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Socio-Dramatic Work Systems for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Honors Capstone

Socio-Dramatic Work Systems for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Abstract

This capstone project assessed the integration of socio-dramatic work systems for two children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive preschool classroom. It provides details about Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment tool and Structured Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication related handicapped Children (TEACCH) Work Systems. My experience working with two children with ASD shows that creating and implementing dramatic play work systems helped these two students improve their dramatic play skill progression as rated with the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment tool.

Introduction

I completed the Capstone project during the fall 2019 semester of my clinical practice. The Capstone project started September 3, 2019 and finished on December 6, 2019. Two students from an inclusive preschool classroom where I was assigned for clinical practice participated in the project. Student 1 attends the morning preschool class and Student 2 attends the afternoon preschool class. The two children (age 5) are both diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

At the start of the Capstone, both children had underdeveloped socio-dramatic play skills. Socio-dramatic play is a type of play that children engage in, consisting of them acting out scenarios and pretending to be other characters. Student 1 was at the developmental level of a 12-24 month child in his dramatic play skills and Student 2 was at the developmental level of a late three or early four year old with his dramatic play skills. My cooperating teacher wanted me to help increase their dramatic play skills. She recommended using the Structured TEACCH method of work systems to teach these dramatic play skills. The goal of work systems is to teach

very specific skills (e.g., fine motor skills, sorting, matching, etc.) and then have those skills become generalized and utilized within the classroom.

The rationale for using the Structured TEACCH work systems was that the students had prior experience with this method. Both students were familiar with their work stations and used other work systems (matching pictures, stringing beads, etc.) on a daily basis. Adding in dramatic play work systems into their routine was to provide the students with support from adults based on their familiarity with this type of learning. My cooperating teacher and I collaboratively created the following goals:

- A. The Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment tools will be utilized to observe, implement and assess student cognitive skills as they engage in dramatic play work systems and,
- B. Data will be collected in 3 areas: (a) engaging in dramatic play, (b) imitating actions, and (c) using items to represent other items.

Materials & Methods

Teaching Strategies GOLD

Teaching Strategies Gold is a curriculum and assessment tool that is utilized in the classroom. Gold is an ongoing observation-based assessment tool that is used to assess children from birth through kindergarten. Within Gold, there are 36 objectives that cover nine areas of development including: cognitive, social-emotional, language, physical, social-studies, science, literacy, mathematics, and the arts. These thirty-six objectives are scored using color bands. Gold's color bands are based off of learner progression for each of the thirty-six objectives. The color bands are typically sorted by ages that typically developing children are accomplishing certain things within a skill progression. For example, mathematics objective 21b states that

children understand shapes. Using the color bands, most three-year-olds are in the green band of identifying basic shapes (circle, square, triangle) whereas most four-year olds are in the blue band of identifying more shapes (oval, rectangle, heart). Using the color band to assess students on their learner progression is an important piece of the Gold assessment tool.

Students are assessed through Gold three times a year: October, February, and May. During the checkpoints, documentation is recorded for each of the 36 objectives for each child. Documentation is comprised of written anecdotal notes, pictures, or videos. Once all of the objectives have documentation entered, teachers are able to begin assessing students through the color band system. During parent teacher conferences, a Gold “report card” is printed to show parents where their students are at currently and what their next developmental steps will be. (Burts, Berke, Hoeroman, Baker, Bickart, Patton, Sanders, 2016).

Differentiation

To assist in meeting the individual needs of the student the lessons planned for the students were differentiated by content, process, and modified to the learning environment. Differentiated instruction is personalizing instruction to meet individual students’ needs. Ongoing assessment was integrated into each learning experience by tracking student interaction with each work system. I collected data to track how many minutes the students interacted with the work system each day. I also recorded written observations of sociodramatic play skills that I observed within the classroom setting during free choice play time.

While creating the dramatic play work systems, I had to be intentional so that both of the students would be able to complete the work systems. In all the work systems, I limited the number of steps to four to assure developmental appropriateness. I included very specific visuals (e.g., putting a piece of pizza on a plate, or a dog eating food) as guides to provide guidance in

each work system. The work systems included lessons that were taught multiple times to create a routine which was embedded into their daily routine. Both of the students I worked with had specific needs. Therefore, while working with the students, I had to differentiate language levels and the expectations I had for each of them. In addition to the goals of the work systems, I also followed their behavior plan goals.

Work Systems - Structured TEACCH Method

Structured TEACCH is a program used to assist students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in organizing their daily activities. This method can be utilized to increase socio-dramatic play skills. There are four main components of Structured TEACCH: reinforcement, physical structure, schedules, and work systems. The first principle addresses structuring the physical environment for children. The layout of the physical classroom environment is important for students as it should minimize distractions, provide visual cues, and organize the environment. It is also important for students with ASD to have visual supports in order to make their daily activities understandable and predictable. In the classroom, visual schedules are utilized to help students with ASD understand their schedule and manage transitions. Visual schedules also promote independence and provide flexibility in transitions (Carnahan, 2009).

The second principle of Structured TEACCH is using visual supports to teach skills and using structure and visual supports to make curriculum understandable and manageable. This is where work systems are incorporated into the classroom.

Work systems are used to teach students with ASD routines and skills which can then be taken into the classroom environment. There are several work systems for students to complete, and the goal is for each student to complete three work systems each day while at work station. Work systems work on various skills such as sorting, matching, counting, fine-motor skills,

socio-dramatic play, colors, and shapes. Students complete tasks such as putting clips onto a box, matching picture cards, sorting crayons by color, counting the eggs in an egg carton, taking care of a baby doll, or putting body parts on a potato head. The skills that students learn in work station can then be taken into the classroom and used during large and small group times as well as during play time. (Carnahan, 2008).

Implementation

I implemented socio-dramatic work systems with two of my students who have been verified with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Student 1 and Student 2 are both five years old and this is their second year of preschool in this classroom. One of the students is in the morning class and one is in the afternoon class. Built in to these student's schedules each day is time for them to complete work systems at their workstation. When students complete their work systems, an adult (teacher, speech-pathologist, paraprofessional, or student teacher) accompanies the student to their workstation.

The workstation is located within the speech and language pathologist's room located next to the classroom. During work system time, students are working on targeted skills which includes play skills for both of these students. At a workstation, a student must complete three different work systems. One of these work systems each day is a socio-dramatic play-based work system.

Within the work system the materials the student will need to complete the work system are provided for the student to interact. There is a "checklist" (a visual) of steps that the students will take to complete the work system. For example, the pizza work system I created included four steps. The work system steps: (1) placing the pieces of pizza on a plate, (2) serving the pizza by placing a slice on each plate, (3) putting a fork on each plate, and (4) giving a cup to each

person. The checklist is laminated and has velcro check marks to check off each step when completed. The goal of the work systems is to increase socio-dramatic play skills in these children.

Results

When I began implementing the socio-dramatic work systems (September 2019) the students were very focused on completing each step of the checklist. They completed the steps of the checklist but did not elaborate on them. The students would follow each step of the checklist and it would take them between 10-15 seconds to complete a work system. The students both completed these work systems each day of the semester, and will continue to do so next semester.

By mid-November, Student 1 was able to engage in doing “cheers” with me and will use forks to take “bites” of the pizza. In early November, Student 2 made comments about how the pizza is hot or the water is cold. In early December, Student 1 was observed changing a baby’s diaper making comments such as “baby poop” and using a cloth to “wipe the bottom.” In early December, Student 2 was observed making comments that it is “time to take dog to the vet” and the “dog needs a shot, ouch!” This demonstrated that both Student 1 and Student 2 have started to learn those sociodramatic play skills and are starting to realize that they can use pretend objects to represent real items and imitate actions with those items.

Student 1 made significant progress in developing his socio-dramatic play skills (imitating actions and using items to represent) through these work systems. Outside of workstation during play time in the classroom, teachers started to observe more socio-dramatic play skills. For example, with teacher guidance and attention, Student 1 transferred socio-dramatic play skills in his play with Legos in the block area. He built a structure that he labeled

as his house. He then used three Lego figurines that he labeled as himself, his brother, and his father. His dramatic play skills increased over time and he placed the Lego people to sleep, had them eat, and he put them in a car and brought them to school.

Student 2 also demonstrated some growth in his socio-dramatic play skills. His two preferred play areas are the toys or books centers. While in the toy area, he crawls on the floor pushing a car around. In the book area, he will often climb inside a boxlike structure (quiet area) that is in the classroom and look at the pictures in a book.

With teacher guidance, he will now come to non-preferred play areas such as the house or art area. With teacher guidance, he will pretend to cook in the house area with some of his peers. He will take play ideas from his peers and has been observed stirring a pot on the stove with a spoon, getting water from the sink, and serving cupcakes to his peers. In the art area, he engaged in socio-dramatic play by playing with Play-Doh. In the art area, there is a plastic ice cream cone that students can put their Play-Doh in. With teacher guidance, he pretended to fill the cone with ice cream and then pretended to eat it.

Progress with Teaching Strategies Gold

Both Students 1 and 2 have advanced their socio-dramatic play skills since the beginning of the semester. It still takes teacher guidance and direction to help bring the socio-dramatic play skills out, which is to be expected. However, both have made progress from where they were at before the implementation of socio-dramatic work systems in September 2019. Socio-dramatic play is assessed using Teaching Strategies Gold. The specific objective I used to assess the students on falls under the cognitive domain within Gold. Objective 14 states, “The child uses symbols and images to represent something not present.” Subcategory 14b states that children

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will “engage in sociodramatic play.” Using Gold, the goal is to have all students to move up two levels for each objective during their time in preschool.

In May of 2019, Student 1 was a level two on the color band progression. Level two for this objective is typical of a one to two-year old child. Student 1 was four years old at the time of the assessment. In October of 2019, Student 1 remained at a level two on the color band progression. The description of level two according to Teaching Strategies Gold is, “imitates actions of others during play; uses real objects as props” (Burts et al., 2016). While Student 1 (currently level three) is not quite at a level four, he is showing progress in moving to the next level. Teachers have observed significant growth and improvement in the socio-dramatic play skills of this child. Teaching Strategies Gold has helped us to track and monitor his learning progression.

In May of 2019, Student 2 was at a level four on the color band progression. Level four is typical of a late three or early four-year old. During the October checkpoint, Student 2 was still at a level four as a five year old. Gold describes a level four as, “acts out familiar or imaginary scenarios; may use props to stand for something else” (Burts et al., 2016). When data was last recorded in December, Student 2 was at a level five which is typical of a four year old preschooler. Level five is an ‘in between’ level, which has no description in the Gold strategies. Student 2 has passed the skills of a level four but is not quite at a level six. Level six would be typical of a four-year old preschooler through a student in kindergarten. Level six is described by Gold as, “interacts with 2 or more children during pretend play, assigning and/or assuming roles and discussing actions; sustains play scenario for up to 10 minutes” (Burts et al., 2016). Student 2 has continually made progress, but does not interact with other children independently and cannot sustain scenarios for up to 10 minutes.

Discussion

Reflection

In completing this Capstone project, I have learned more about using the Structured TEACCH method of teaching students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Working with these two students one-on-one each day during their workstation time has helped me form a relationship with the students and has enabled me to help develop their socio-dramatic play skills. Using work systems is a very systematic way to teach students how to acquire new skills. These students started off following each of the steps of the checklist and completing that work system. The students are now able to not only complete the steps on the checklist, but elaborate on them and are able to play with the work systems. The goal skills have been generalized to the classroom. Both students have both been observed using socio-dramatic play skills independently in the classroom setting.

I feel one of the strengths of my Capstone project was the consistency of it. Every morning and afternoon, both students were provided with a visual schedule in order to complete their routines. Students used their visual schedules to hang up their backpacks, go to the bathroom, do table work, and then come to workstation. I was very consistent in taking the students to the workstation and completing the work systems with them each day. I made sure the students did at least one socio-dramatic work system each day, as well as two other work systems. Being consistent with the students and holding them accountable for doing the work systems each day helped them both progress in their socio-dramatic play skills.

If I were to change something about this project, I would change how I collected the data. I would have collected more written or video-recorded observations. Had I collected more data I could have had work samples of student progress to provide to the parents and my cooperating

teacher. I did make notations when I saw students showing progress in the classroom setting.

However, I wish I would have collected more data of the students' progress during the workstation to demonstrate evidence of student progress, rather than just my observations of the student progress.

Conclusion

Overall, I think that the implementation of these socio-dramatic play work systems has helped my students improve their socio-dramatic play skills in the classroom setting. Both of the students have moved up one level on the Gold color bands. The goal for every preschooler in the program is to move up two levels by the end of the school year. As it is December, the students are on track to move up another level during the spring semester and are on track for meeting their goals. Using work systems, students learned how to engage in pretend play with objects and were able to imitate familiar actions. In addition, they demonstrated how to use items to represent other items in both the workstation setting and the classroom setting.

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Appendix A: Work System Photos



Baby Work System



Pasta Work System



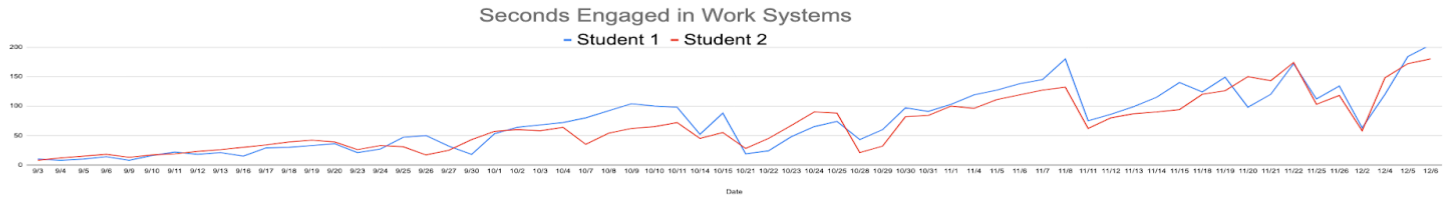
Pizza Work System



Vet Work System

Appendix B: Graphs & Tables

Seconds



Date	Student 1	Student 2
9/3	10 seconds	8 seconds
9/4	8 seconds	12 seconds
9/5	10 seconds	15 seconds
9/6	14 seconds	18 seconds
9/9	8 seconds	13 seconds
9/10	16 seconds	17 seconds
9/11	22 seconds	19 seconds
9/12	18 seconds	23 seconds
9/13	21 seconds	26 seconds
9/16	15 seconds	30 seconds
9/17	29 seconds	34 seconds
9/18	30 seconds	39 seconds
9/19	33 seconds	42 seconds
9/20	36 seconds	41 seconds
9/23	21 seconds	26 seconds
9/24	27 seconds	33 seconds
9/25	47 seconds	31 seconds
9/26	50 seconds	17 seconds
9/27	32 seconds	25 seconds
9/30	18 seconds	43 seconds
10/1	53 seconds	57 seconds
10/2	63 seconds	60 seconds
10/3	68 seconds	58 seconds
10/4	72 seconds	60 seconds
10/7	80 seconds	35 seconds
10/8	92 seconds	54 seconds
10/9	104 seconds	62 seconds
10/10	100 seconds	65 seconds
10/11	98 seconds	72 seconds
10/14	52 seconds	45 seconds
10/15	88 seconds	55 seconds
10/21	19 seconds	28 seconds
10/22	24 seconds	45 seconds

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10/23	48 seconds	67 seconds
10/24	65 seconds	90 seconds
10/25	74 seconds	88 seconds
10/28	43 seconds	21 seconds
10/29	60 seconds	32 seconds
10/30	97 seconds	82 seconds
10/31	91 seconds	84 seconds
11/1	103 seconds	100 seconds
11/4	119 seconds	96 seconds
11/5	127 seconds	111 seconds
11/6	138 seconds	118 seconds
11/7	145 seconds	127 seconds
11/8	180 seconds	132 seconds
11/11	75 seconds	62 seconds
11/12	86 seconds	80 seconds
11/13	99 seconds	87 seconds
11/14	115 seconds	90 seconds
11/15	140 seconds	94 seconds
11/18	124 seconds	120 seconds
11/19	149 seconds	126 seconds
11/20	98 seconds	150 seconds
11/21	120 seconds	143 seconds
11/22	172 seconds	174 seconds
11/25	112 seconds	103 seconds
11/26	134 seconds	118 seconds
12/2	63 seconds	58 seconds
12/3	120 seconds	148 seconds
12/4	184 seconds	172 seconds
12/5	190 seconds	162 seconds
12/6	204 seconds	180 seconds