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Working with the Unknown

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Abstract

My capstone project consists of developing my personal skills and knowledge when working with children with special needs, specifically Autism Spectrum Disorder. I provide some insight and background knowledge the reader will need to know. Then this capstone will showcase the most important findings of my research and how I applied it while caring for these children. It will also consider the perspectives of key stakeholders and how they benefit from this research. To conclude I will relish my findings of what worked and how my innovative approach helped others.

Keywords: Researched, Autism, Coping Strategies

Introduction to your Capstone Project

Section 1: Innovative Approach

Bringing Together Perspectives

Children are unique individuals. Everyday they grow and learn important life skills like how to live in the world. They are guided primarily by people who love and support them. What happens though when a child needs special care because of a disorder that makes them learn and think differently than others? To find a way to solve this question I needed to learn and gather information that could help me. The project that I completed in 6 weeks is a research study on coping mechanisms and ways to deal with outbursts from children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. There are many behavioral scientists, psychologists, and educators who have broadened the scope of knowledge on what autism is, how it can be detected, and different pathways children can lead down toward. According to researchers, "Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by the association of abnormalities in social interaction and communication with restricted or repetitive patterns of thoughts and behaviors" (Vernhet et al, 2019). Understanding how to handle clients with aggression and over stimulation by reducing the causation and extremity of the behavior is the most important part of improving my job performance. . I measured the progress of my clients week to week by keeping track of the beverity and the scale of outbursts.

Everyone involved or who knows a child with autism understands how hard it can be at times to manage any difficulties. My research outlines the best ways that my clients from nannying can benefit from research that I have conducted. The parents will be assured knowing that their nanny will be able to handle difficult situations and they can provide support for their

child. The children will hopefully be able to settle down quicker and be assured that I am in control and that they are safe. Every child has different needs that need to be tended too in its own unique way. Therefore, for this project to be successful I will need to draw information from all different studies and perspectives. I intend to research as many different types of coping mechanisms, so that I can be prepared for new behaviors and situations when they arise.

For my research I based my findings off of who I take care of. My first client is a bright 8 year old and for the purpose of anonymity we will name him James. He has a list of diagnoses that stem from his Autism. He is nonverbal and has ADHD with Oppositional Defiant Disorder. My other client is an 11 year old who has been diagnosed as Autistic and he is completely deaf. His name for this paper will be Drew. My other client is an 8 year old boy who has ADHD and is Autistic. His name will be Ian. All of these boys are unique and require different needs that need to be tended to.

Creating Innovative Approaches: Beyond Either/Or

I am exploring different ways to approach the children when they are triggered. I will not be focusing on just the conventional ways to handle aggression or misbehavior. The sources that I intend to use will be from the children's working behaviorists, peer reviewed scholarly articles/studies, published works, and their parents. These sources and information within are very informative and up to date.

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Section 2: Emotional Intelligence

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Awareness of Self and Others

This project that I am completing is for my current career path. It will benefit me right now as I am working with these kids. In the future if I choose to keep being a nanny or if I

decide to become a teacher, then having this deep understanding and knowledge will expand my opportunities. Through this learning I have learned that I need to be open minded when applying any new coping mechanism. Sometimes things don't work out and it takes time and repetition. My clients on the other hand have become more aware of the dynamics changing in our relationship. The biggest change is a shift in authority and response. This is seen when changing activities, or reprimand.

Consideration of the Audience: Emotional Intelligence

Autism Spectrum disorder is usually diagnosed at a young age when the child shows signs of non social skills and cannot make eye contact "Diagnosis of autism for children (from birth to age 21) continues to increase, with the current rate being 1 in 110 children" (Shawler et al., 2017). "Research suggests that when families are surrounded with dedicated, efficient support systems, they cope and adapt to challenges better than those families with little or no support" (Shawler et al., 2017). Without support many children cannot live up to their potential. They do not have the ability to control their own emotions when they are overwhelmed. It is much harder for the kids to find their center or middle ground. My job is to provide that support and help them decompress after a meltdown. Gradually they will gain more trust.

The parents have a harder job because they also deal with discipline. Multiple studies have shown that parents "should be a central target in prevention and treatment interventions for children with ASD to reduce the emergence of child disruptive behavior problems. Reducing challenging behavior… may improve the rate of skill acquisition and improve the parent–child relationship" (Shawler et al., 2017). The basis for parenting and home life is crucial to the success of the child. Parents are vital because they have knowledge on how and why their kid

might be feeling a certain way. "Three challenging areas of social emotional development that are commonly experienced by individuals with ASD: anxiety, social isolation, and grief" (Ahlers et al, 2017). These 3 feelings for anyone are very hard to cope with alone and having parental support can make a big difference in the children's lives.

There have been many different studies on different behaviors and the best ways to manage or decrease the behavior. "Behaviour management in autism is a skill achieved through an alternative practice, namely Neuro Linguistic Programming"(Dhawan, 2021). NLP establishes trust and guides people toward their main goals or purpose. This is done objectively through the mind by focusing on future endeavors. In other fields like psychology this is referred to as confirmation bias or self fulfilling prophecy. "NLP was used as a comparative intervention to ABA because it is known to work effectively in changing behavioural patterns" (Dhawan, 2021). An example of its effectiveness is seen through play therapy because it can enhance the need for social interaction. In autistic children this is a breakthrough because many cannot or will not have these social interactions.

In another study I came across that I thought would be interesting to note are other coping strategies for different cultures. The "Chinese culture emphasises discipline and obedience, which may influence coping strategies of children with autism" (Chin Et Al, 2017). Coping strategies are used to to help children with the following, "problem-solving, acting-out, avoidance, seeking help and self-regulation. These themes included multiple coping strategies, which employed the concepts of engagement and disengagement" (Chin Et Al, 2017). In a study that was conducted by Taiwanese children with Autism, they were surveyed by what coping strategies they used when they were stressed. The study found that, "most of the Taiwanese

children use both problem-solving and emotion-focused coping strategies" (Chin et al, 2017). It is interesting how culture shapes the person's ability to cope under hard circumstances.

Applied Behavior Analysis is the most popular method for working with framing to autism and its applied behavior analysis treatment provides an exemplary case because autism research is inconclusive about its cause and/or prevention"(Fortunado Et Al, 2007). Applied behavior analysis works because all factors are taken into consideration and applied to help the person. The most important part to recognize is that all behaviors can change and improve. "Being aware of the frequency of the potential threat, the symptoms of the condition, knowledge that the condition can be improved, and the efficacy of treatment options" are what it takes to make an actual difference. (Fortunado Et Al, 2007)

An approach that is often used, "begins with fairly structured and intensive teaching sessions involving discrete-trial training in a one-on-one training situation." Just like in a regular public school students are actively involved in their education. ABA specialists use response prompts to gauge a reaction and evoke target behaviors. "Correct responses by the child are reinforced with preferred objects or activities, so as to increase the behavior" (Fortunado et al, 2007). Children were more likely to repair a breakdown by changing the signal than repeating or adding something to the previous signal. Golinkoff's research was very important for studies involving development of children through the prelinguistic period. "A study surveyed the different types or repairs needed for a child to communicate the types of repairs used by the children showed an initial increase in the use of repetition from the prelinguistic to the early one-word stage followed by a decrease, and an increase in modifications and decrease in repetition as language competence developed"(Fortunado et al, 2007). They also used gestorial

forms to help communication breakdowns. Every researcher noticed that every kid that had been using gestures as a repair when they had a breakdown.

This research has led to studying why children have breakdowns. What mostly caused it was the inability of a child to communicate even with people they were close to. "Attempts to repair these breakdowns occur early in children's development before the use of words, when children seek to repair breakdowns using gestural forms that may repeat, modify or change the previous signal"(Fortunato et al, 2007). Another study used impaired theory of mind to "explain some of the social and communication impairments. What was missing included joint attention behaviors and formal communication systems. Children who were not taught these forms then relied on idiosyncratic and informal behaviors to communicate. Idiosyncratic refers to using language that specifically means 1 thing to a person. James for example uses "ba" to say he wants something. Drew cannot speak so his gestures are in sign language and he created his own sign for hamburger. Every child is unique and comes up with their own way of communicating. They can also communicate through aggression, self injury, or directly taking a hand and leading the person to what they want. In a study 10 participants were given scripted interactions that were used to evoke a certain repair strategy or to discriminate against it. The two communications functions used were requesting help and requesting attention to an event or object. Results showed, "When these requests were misinterpreted or overlooked, most participants attempted at least one repair, although this was more likely to occur with the function of requesting help" (Fortunado et al, 2007). Repair Strategies that the participants used were very repetitious or they made changes to their signal.

Problem behaviors cause significant damage to a child's emotional and physical

wellbeing according to a book by researched behaviorist Brady. It can also impact their quality of life by reducing access to activities and learning opportunities. Brady stated "repairing communication breakdowns may decrease frustration and thereby decrease aberrant behaviour if the repaired communication is responded to by the communication partner" (p. 1345, 1995). He also found that when children cannot effectively communicate to others what they want they can start to respond with aggression or self-harm. If not treated right they will continue with the impulsive behavior. "For individuals with severe disabilities, avoidance, attention, tangibles, and self-stimulation have been identified as communicative functions that may motivate challenging behaviour" (Keen et al, 2003).

Functional communication training (FCT) has emerged as an effective intervention for children with problem behaviours. "FCT involves identifying the communicative function of the problem behaviour and then replacing the behaviour with a more acceptable form of communication that serves the same function," (Carr & Durand, 1985). Problem behavior stems from frustration or protest from failing to fully express their wants and needs. The other reason problem behavior occurs can be a repair strategy according to Keen.

Naturalistic Developmental Behavior intervention has also been effective at reducing problem behavior, but it is not widely used by professionals, (Hampton et al, 2021). It involves using the child's natural setting then instilling control between the child and therapist.

When analyzing behavior at school, I thought it could be meaningful if it was also applied in the home setting as well. "Daily behavior report cards (DBRCs) have shown promise in reducing problematic classroom behaviors,"(Riden et al, 2021).This can also be used at home to reinforce positive behavior therefore reducing the amount of outbursts. It has been effective

for children with ADHD, delayed learning, and high incidence disabilities. To study its effects with ASD they created and tracked the students. "The purpose of the current study was twofold: (1) to examine the effectiveness of a DBRC in reducing off-task classroom behavior for a high school student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and (2) to evaluate the delivery of an intensive intervention by a novice special education teacher," (Riden et al, 2021). It was then proven to reduce off task behaviors. If this can be implemented in the classroom then it can also be used at home to help children focus on chores and other activities.

Value to Others: Emotional Intelligence

The stakeholders benefit from this knowledge because it is important to know. When telling them of this project they too were interested in any good readings or findings that I had found through my research. If I can find a way to help calm down one of my clients in a fast and effective manner then I can share it with anyone who might work with them. This can benefit Ians specialist if he reads something new. He can also understand key differences that might slip the mind. The parents have been invested and have given me valuable information about how their child communicates. They have also given me tips on research and what they are most interested in like FCT and NLP. Through this process the kids have also benefited and their behavior has improved significantly.

<center>**Section 3: Creative Thinking**</center>

The Creative Framework

Working with kids is not easy and in general they are the creative bunch. To keep up with them I needed to think outside the box. When a kid is in a good mood and they are content with what they are doing it is pretty easy, but as soon as they get bored that is when they find trouble.

I have to be creative when working with these kids by finding new ways of doing something, or by creating something. Ian for example loves Mickey Mouse and he responds, focuses, and participates in anything that has to do with Mickey. Drew loves crafting and glueing, so every month I have introduced a new type of craft to him to keep him busy. James doesn't like staying home and he gets bored pretty easily in the car, so what I have tried is introducing him to a new genre of music whenever we go somewhere. His emotions are affected by the type of music he is listening to, so I have to try my best to find upbeat music that he can respond positively to. I never want to get stuck and have nothing else to do, so getting creative is important. My approach is creative in that I'm not focusing on 1 solution to fit all problems. I am coming up with new ways to appease different solutions.

Unique Approach/es to Project

My approach is unique because my research is open minded. I want to hear and read about anything that would help. I want to make sure that I am benefiting the child with how I am working with them. I think that by conducting a study and tracking the behavior it is a unique approach to this capstone. I am integrating creativity into each step and I am also learning by working with these amazing kids. By combining these resources I feel like I will be better equipped at handling the tough moments. Accepting and listening to the perspective of others as well is also a unique approach.

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Section 4: Your Innovative Solution

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Accomplishment of Capstone

I accomplished my goal of gaining a better understanding of what I can do to help reduce the amount of outbursts. My client Drew has reduced the amount of times he cries or has a

meltdown to once every couple of days. This is a major difference in that before he would cry and have an outburst every hour or every other hour. His crying was due to poor communication and boredom. What helped him out the most was naturalistic behavior development. He needed to gain trust in me before he was able to be comfortable. If he gets upset his coping strategy is to take a deep breath and sit still until his emotion has passed.

My 11 year old client Ian can get aggressive when he is communicating because sometimes I cannot understand exactly what he is trying to say. Any new sign that he learns, his mom teaches me. Also whenever he becomes aggressive his behavioralist has taught us certain maneuvers and calming exercises that we can do to help him. In my research and what I have tried is when he has sensory overload he responds best to watching a calm video while laying on his back. Within 5 minutes he is noticeably calmer and his focus has shifted. Before he would respond aggressively by pulling hair, scratching, and biting It would take an upwards of 40 min for him to settle down by someone physically restraining him. Knowing this new coping strategy has really helped calm him down and his response after being overloaded is to grab his phone instead of going after someone.

James has gotten better at listening and focusing through his report card. At school he has made really big gains in interaction and focusing. To help him at home I created his own verbal report card by enforcing a positive response. If he asks for something rather than just taking it, he will be praised and I will mark it on his behavior chart. At the end of the day he will be able to decide which Mickey cartoon we watch. This had an almost immediate change in his behaviors .

Innovative Approach to the Problem/Project

My solution is actually working with these children on a one on one aspect. I am their

primary caretaker until their parents return home. It is my obligation to keep the child safe and also to help keep them happy and engaged. My approach to researching and learning is open ended. I am taking advice, reading actual books, and researching credible sources online. I want to hear as many stories and read as many examples of different behaviors, so that I can be helpful in different situations. Experts are great but parents have a deeper insight into their child and that child's specific needs. I may just be researching, but I am applying whatever I can to my everyday interactions with these incredible kids.

Section 5: Results

Benefits to Stakeholders

The stakeholders have been an important part of my project because they have guided me and have also been learning with me. Anyone who works with these kids like the parents, behaviorists, and I will be able to apply these new strategies whenever their behavior is unacceptable. If we are all on the same page then the child will have stability. With that they can accomplish more and learn more proficiently.

Impact on Stakeholders

Learning is progressing. The more we learn and can gather information on why outbursts happen and what we can do as their support system is beneficial. It impacts the stakeholders by helping teach them other strategies they may have not used before. It also puts some perspective on why the child may be acting up. New coping strategies help integrate a more purposeful response from the child. It will continue to impact the child as they grow and mature.

Section 6: Conclusion

Each coping strategy has been designed to help control different behaviors that may affect the child. Knowing the most effective ways can help calm a child who has become upset, or reduce the behavior that is unacceptable. This project primarily focused on how I can better myself as a caretaker when working with special needs clients. These studies are important to know because children with ASD deserve to be treated in a way that works for their own uniqueness. I learned that Drew, Ian, and James are all unique kids that have their own way to cope with different feelings when they arise. Every kid will have their own way; it is just a matter of finding it. The skills that I have learned have helped me make swift and decisive actions when dealing with different behaviors. By utilizing this research I have learned valuable skills that will progress my knowledge of how to solve problems when working with special needs children.

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