Robert Chase

EDU – 615

Case Study

University of New England

I.   INTRODUCTION:

The student I have selected for my case study, Brendan, is a six year old, first grade boy. He generally is an affable child and has a good rapport with his peers, as he socializes and interacts well with others, with no real behavioral issues. At our school, students in Kindergarten through second grades, receive an above Satisfactory (S+), a Satisfactory (S), a less than Satisfactory (S-), or a Not Satisfactory (N) grade. Brendan generally received satisfactory grades in the following areas: reading, writing, listening, mathematics, art, music, and physical education.

Occasionally he would receive a less than satisfactory grade (S-) in reading, listening, work habits, and conduct. Brendan also has received unsatisfactory (N) grades occasionally in work habits. His fine motor and gross motor skills are excellent, as evidenced by his above satisfactory (S+) grades in these areas. When work habits or conduct has been an issue, it is due to stubbornness/defiance. Brendan has, on more than one occasion, refused to complete tasks and class work as a result. He also has shown signs of defiance when he feels that members of his group are not giving him a "fair chance".

It has been noted that there is a family history of attention difficulties. He has a reward system at home, based on his behavior. In April of 2011, Brendan had tubes placed in his ears to address his low audible tone. His parents and his doctors suggested that this might be the reason for his inability to attentively follow instructions in class; however he continues to lose attention. Brendan needs one on one support to finish tasks

and has trouble working independently. In the classroom, he has difficulty adjusting to change in routines. Brendan's written expression appears legible and clear. He is capable of reading high frequency words, but presents difficulty in testing.

II.   OBSERVATIONS:

Lesson 1 – Brain Gym

Upon observing Brendan in various classroom settings, he tends to react and participate differently in each. In this lesson, we discussed brain related information and activities and how these activities tie into learning. First, we discussed the five distinct domains of cognitive and behavioral functions: memory, concentration and attention, language skills, visual and spatial, and executive functions. Memory and new learning is a necessary and important function of the human brain. Our personal identity is framed by our memory and ability to learn from these memories. Attention is the most basic and necessary function of the brain. The brain can attend to information from the five sensory pathways. Perhaps the most fundamental and critical behavior of your brain is language. The ability to communicate is necessary to our species and survival. Your brain has the ability to appreciate and interpret space in multi-dimensions. This skill is necessary for behaviors such as driving and directional ability.

The class then discussed ways to train or exercise the brain, such as engaging your brain with unfamiliar tasks, travel as a way to stimulate the brain, and engaging in physical exercise. After the lecture/discussion part of the lesson, we had the children practice some of the brain gym activities in class. These brain breaks ranged from

writing the alphabet in the air with one hand while balancing on one foot, tracing the number eight with two hands together and head kept still, right hand to the left ear and left hand to the nose – switching to do the opposite on the signal, etc.

Using these memory tasks hand in hand with Social Cognitive Theory and using techniques to intrinsically motivate Brendan seems to work very well. Brendan appears to be more intrinsically motivated to do well in class. He clearly enjoys positive feedback and belief that he is fully capable of succeeding. We do not normally use extrinsic rewards for individuals in class, but will do so on occasion.

We generally use a class conduct chart; some of the homeroom teachers have extrinsic rewards if their class receives a determined number of compliments for the week or a certain number of marbles in the prize jar. Brendan did extremely well with this lesson on his own. He did struggle with the brain breaks at the onset, but after practicing and working briefly with myself, he was able to have sustained success. Normally, Brendan struggles greatly when the activity/task objectives are presented to the entire group. Lacking the ability to focus at times, he is often unable to comprehend what is expected of him.

In this lesson, Brendan was given the opportunity to continue to practice each brain break and was achieving various levels of success. When he visibly looked frustrated, I would provide some one on one support and feedback. This provided Brendan the opportunity to meet the lesson objectives. The only real issue he had was near the end of the lesson. He was working with a partner, and there were cooperation issues that the two of them eventually resolved.

Lesson 2 – Independent Work/Large Group Activities

Today the students in Brendan's class were working independently with pool noodles. The class was exploring with the noodles individually, using them in various ways, such as balancing them on different body parts, follow the leader, etc. After this warm-up, the students participated in a tag game using the pool noodles. Specific instructions and rules were given for the tag activity, such as, no tagging above the waist; if the tagger touches someone with the pool noodle, they drop the noodle while the person tagged does a predetermined physical activity; anyone can pick up a noodle that is dropped onto the floor; etc.

The primary motivational strategy used for this particular activity/task was the use of the Social Cognitive Theory, which states that students can be motivated to engage in behaviors they see modeled by others, especially if the individual being observed is perceived as being similar to the observer. At the beginning of the lesson, student helpers were used to demonstrate the objectives while verbal instructions were given. This helps the visual learners understand the goals of the activity, and is something I do for every lesson.

During the introduction/demonstration phase of the lesson, Brendan had some difficulty focusing on the instructions at the beginning of each activity. This seems to be a common occurrence, as it ties into his difficulties during transaction time. Brendan participated during all activities. He appears to really enjoy working with the pool noodles. However, there were times when Brendan would decide to do something that was not modeled or demonstrated in class.

Lesson 3 – Partner Activities

In this particular lesson, the students worked with partners. Students were given directions to find a partner and proceed to a designated area in the room. The activity area is centered around the painted rectangle lines in the center of the room. Each pair of partners has beanbags – one for each student. The activity is called Poly Fishing. Surrounding the rectangle are cones, and within the rectangle (the ocean), there are various poly spots scattered about.

The objective is for each student to stand behind their cone and, using an underhanded toss to throw their "fishing line" or "fishing lure" into the "ocean" and try to catch a fish by having the beanbag land on the poly spot. The beanbag has to either be on top of the poly spot or at least be touching the spot. If the beanbag is on the poly spot, that student retrieves their beanbag and also picks up the poly spot their beanbag was on or touching, returning to their cone. If the student's beanbag is not touching the poly spot, they walk out and pick up their beanbag, returning to their cone. The student alternate turns during the activity.

The activity continues until all of the fish are caught. The students then have to return the fish to the ocean, after which the activity starts over. Adaptations of the activity included adding larger fish and or sharks (larger poly spots) as well as adding number values to the different colored poly spots. By giving the spots different number values, we were able to work on some addition and subtraction skills.

The motivational techniques used for this cooperative learning activity were the use of extrinsic values/goals, developing self-efficacy, and some use of social cognitive theory. By adapting the rules slightly (adding point values to the poly spots), this

provided an extrinsic goal for Brendan. He was very much interested in trying to help his partner achieve the highest points for the activity. This lesson was a good way to help build Brendan's self-efficacy towards the tasks and activities in class. The success level was very attainable; therefore it was a great way to build self-esteem.

Brendan did extremely well with this lesson. He was enthusiastic about the activity and cooperated extremely well with his partner. He was trying his best to obtain as many points as possible. Brendan had varying degrees of success with this lesson. More importantly, he did not get frustrated when he struggled, nor did he have any issues with his partner. As I observed him, it was rewarding to see Brendan thoroughly enjoying himself. In my opinion, it is very important that my students not only learn in my class, but that they are actually excited to do so.

Lesson 4 – Small Group/Cooperative Learning

Today's lesson was perhaps the most challenging of the four. In this lesson, our students were learning how to use the array of basketball hoops on the small playground. There are approximately 12 hoops for the nine stations. These basketball hoops are part of what is called BankShot (website address on reference page). BankShot is an activity where students move from station to station attempting to shoot the ball through the hoop or hoops. The hoops are set up to become more challenging as the student progresses from station to station. The first station is relatively easy, depending on the skill level of the student. The most difficult station is station nine. There are also three squares (red, yellow, blue) from where the students must shoot. The yellow square is closest to the basket, the blue square the farthest from the basket.

The rules normally state that each player shoots three times from each square and keeps track of their points for made shots. In order to ensure that each group gets an opportunity to shoot at each BankShot station, each student shot only once from each square. After introducing the procedures and pattern for BankShot, the students were divided into nine groups.   Each group spent three minutes at every station. The students were paired up and took turns shooting at the baskets. After a student shot the ball, his or her partner would hand them another ball and retrieve the ball that was shot, in order to keep the line moving smoothly and to reduce wait times. Since this was their first time doing this activity, and since it was a first grade class, the students did not keep track of their partner's points. At the end of the three minutes, the students moved to the next station, trying successfully to shoot the ball into the hoop. Teamwork is vital to the success of each student in this activity.

In this lesson, I promoted mastery goals and used scaffolding. I made sure to promote collaboration among the groups so each child could build on what they learned and improve on the results. By approaching the lesson the way I did, I provided each student a chance to understand and take ownership of how to participate in the game on their own. Although this was the initial lesson using the Bankshot hoops, I still wanted to promote mastery of the lesson. I realized that not every student is going to master the skills immediately, even the older students who also participated in this lesson throughout the week. However, through setting mastery goals along with effort and improvements, the students should be able to master the basics at the very least.

Brendan struggled often in this lesson. The fact that the tasks were new were an incentive to try and do well, however, the challenge of some stations overwhelmed him at

times. When Brendan had difficulty being successful with some of the tasks, he became visibly frustrated. Unfortunately, when this happens, he resorts to not cooperating with his group mates and sulking. Brendan's partners attempted to persuade him to keep trying, but as soon as he was unsuccessful with the task, he reverted back to his uncooperative ways.

III.   EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES:

The most effective strategies to use for Brendan would have to be scaffolding, self-efficacy, setting mastery goals, and using the social cognitive theory. These strategies work really well as they address areas that benefit Brendan.

With scaffolding I tended to make him obtain ownership of the task rather than what everyone else is doing because the "have to". By building his self-efficacy, I instilled a belief that he could be successful at various tasks. Self-efficacy is vital to a student's self-esteem. Once Brendan believed he could be successful, his effort increased.

By setting mastery goals for the lesson, I gave Brendan the framework to succeed and to master the material being learned. By doing so, I tried to instill the belief that he could succeed. Lastly, by using Social Cognitive Theory, Brendan was able to model his behavior after peers in his class. Rather than demonstrate the expected behavior, I chose peers to help those students who were struggling. The added benefit of this is for the students to feel that they can emulate their peers.

Strategies that would not work with Brendan are helping him whenever he appears to need help. This help seeking can create a dependence on the teacher. Sometimes he does genuinely need help, but other times he is just relying on help from the teacher or seeking attention. I also would not try to use intrinsic goals as he does not seem to be motivated intrinsically. Brendan truly does appear to be motivated extrinsically (praise, rewards, etc.).

I would definitely recommend that Brendan's teachers use the Social Cognitive Theory as often as possible. The more opportunities he has to observe modeled behavior, the better. Of course, building his self-esteem plays an important role in the success of future lessons. One of the best strategies I implemented was the student interest surveys. They were extremely valuable and provided me with many lesson ideas. With Brendan's grade level, the parents helped answer the surveys, but I asked that they kept it as relevant to the first grade students as possible. Flexible grouping also works well with Brendan, since he is used to working in these groups in class. He generally works hard when in small groups. However, he sometimes has personality problems. One on one activities are also good for Brendan, but there has been problems in that area as well.

IV.   CONCLUSION:

While focusing on Brendan in our bi-weekly classes, I was able to come to a few conclusions. One of the first things I learned is that what motivates one student does not always work with *all* students. Since all students learn differently, I also know that I may need to adapt my motivational techniques when necessary. Students that are not

motivated intrinsically have difficulty being motivated to do well in school. Often it is a result of parents not placing a high value on school or the student may do well in school just to through with as little "hassle" as possible.

Something that has emerged as being extremely valuable is a strategy I became aware of in my Differentiated Learning course (EDU610). As mentioned in the section above, I found great success using student interest surveys. The surveys provided information that was used to design lesson plans. The benefit of the surveys is two fold. The students get a feeling that I was truly interested in them, not only in school, but outside of the school setting as well. Second, the surveys provide an opportunity for me to implement student interests into my lesson plans. The surveys can be used at various times throughout the school year.

Flexible grouping works extremely well for all students and is used every day in my classes. Often my lessons are geared for the total group, such as team activities or cooperative learning. When using manipulatives in class, my students are generally working independently on a specific task. Partner work is important when teaching social skills or working on hand-eye coordination tasks. Finally, when working in small groups, students are relying on teamwork, social skills, and cooperative learning.

It is my hope that I can motivate all of my students and make their experiences in my class worthwhile. This course has provided me with the tools I need to motivate the most difficult of learners.

References

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