formal intervention, however, I had already begun cooperative learning groups with John. This, discussed in Best Practices, is defined as “a type of peer-mediated instruction in which small groups of students work together to help each other achieve academic and social

goals” (Best Practices, 1996, p. 13). Here, John was able to work in small groups and use his friendly and caring personality to work as a teammate - a very intriguing and motivating quality for John - to get his assignments done. Once formal intervention began, I continued using cooperative learning in tandem with the other classroom accommodations.

Plan Evaluation

In reflecting on these interventions, I have found some to be more successful strategies than others. The most effective strategy has been John chewing gum throughout work time. This has eliminated chewing on his shirts and becoming uncomfortable at school. John is independent in this task and is responsible in flipping over the smiley face cards in his pocket chart and maintains honesty in the process. When John is chewing gum, he is more focused and involved in classroom discussions and activities. He is less likely to leave his seat when he is chewing gum and is able to complete more work independently when he is chewing gum. This was determined during a time when John’s gum collection was out-of-stock and he was distracted during learning times. This data is represented in Table B below.

One of the surprisingly less effective accommodations is the bumpy seat. While John is eager and willing to share his bumpy seat and choose a new bumpy buddy each week, I find John taking his bumpy seat off his chair more and more often. I even have tripped over it because he has tossed it beside his desk. I spoke with John and told him that if he chooses to not use his bumpy seat, that’s fine, however he needs to put it in a safe place. This bumpy seat has almost become more of a distraction and toy to John than a way of keeping him seated. I plan to share this information with his parents so that they are aware of how their classroom donation is being used and it’s effectiveness so far this year.

As a teacher, I know the value of reflecting on lessons, discussions and management styles in the classroom. Each day reflecting may happen during a lesson, after a lesson or on the drive home from work. Reflecting allows teachers to understand the successes of a lesson and provides a deeper understanding of how to adjust the lesson if needed. During this ABC project, I spent time critiquing my intervention to focus on what I did well and what I might change next time.

One part of this intervention that I felt went well was my openness, both with ideas and accommodations as well as with John's parents in communication. These two aspects of the intervention were very well developed and gave me the opportunity to adjust my plans and strategies on weekly, or sometimes day-to-day basis if need be. By having open communication with John's parents, I had a clear understanding of things that were happening at home, strategies they use to keep John focused, the tendency for John to lose focus and "waste time" during routine procedures and the ways in which John's parents have best addressed these same issues.

It was comforting and reassuring to know that John's off-task behavior is not something that happens solely at school. While it is a problem for John, I found reassurance in the fact that it was not necessarily *me and my instruction* that was causing John to appear "bored" or unfocused, rather it's John's overall motivation in certain routine or monotonous daily patterns, both in and outside of school.

John's parents had great suggestions of how to keep him moving when it comes time for John to get things done. They mentioned using a timer, creating more of a game-like/ "challenge" for him to keep himself moving, or doing things out of order for a silly and fun way to get ready for school. I have utilized a timer for the end of the day procedures for John to ensure he will get everything he needs to do completed before the dismissal bell. If John is able

to get ready completely before the timer goes off, he receives a sticker for his individual rewards chart. Brophy stated, “teachers who used reward approaches often included charts or other methods to help keep hyperactive students aware of their behavior [...] students were ‘almost relieved that something is helping them’ because they get tired of being nagged by the teacher” (Brophy, 1996, p. 288). This has been effective and was put in place after communicating with his parents.

Professional Stance

My professional stance at the end of this intervention still remained *firm but flexible*. This stance has been a positive and great approach for John and my classroom setting. Being firm was the most effective part of this strategy for John to get things done and remain seated. John is a boy who needs structure and routines, despite what his body may feel the urge to do - run throughout the room, spin by his table, etc. These routines and procedures are going to be in every school year and he needs to become acclimated with this type of setting. Brophy stated to use “predictable instructional routines; make directions clear and concise, simplify complex directions and avoid multiple commands” (Brophy, 1996, p. 272) which is what a student like John needs.

John knows what is expected of him and he knows that he is no different than any other student in first grade. He still needs to come to school ready to learn, finish the same activities and behave appropriately or there are consequences. John has a big heart and recognizes that he is responsible for his own actions and work. He is a rule follower and wants to please. These qualities in John have given him the extra push in times where he began to get off-task.

Although my stance remained true for the duration of this project, it is important to note that there were times of concern or worry. Dealing with a student who becomes off-task so

easily and requires a large amount of check-ins and management, it is easy to become frustrated and have limits tested. Patience in dealing with John during this case study became a struggle at times. There were instances where doing it myself would have been easier and quicker than waiting for John to do it himself. There were days where time was short and lessons needed to be completed and John was still working on getting it done where I stepped in and took over what he was working on to ensure it would be completed.

It is difficult to allow John time to do things independently and work at his own pace and on the other hand enforce rules and expectations of John finishing things on his own. There are approaches to take that Brophy, as well as in PowerPoint presentations, discussed when facing challenging behavior. One of the suggestions that was mentioned in a PowerPoint was *breathing techniques* to avoid quick and rash reactions. Teachers should practice giving some reaction wait-time to ensure the most effective response will be given during these types of behavior challenges. This was also discussed in Brophy saying to, “repeat the instructions in a calm, positive manner; bear in mind that they may progress more slowly and need more help for longer time than most students” (Brophy, 1996, p. 272).

With the combination of readings from Brophy and Best Practices, group collaboration and discussions as well as PowerPoint presentations and online readings, John’s intervention was detailed and productive. While some alterations were made during the process because of teacher reflection, John was able to remain in his seat more often to complete work in a timely manner overall. This is not the end of John’s intervention and I plan to continue to educate myself to be more equipped and knowledgeable for future behavior challenges in the future.

Project Documents and Data Collection

Table A: John's Accommodations		
Gum Chart	Bumpy Seat	Bumpy Buddy Bag
		

Table B: Times Out of Seat		
	A.M.	P.M.
With Gum	4	5
Without Gum	6	8

References

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