

# Inquiry in Practice

Tea

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(U) What happens when I engage a student with multiple disabilities in organized physical activities before math and language instruction?

(U) Mult. Disabilities + Phys. Activity

## I. Question Context

**What happens when I engage a student with multiple disabilities in organized physical activities before math and language instruction?**

I am currently tutoring a fourth grade student with Tourette Syndrome and other related behaviors associated with Tourette Syndrome, such as, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder) and tics. When first asked to tutor Robert, I admit I was more than a little hesitant. I knew I would be up for a challenge due to his disorders, and also because I am not familiar with the fourth grade curriculum. I soon found out that the curriculum was not going to be a big problem, but that Robert's ability to participate in the lessons, comprehend what was being taught and recall information from week to week was something more to worry about. I felt that I was failing him and was hopeful that becoming more educated on his disorders could help me make some sort of difference in his life.

I was first in search of instructional strategies that would work more effectively for his specific personality and learning needs. My goal was to help this child become more successful academically and socially.

I began working with Robert in December while his teacher was absent for an extended period of time. He was having difficulty with the material being covered in class, specifically grammar, writing and math. His parents thought my tutoring would be a good way to re-teach and review topics covered in class. They also thought it would be a way to help prevent Robert from losing self-confidence because he wouldn't be so far behind. We meet on a weekly basis for one hour after school. This may not be enough academically, but realistically

it is all we can do for now since he participates in after school activities and does require down time.

Robert's mom first reported to me his confusion with language and difficulty with proper grammar usage. Possessives were the theme during our first meeting. I originally planned on possessives being just a short fifteen minute or so segment of our hour session. We looked at and discussed picture examples using the "possessive s" ('s and s'), then discussed the rules which led us into some written practice. At this point I was hoping that Robert understood, but to my disbelief what we had done in the past hour had not seemed to have sunk in. I left that session feeling very confused and a little discouraged. I knew it was a bad idea to stick to something that wasn't working and felt like a failure because of that. I also wondered if the focus of our sessions should be more on Robert's ability to function as an independent, successful student and person rather than his understanding and mastery of such specific grammar points.

I didn't feel much better at the end of our second session. Robert's mom e-mailed me during the week asking me to work on letter formation in cursive and neatness in print. During that session we worked on handwriting, which was painful for both of us. Robert had a hard time staying on the line and difficulty forming the letters. I talked him through each letter's formation and verbally coached him on their placement in relation to the lines. We tried writing on special lined paper for children who struggle with fine motor skills and handwriting. The paper didn't seem to help much. While frustrated with handwriting, I did feel a little better about the possessives. Maybe what we worked on the week before had sunk in after all. For that session we searched his house for objects and photos. I scribed what Robert told me about each

object and photo. Afterwards, he added the apostrophes without too much trouble. On my ride home, I wondered once again what the focus of our sessions should be. I thought teaching life skills such as problem solving and communication would be more practical for Robert's success.

Sessions three and four left me with similar feelings of confusion. We were now working on descriptive paragraph writing along with balancing equations (which was like beating a dead horse probably more so than our first possessive lesson). I soon realized there were lots of things Robert needed help with that were related to a much larger theme- Tourette Syndrome, ADHD, OCD and tics. I also thought if the small problems were and still are probably caused by a much greater problem (his disorders), then maybe we should work on basic life skills that can be transferred to more specific situations. I thought we should work on how to go about problem solving in math, just thinking of a plan, but not actually solving the problem. I also thought it would benefit him to practice reading body language in order to stay focused in conversations and not go on tangents. I could later teach him how to write this way, acting as if he were the reader who knows nothing about the point the writer is trying to make. As discouraged and confused as I was, I was determined to help Robert.

I evaluated the situation after I left his house. I recognized Robert's difficulty with handwriting, but felt computers and other machines will make up for that in the future. I worried about his lack of organization of thought in oral and written language and his inability to explain or plan out how to solve math problems. Robert sometimes comes up with the correct answers in math, but cannot explain how. His writing had no focus which would leave any reader extremely confused and his verbal (completely off topic) tangents left me

wide-mouthed, not knowing how to respond. I realized there were two things to be concerned with, falling more behind academically and not fitting in socially.

I felt better prepared for the fifth session. Robert's teacher had returned to school and we were more on the same page as far as what the focus of our sessions should be. His teacher came up with a good point. She felt he should possibly take part in physical activity to reduce the tics. She thought that adding physical activity to our sessions could be a possible way to help him organize his thoughts and problem solving strategies. In other words, what doesn't fit or work physically could be related to what doesn't make sense mentally (verbally or in writing). His teacher and I brainstormed a list of physical activities to use at the beginning of my sessions with Robert. I felt somewhat relieved; I had a plan.

I was well-prepared for session five (and feel better prepared for the sessions that followed). Before I started the language and math lessons, I had Robert put together a tangram. He was able to do this with great success visually, but had a hard time (being specific enough) in verbally coaching me to solve the same puzzle. Once the tangram was together again, I placed extra pieces on top in various spots. Robert agreed that the puzzle didn't make sense because it was not completed the correct way according to the directions. I told him this was similar to how he sometimes gives too much unrelated information while speaking and writing. We agreed or more importantly, Robert understood that the puzzle was not focused and that his work sometimes lacks focus as well. What progress!

During another session we began by putting together his fishing pole. Robert verbally directed me in doing this. It was not easy for him. He realized how specific he needed to be in order for me to understand and act out the steps. I later

related the organized steps of setting up his fishing pole to the steps in long division. In sessions that followed I related the fishing pole steps to steps in problem solving and also multiplication. I noticed that this helped redirect Robert to following the steps to get the answers. I must be honest that all of our sessions are not successful. Some days are productive, some moments are productive, and some activities work better than others.

I also must admit that I don't always follow through with this plan of physical activity before each lesson. Robert's mom often hands over what I should work on with him. His mom is extremely supportive and helpful, but I tend to worry more about completing as much of the work she has given me, rather than using some sort of physical activity at the beginning of our sessions.

Robert is a bright and capable child, but misses out on a lot because his disorders often take over his body and mind. These short vocal and motor behaviors and compulsive thoughts put a damper on his attention. I feel they can also become a social problem for him. Even though Robert has friends and is well-liked by his peers, he sometimes has a hard time reading or acting on social cues, such as people's facial and body expressions. He will continue to talk when people appear less interested in what he has to say and even still when people begin to distance themselves from him by beginning to walk away. I worry that his social acceptance may dwindle in the future. These are things his speech and language therapist at school is working on with him as well as his regular education teacher. I was hopeful we could come up with successful instructional strategies through collaboration.

## II. Literature Review

Where to begin researching about my question, What happens when I engage a student with multiple disabilities in organized physical activities before math and language instruction?, seemed rather clear. I first began searching for information about Robert's disorders, Tourette Syndrome, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder) and tics.

Tourette Syndrome is a neurological disorder which is defined by multiple involuntary motor and vocal tics. The exact cause has not been defined, but researchers think it may be due to a biochemical imbalance in the brain. Tic disorders seem to involve dopamine and serotonin (which are chemical neurotransmitters) and their effect on the central nervous system. Although tics may wax and wane in intensity and have times of dormancy and exacerbation, they are always present with Tourette Syndrome (Berlin 2006). Berlin states that "In most patients, emotional stress, tension, anxiety or fatigue may cause an increase of symptoms. Concentration on a non-anxious task usually results in decrease of symptoms. Tics usually do not occur during sleep or are greatly reduced (Berlin, 2006, p. 4)." "ADHD and Obsessive Compulsive Disorders are often associated with Tourette Syndrome and other medical problems can co-exist (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003, p.4)."

This holds true in my experiences with Robert. Each session we start and usually end with a few minute chit chat on unrelated school subjects such as surfing, soccer, fishing and trips we have both taken. Robert rarely tics during these short conversations, but things change once we start school work. He had a few weeks during NJAsk testing that were extremely unproductive. He was unable to carry a normal (focused)

conversation about his school work and tics were almost constant throughout our hour sessions. During one session it was particularly difficult for him to come up with supporting details for a writing topic, it got worse once I asked him to write on large chart paper. He began twitching with the marker as if it was a sword and he was fighting off an enemy. He then asked if I could take over writing because it would "be easier". When I asked him to explain why, he said he was afraid he might "become the pencil" if he wrote with it. When I took over he was better able to verbalize what he was trying to write. This was a perfect way for me to see how ADHD and OCD take over his mind and almost force him to focus on other things that most people are completely unaware of. Some people are able to still concentrate on lessons and conversations while ticcing (Berlin 2006), this is why I will continue to teach slowly while tics occur. I often check in with Robert by asking him to explain what I have just said back to me to see if he is ticcing, just a bit fidgety and unfocused due to ADHD, or if obsessive compulsive thoughts have taken over his mind for a bit. In Robert's interview he explained that he especially likes science because, "it's fun, interesting and I'm pretty good at it". In reviewing my journal entries, I've noticed better verbal communication and concentration during science instruction. On other occasions he has verbalized his uneasy feelings toward math because it's difficult, but he likes to stick with it because he can see where it is useful in real life. Robert has also expressed how "extremely dull" reading and writing can be. He tics most and loses concentration during these subjects.

"A learning plan should consider the many dimensions of TS, including: physical, social-emotional, medical and psychological needs. Ideally this learning plan is developed collaboratively with children, parents, teachers and sometimes counseling



providers (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003, p. 5). " Robert's classroom aide will take extra walks around the building, to the bathroom and to get drinks with him to release tics as well as have him run around outside when he begins to tic more in class. When he returns to the class or the building, he usually works outside in the hallway where there are fewer distractions. I have also asked his mom to have him play outside or use his punching bag before our sessions to hopefully relieve his need to tic, but I have not found a relation between physical activity before our sessions and ticcing. Nor have I found a consistent pattern in when he does and does not tic.

Wilson and Shrimpton (2003) also state that children with Tourette Syndrome have normal intelligence levels, but are often classified as disabled due to lack of an appropriate school care plan. Robert was put in the resource room in second grade with children who could not read or add and subtract. Halfway through the year he was put back into a regular education class with a full-time aide.

"Tic suppression requires much energy and can cause stress which may interfere with a students' ability to concentrate on classroom tasks (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003, p. 5)." Tourette Syndrome is a multi-faceted disorder (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003). Learning to read Robert and decide how to deal with his behavior can be tricky. I make sure I ask him if he's OK before I continue at times and give him choices. For example would he like to write on chart paper or regular paper, would he like to use a calculator or a multiplication table, would he like to start with reading, math or science. I also have him repeat back what we've been working on in his own words.

"Students said that TS reduced concentration, created obsessive thoughts and inhibited class participation, affected their friendships and caused vocals and twitches that disrupted

collaborative group work and learning in general (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003, p. 9)." A couple of incidents happened with Robert in school where his classroom teacher thought he was being disobedient. One time he refused to move his seat closer to another child during group work. His teacher was a bit upset with his behavior, but later spoke to his mother and found out he was afraid to have his chair any closer to a dark spot on the floor because he "didn't want to fall inside" the floor and not return to the "real" world. Another time he walked to the outside water fountain after being asked to use the classroom's fountain. When Robert's teacher asked him why he ignored her he explained that he "just couldn't stop thinking about the time the spider was climbing in the sink and got washed down the drain". I guess that's a good enough explanation for a child with OCD. Robert's teacher will now ask him with whom and where he would like to work during group and independent activities. She does not see any difference in his tics or concentration, but is hopeful that OCD does not take over him in class for reasons that she could have avoided.

Making Robert feel safer and more relaxed may have helped subdue the tics and obsessive behaviors at times, but also could have allowed them to become more apparent. Berlin (2006) discusses that the most important thing for people who are involved with children with Tourette Syndrome is that they must be understanding, encouraging and extra supportive. These children, like any other children, need to feel loved, supported and understood. I sometimes feel that my understanding of his disorders make him less aware of his ticcing.

One time I asked him why he had jumped out of his seat and he told me he didn't realize that he had moved at all. Robert's teacher also noticed more ticcing after his presentation about Tourette Syndrome with his class. When she asked why he had

been ticcing more, he told her he didn't really notice a change in his tics, but maybe it was because "I feel a little more relaxed in the classroom and everyone knows I'm not just doing it to bother them". His teacher said that after his presentation, the students have been more likely to change their seats away from him rather than complain about his behavior. As Asher (2005) states with his foreign language learners, "we need to be as tolerant of mistakes as we are of infants acquiring their first language (p.3)." Maybe because his classmates are more tolerant of his tics and behavior, he is ticcing more, because he feels safe and understood.

Wilson and Shrimpton (2003) discovered that students with Tourette Syndrome felt teachers should be more empathetic. Teachers who were more compassionate had satisfied and happy students and parents (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003). Wilson and Shrimpton (2003) also state the importance of open communication and promoting self-esteem in the child and see these as key factors in educating children with Tourette Syndrome. Teachers who have experience working with students who have Tourette Syndrome stress the importance of having a holistic understanding of the child's needs (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003).

Over the past six months I have really gotten to know Robert as a person and not just a student. He has also been introduced to parts of my personal life, especially when we had two tutoring sessions at my house. We have a great relationship and Robert and his mother know just how fond I am of him. Even if I am unable to accomplish all I have set out to in our sessions, they both (Robert and his mom) give me a great big "thank you" and smile when I leave. I used to leave wondering why they were thanking me when I felt I had done nothing for an hour, but I now take it as thank you for your patience, your understanding, and especially for not giving up on him. It's a

pretty good feeling to leave knowing that you can so easily make a difference just by caring.

Robert's academic success is at an advantage since he was diagnosed with having Tourette Syndrome and other related behavior disorders by age seven. "When diagnosed and treated early, many of the associated learning, emotional, and social disabilities it produces can be lessened or dealt with more effectively (Bergeson, Kelly, Riggers, & Maire, 1999, p. 5)." Asher (2005) explains that with his foreign language students "the best chance of acquiring a near-native accent is if the language experience starts early, before puberty (p.3)." Early diagnosis and intervention allows the opportunity for greater success and utilization of more effective learning strategies with students who have tic disorders and Tourette Syndrome (Bergeson, Kelly, Riggers, & Maire, 1999). The goal of any program for a person with Tourette Syndrome is to assist the person in learning and interacting productively in school and society (Bergeson, Kelly, Riggers, & Maire, 1999, p. 5)." This is why Robert's speech therapist, classroom teacher and I modify all of his work so that the focus is on problem solving and organization of thought for speaking and writing. We all agree that quality of work is more important than quantity.

Bergeson, Kelly, Riggers and Maire (1999) chart program implications which include allowing time for physical activity, encouraging children to relax and using movement education to help increase body control. Asher (2001) explains that traditional classroom instruction has played almost exclusively to the left side of the brain. Asher (2001) used Jacques Hadamard's study as an example of the importance of right brain instruction. "Hadamard discovered that outstanding mathematicians think in visual and kinetic images. One of the people in the study was Einstein who confided that he visualized

events in motion and he added that he felt that imagination was more important in mathematics and physics than intelligence (Asher, 2001, p. 2)." Although visualization and motion are processed through the right side of the brain, traditional schooling unintentionally shuts down the right brain since little time, if any, is spent on physical activity (Asher, 2001). Asher (2001) explains that body movement allows information to quickly flow back and forth from the left side of the brain to the right side. Body movements are the best way to help students internalize information (Asher, 2001). Asher (2001) feels that the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach he uses in teaching foreign language learners is a brain compatible instructional strategy that works for most students who are studying mathematics and science as well. We often use manipulatives or act out situations in math or writing. Sometimes I just have Robert go get a drink of water and do some jumping jacks in the middle of activities. "Any instructional strategy that has built-in brain-switching should be successful with most students for first trial learning, long-term retention, and zero stress (Asher, 2001, p.5)." "Students with a painful history of difficulties coping with academic content presented through the left brain, excel in language classes that apply TPR (Asher, 2001, p.5)" which focuses on the right side of the brain as well as the left. "Skillful brain-switching from left to right and right to left is brain compatible instruction that reaches most students (Asher, 2001, p.6)."

Asher (2005) explains that comprehension should come before speaking, reading or writing. This is why Robert and I often do shared writing and I usually scribe for problem solving activities. The important thing was to first make sure he understood the process. Now that he does I am trying to desensitize him to writing instruments since he is currently

afraid that he "will become" whatever he is writing with. Wagner (2002) mentions that students with learning disabilities wrote better essays when they dictated to a scribe than when they did the writing by hand themselves. After reading Asher and Wagner's articles, I feel more comfortable being Robert's scribe. Wilson and Shrimpton (2003) also list having a scribe as one of the classroom modifications for language problems. Teaching processes can sometimes be more important than getting to a final product (Wagner, 2002), hence the reason why we discuss the problem solving steps and how we would go about solving the problem rather than actually solving it. We also use graphic organizers for prewriting strategies and often do not get to the final writing piece. Wagner (2002) also discusses what positive effects of having a prewriting strategy had on students' comfort levels when asked to write an essay.

Watching and reflecting on what happens while I hold sessions with Robert and altering my instructional strategies accordingly seems to be more important than always having a "successful session" after all. What defines a successful session anyway? I think a successful session is when I leave and Robert has a smile on his face even if we have just completed one math problem. As I stated earlier, the quality of work is more important and beneficial to Robert than the quantity of work we complete together.

Although Asher (2005) is not the biggest fan of traditional methods classes, he states that "every technique and trick you learned in that "Methods" class can be placed in your box of tools. The secret of success is to decide which tool to select at a particular moment in the learning experience (p. 2)." His closing comments gave me confidence in what I am doing with Robert. Asher (2005) says that "all instruction should not be an off-the-shelf product, but custom made to fit comfortably for

students and the instructor. For an elegant fit, tailor the instructional experience especially for your students. They are worth it (p.6)!" I feel I have been doing this all along, but wasn't sure it was the right thing. I am not used to working in situations with little structure. As much as I am prepared and somewhat have a plan, the plan seems to be forever changing before, during and after our sessions. I guess that is alright. Isn't that what "tailoring" is all about? Learning to plan and work around Robert's various disabilities can sometimes be like a juggling act. In other words, I bring my bag of teaching tools with some sort of plan, but when the plan falls through it's on the spot trial and error activities. I think my flexibility and ability to easily adapt to his behaviors has helped make him feel more accepted by me.

"Students with tic disorders, Tourette Syndrome, and a range of associated behavioral disorders and learning disabilities present many challenges to school staff (Bergeson, Kelly, Riggers, & Maire, 1999, p. 10)". "Students with Tourette Syndrome, like all children, have enormous potential when holistic support is based on individual needs and when they experience success (Wilson & Shrimpton, 2003, p. 16)." There is a plethora of information and resources teachers can use to help assist in instruction and academic and social success. I am glad that I found consistency in the explanation of behaviors as well as teaching strategies throughout my reading. I also realized that there are children with Tourette Syndrome who are in much worse shape than Robert because they are not getting all of the support and encouragement in education that Robert is getting and therefore, lack self-confidence. I no longer feel as if I am failing him. I can honestly say that I am trying my best and hopeful that I am making a positive impact on Robert.

### III. Method

#### **Overview of original question and situation:**

What happens when I engage a student with multiple disabilities in organized physical activities before math and language instruction?

#### **Plan based on related sub-questions:**

Robert's speech therapist, classroom teacher and I communicate on a daily basis. We first noticed his lack of organization and need to release tics. We thought engaging him in organized physical activities before math and language instruction could be beneficial. Early on we brainstormed a list of activities that would allow him some small or gross motor movement that could later be linked to thought processes in math problem solving, speaking and writing. I then verbally linked physical procedures such as setting up a fishing pole, doing the backstroke, putting silverware in a draw or putting together a tangram to logically, well thought-out processes such as long division and problem solving. I created and implemented the use of poster size graphic organizers for reading and writing activities to encourage him to write rather than having me scribe. For math computation I had him use a large calculator and color code each step on chart size grid paper. I brought lots of manipulatives for problem solving as well.

I later realized that relating instruction to real life situations helped Robert stay more interested and a bit more focused. Hence, my question changed a bit: What happens when I relate real life situations to math and language instruction and vice versa?



Before each new activity I explain how I use the process in my life and ask Robert where he may have used it or may need to use it in his life. I used window panes in his house and a pizza for fractions. I have already used my personal pictures to model focusing on the main idea in writing and had him use photographs from his life to practice staying on topic while speaking and writing.

In order to get a better idea of what interested Robert and what made him tic in his classes, I interviewed him and his classroom teacher. I also observed him in his regular education class during reading and math and his speech class during a verbal communication activity that required him to read another person's body language.

After much reading on Tourette Syndrome, tic disorders, ADHD, and OCD, I wanted Robert to feel stress free during our sessions. I set a routine of beginning and ending our sessions with small talk unrelated to school or subject matter. I thought this would not only help us get to know one another, but also relax him before the teaching and working part of our sessions.

The biggest tool was my journal. I wrote in a journal after each session, keeping notes on what we had done and what was or was not successful. I also wrote when tics were more apparent. To help plan for future sessions, I read the journal entries and reflect with his classroom teacher and speech therapist. I also shared samples of his work with them to get ideas on how to address certain issues, such as place value in math and focusing on the main idea in graphic organizers. I also started writing a "random thought list" for him during our sessions in the hopes of keeping him focused on what we were doing at the

present. I allow him to share any other those unrelated thoughts from his list at the end of our time.

I began to code journal entries, the interview and references using different colored highlighters. I first used yellow to represent areas that seemed important to focus on such as life skills (problem solving and communication). I then went back over these same data sources with purple and orange. Purple was used to mark physical activities Robert was engaged in and orange marked the activities or conversations related to real life situations. I read through data again with a blue highlighter to show where ticcing was apparent and added gold stars on the successes. I then read through each color coded area, one at a time, trying to find relations between journal entries, interviews, student work and observations. Lastly, I went back over the areas I had highlighted in research articles, books, and printed web-pages to discover any connections with these sources and my situation's data collection. I have read more to get other ideas on how to reach and understand Robert.

Meeting with my group to discuss my findings was very helpful. They were the ones who supported me and helped me feel that my implications should not make me feel like I had wasted my time. They also helped me realize that some of my questions were answered and it was alright that my outcome was a bit different from what I had hoped to achieve. Analyzing my journey's highs and lows was what helped me make sense of all of it- my time, my planning and my confusion. Analyzing and reflecting is also what helped me come up with a great way to present my adventure.

#### **IV. Findings, Implications and Emerging Questions**

Robert is an extremely verbal person and tends to go on tangents in conversation and writing. He has a hard time reading people's body language, therefore, needs to be told when to end most of his conversations. When given a math word problem he usually has no clue where to begin solving it and will only look for patterns in the numbers, not thinking if the answer makes sense or not. Although he may appear normal on the outside, he is a very unique ten year old boy. Robert has Tourette Syndrome, tics, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder).

I have never been formally trained in Special Education, but just reading material on Robert's disorders and getting to know him as a person has helped me understand him better. This is what has given me confidence in teaching him. My original goal was to help this child become more successful academically and socially. I now realize this was much more difficult than I anticipated. My priorities have somewhat changed now that I have been working with Robert for six months and have come to be very fond of him. At this point, I think it is more important to make Robert feel accepted and "normal".

Since his classroom teacher felt he needed physical activity to reduce his tics, she thought that adding physical activity to my sessions with Robert could be a possible way to help him organize his thoughts and problem solving strategies with less ticcing. His teacher and I brainstormed a list of activities. I don't think we needed to make such a long list. I found that using just one or two of the activities and constantly referring back to them has helped Robert understand why problems need to be solved in a certain order and also why

too much information is not always a good thing because it can leave people confused.

The first physical activity I used with Robert was before we started a writing lesson. I had Robert put together a tangram. He was able to do this with great success visually, but had a hard time (being specific enough) in verbally coaching me to solve the same puzzle. Each time I picked up a piece he realized which color and directional words he was leaving out. He also noticed when he was directing me too much and confusing me because I would pick up the wrong piece or turn it in the wrong direction until he was specific enough to have me place it down correctly. Once the tangram was together again, I placed extra pieces on top in various spots. Robert agreed that the puzzle didn't make sense because it was not completed the correct way according to the directions. I told him this was similar to how he sometimes gives too much unrelated information while speaking and writing. We agreed or more importantly, Robert understood that the puzzle was not focused and that his work sometimes lacks focus as well. In other words, he was able to relate what didn't fit or work physically to what doesn't make sense mentally in his speech and writing.

We then reread a writing piece of his that was supposedly about a snowy day he spent with a friend. The piece started of about a snowy day, but ended up being full of confusing tangents about Vikings and surfing in Hawaii. The week before he said his focus on this piece was "to be silly". I reminded him that most sitcoms on television are silly, but do have some sort of underlying theme throughout for viewers to follow. After hearing this, he was not as reluctant to take out the parts about the Vikings and his surf vacation in Hawaii. When the hour was up he had written a "silly" paragraph about a snowy day spent with his friend. What progress!

The second physical activity I planned was having Robert put together his fishing pole and then verbally direct me to do the same. It was not as easy for him to direct me. He realized how specific he needed to be in order for me to understand and act out the steps. I later related the organized steps of setting up his fishing pole to the steps in long division. I told him that we have to divide and then multiply before subtracting otherwise it would be like looping the fishing line through the top first and trying to fish by throwing the line out of the bottom. In sessions that followed I related the fishing pole steps to steps in problem solving and also multiplication. He was not fond of color coding while multiplying so I told him to pretend each color was a different loop on his fishing pole. While this thought helped him use different colors, I still had to coach him on where to place each of the numbers. I do notice referring to the fishing pole set up sometimes helps redirect Robert in following the steps (understand, plan, solve, look back to see if the answer is correct) to solve word problems.

I also realized that both of these physical activities were related to real life situations which also helped build a comfort level between us. I asked him to pretend I was a small child while putting together the tangram and reminded him that small children need short, yet specific directions. He told me this activity reminded him of when he used to try to teach his younger sister how to tie her shoes. We chatted a bit about our siblings. He also could not believe the fact that I had never set up a fishing pole before and found it rather funny. He wanted to know if I had ever gone fishing and who set up my pole. I told him that our situations were similar, but the opposite. I had to focus more while setting up the fishing pole because it was something foreign to me, but solving math

problems comes a bit easier since I have had more practice in math. He agreed at how much easier it is for him to set up the fishing pole than it is for him to do math. He noticed how willing I was to carefully take my time while setting up his fishing pole in order to do it correctly. He eventually agreed that following the steps while solving math problems would probably be more helpful for him.

Robert also finds it interesting that I am still a student who also gets frustrated with school work. I often remind him that he is not alone. I tell him that I get tired and distracted at times too. I told him that I stay focused on school work by keeping a pad nearby to write my thoughts down and then go back to the pad after I am finished with my school work. We tried keeping a "random thought" list in a few sessions when Robert was getting off topic, but it turned into him having me write everything down before he was satisfied enough to move on. He told me that he had to get the thought completely out and off his mind otherwise he would still be thinking about it instead of concentrating on what we were doing. Robert said that a short phrase was not enough for him to write to get the thought off his mind.

I also explained to Robert how I use graphic organizers in planning for my first grade classroom. I told him that I print out a blank copy of my lesson plans for school and pencil write them in before I type them on the computer. I even showed him a copy so he could better see and understand how this is a kind of graphic organizer I use to stay focused and keep my lessons better sequenced. I must admit that he seemed pretty interested in the techniques I use to stay organized with my work. He also finds it a bit easier to use a graphic organizer and no longer negatively comments on using them as he did when we first began working together. We often talk about things that are

challenging to both of us and have decided that we both get a greater feeling out of trying our best rather than giving up.

I now try using real life examples as much as possible. Sometimes they work and other times they are not so successful. One time I tried to have him use the sliding glass door window panes in house for fractions. I asked him to cover three-twelfths of the door and this turned into a verbal and motor tic. He kept repeating "one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three", then rolled onto his back and kicked his legs four times. For whatever reason this did not work. On another occasion we used the pizza he was having for dinner with fractions and it seemed to work better. He was focused and actively engaged in the lesson. It could have been because he was hungry, but whatever the reason, I was thrilled at what a success the lesson was. He was able to cut the pizza into sixteenths (evenly for the most part) and tell me that he ate four-sixteenths which is equal to two-eighths. We then figured out how much pizza his class and the entire fourth grade would eat and later converted the fractions into mixed numbers.

Math instruction can be tricky for me to plan because numbers set off Robert's tics. I thought having him use a large calculator would be helpful, but soon realized it was more of a distraction. Robert kept pressing each number four times. Then he insisted on doing the same multiplication fact four times before "trusting" the answer on the calculator. I eventually punched the numbers in for him while he repeated them out-loud four times over and over again. If Robert does computation in his head or on paper, he repeats the numbers four times. Sometimes he sounds like a broken record, but he usually gets the correct answer. I also have to decide when he should write and when I should scribe. When I see him feverishly swinging the writing instrument through the air (which I will explain in

a moment) or continually breaking the point to his pencil, I usually step in and begin to do the writing for him. It makes life easier for both of us. I am satisfied that we can get more done because he is better able to participate. Robert is satisfied because he is not thinking about his fear of using writing instruments.

A couple of weeks ago Robert was trying to add and subtract decimals on large grid chart paper I had made for him. I was proud of the time I had taken to make such large paper. I thought it would allow Robert more movement while writing and that it would be more fun to color code using markers. I handed Robert the markers to get started and something unexpected happened. He began twitching with the marker as if it were a sword and he was fighting off an enemy. I knew from another time this had happened with writing that it was not a tic, but an obsessive compulsive thought. Robert is afraid to write because he thinks he might "become" the writing instrument he is using. I immediately took over writing and he was able to do the math. At first one might have thought Robert does not know how to add or subtract decimals, but luckily I knew he had done this before and something else was happening. I learned just how powerful obsessive compulsive thoughts are at this moment. Once those thoughts get in his head he cannot concentrate on anything else. That is my signal to change the way we are doing things or take a break. I will often ask Robert to run to the door and back or do some jumping jacks to get the blood flowing back into his brain and to help refocus him on academics rather than OCD thoughts. Even though it takes us longer to get through activities, it is not a problem for me. The most important thing is that he is comfortable, his answers are correct and he realizes how he solved the problems.



Another time he was working on a persuasive writing piece where he was not in favor of wearing school uniforms. His lead was, "Uniforms make children look very neat. Kids are less likely to be made fun of about their clothes because they are all wearing the same thing, but this is not a reason for children to wear a uniform to school." I told him his writing confused me because it sounded like he was in favor of wearing uniforms up until the last sentence. I also told him that he had not yet explained any of the reasons for not wearing uniforms. At first he was upset with my comments and he didn't want to change a thing. He told me he was "buttering me up" to get to the point. I told him too much butter is not healthy. He stopped, stared at me and said, "Oh-right, butter can be fattening!" I asked him to please hold the butter in the rest of this piece. He managed to stay focused on his argument while I scribed note-cards for him. At the end of this hour he turned to me and said, "You know what? Butter in general is fattening so you should try to not use it at all unless you really need it." I suppose he related not using butter to getting to the point immediately. It worked, great!

Throughout my journey I realized that while my original objectives of helping him become more successful academically and socially were not completely met, I have achieved other goals that I did not even plan on or think of before. I allowed Robert to feel safe and comfortable with me which has built his confidence. We have openly discussed his disorders and I have let him know he is not any different from anyone else. I reminded him that all people are unique, with different strengths and weaknesses. I praised him for his perseverance and determination to continue even when the going gets tough. I let him know that I accept him the way he is and that if anyone in his life does not, they are not worth having around anyway.

Through working with Robert I have learned about the power of acceptance and compassion. Changing the situation and making it "better" was not as meaningful as having people be aware of Tourette Syndrome and understanding why Robert acts the way he does. A couple of months ago Robert decided to share an HBO documentary, *I Have Tourette's, But Tourette's Doesn't Have Me*, with his fourth grade class and then explained a little about himself to his peers. He told me that he hopes his classmates will be more aware of Tourette Syndrome and understand that he doesn't always have control over his behavior. When his mother told him how proud she was of his courage and that she'd like to congratulate him with a pair of Heelys (sneakers with wheels that he had been wanting to get), he said, "I don't want to make a big thing of it and I'd really rather have a bag of Raisinets." Yes, Robert is faced with many challenges, but he has a great attitude and doesn't expect to be treated any differently. Since his presentation, his disorders have not gotten better, but his classroom and speech teachers have noticed a change in his comfort level with them and his classmates. He expresses his feelings and explains his behavior in their classrooms with more ease. Robert now knows that the people around him are aware of his disabilities, for the most part accept him the way he is and that all of his teachers are working together with his mother to make learning more successful for him. I think all of our efforts helped create more positive feelings toward education and more importantly toward life for Robert. That is something I am extremely proud of.

I've come to terms with the fact that not all situations are perfect nor can they be made perfect. You must deal with what you have. The situation with Robert is what it is and I have learned to adapt. I realize that Robert, nor I, are super-

humans. Learning to plan and work around Robert's various disabilities sometimes feels like a juggling act. I bring my bag of teaching tools with some sort of plan, but when the plan falls through it's on the spot trial and error activities.

I must admit that I have gotten better at "juggling". I think my flexibility and ability to easily adapt to his behaviors has helped make him feel more accepted by me. He is comfortable expressing his feeling with me in our private sessions which then helps me adapt my teaching strategies. I feel like I have succeeded because I have learned to adjust my teaching, accept the fact that I do not have control over the situation and still have not given up on Robert.

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While reflecting on my journey with Robert, I feel many things would be different. I do not think I would have such negative feelings about working with him as I did when his mom first asked me to tutor. I think I would have thought to just try by best and see what happens.

I first felt very negative about tutoring Robert because I didn't know anything about Tourette Syndrome or about the fourth grade curriculum, therefore, was afraid to get started. I would not have judged him as a "strange character". The most incredible thing I have learned is how completely normal individuals with Tourette Syndrome are. They are "normal" people who make involuntary movements or comments due to a chemical imbalance. I now feel more compassion for Robert and will defend him when staff members make negative comments about his behavior. They just don't understand that he is not in complete control (mentally or physically) of all his verbal thoughts and actions.

Now, I think I would feel less nervous and more honored that his mother had enough faith in me to make a difference in her child's life. I would not have judged her as a parent who couldn't get through homework with her child nor would I have assumed that she wanted her child to only succeed academically (which is the main goal for most parents in their neighborhood). I would have realized the great patience needed to work with Robert and how much more effective it is to have me work on homework with him rather than his mother. Believe it or not he gets more done with me than with his mom. I guess many children in his circumstance are more willing to work with another adult rather than their parent.

I now know how important it was for someone to take the time to understand Robert. I could not believe how appreciative his mother was when I asked her if I could borrow their HBO documentary video, *I Have Tourette's, But Tourette's Doesn't Have Me* (the same video Robert showed to his class during his presentation) to watch at home. I also asked her to give me any other written information she had on his various disabilities. It meant so much to her that I was taking extra time out for her son. She thanked me and said she didn't expect me to spend my free time reading and watching about Tourette Syndrome. She said it was fine to just discuss any questions or concerns with her in the short time before and after each of my sessions with Robert. I have so much respect for her and how gracefully she deals with this difficult situation without ever complaining. She is a true example of how to be happy with what you have and go with the flow.

I also would have more confidence going to each session not completely prepared, but with tools to use. I would have felt more comfortable from the beginning letting Robert have more say on what we should be doing. I guess I just needed some time to

trust him and see how determined he is to learn. I would not have worried so much about having control of the situation, having specific lesson plans and a time schedule to follow. I now see that sessions with Robert go better when he lets me know what he needs help with and what is due at school. At the beginning, I would not have looked at my watch so much to make sure the lessons were flowing. I would have read his behavior to help me know when it was alright to continue with what we were doing and when it was time to change the strategy or subject matter altogether. I also would have felt much more comfortable allowing quick movement breaks from the start now that I see how well he realizes he could use a "brain break". I know that Robert is a hard worker and wants to learn. He has proven this through not giving up when things get difficult and telling me that he does not want to change the subject to something easier. On more than one occasion he has told me that he would rather stick it out with math than go to science or spelling work because the math is more difficult and what he needs more help with. Robert really does try his best to understand. I coach him in prioritizing a work order list before we get started. We get through what we can and leave the rest for another day or sometimes decide if it is something he can complete on his own.

If I knew how important it was for him to be understood, I probably would have started our first session with a conversation about Tourette Syndrome. I would have let him teach me about his disorders and emphasized on how he needs to let me know when something isn't working. I would have possibly brainstormed ways to make work easier with him as well as his classroom teacher. Maybe I would have found out sooner that a gross motor math or language activity is not as effective as having him quickly jump around to get rid of the jitters. Also,

now that I realize allowing him to speak in between each activity is a more beneficial way to get rid of his mental distractions rather than making him wait until the very end of our session, I would have allowed for more short interruptions between activities from the beginning.

Robert is a great kid. He may not become what his mom and dad had expected, but both his parents and I think he will be successful in life. I can see Robert doing something with gardening or sports. Maybe one day he will become a soccer, swimming or surfing coach. I know I have learned a lot about all three sports from him. He might even open up a fishing supply store and teach many more people how to set up a fishing pole. Who knows, there are many possibilities for Robert. Magnificent writing and math skills are not a priority for all professions.

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My biggest question now is where will Robert be in the future? Will his future teachers see his great character? Will they invest as much time in him as his teachers and I have done during his fourth grade school year? Will they be as patient and understanding? How long will our support keep Robert confident?

Is a regular school schedule effective for him? Would he be better being in a regular school setting part time and home schooled the other part? How would that work and would it effect his self-esteem and acceptance with peers? Would this kind of schedule help him more in junior high school rather than elementary school? Should he maybe take fewer classes and focus on his interests such as science and social studies rather than "suffer" through more complicated math and writing courses which

he is already struggling with now? These courses are what have crushed his academic confidence.

Robert's teachers, mother and I have discussed this on more than one occasion. We all agree that he is more attentive after a long break. Mondays are usually his best days in class. He has had his most successful sessions with me during winter and spring break when he met with me earlier in the day and he was not sitting in a classroom prior to our meeting.

Should he meet his future teachers and work with them each summer before the school year begins? Maybe getting to know his future teachers before the year begins would relieve some of his stress. Would his future teachers be able or willing to tutor him? He tends to get nervous before each new school year begins. I think having his future teachers tutor him would not only help them to get a better idea of what they are going to be working with and see what Robert is capable of doing, but also ease Robert's nerves. Would this help reduce ticcing in class? I am hopeful that any educator, if given the opportunity to work with Robert alone, would form a liking to him.

Also, pre-teaching what is going to be taught could be a powerful tool in Robert's understanding of new information. Even if he does not fully understand during the pre-teaching, he will have an opportunity to be reintroduced to the same material in the same way with the same person in class along with his peers. Maybe he would be able to recall some of the information from his private sessions. I believe Robert will be a success as long as his educators continue to invest time in him and patiently accept his differences.

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