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Module 20: Case Studies

Now, it is time to take everything that you have learned about special educational needs, and put it into practice. We have discussed the process by which teachers, schools, parents, and other professionals get individuals, with special educational needs and disabilities, the assistance they require. It always starts with observation.

In this module, we will discuss a few case studies, and go over how to proceed in specific situations. Although we will take you through the process step-by-step, we encourage you to actively participate in these case studies. Try coming up with your own recommendations before reading on to see what our recommendations would be. After reading each of the case studies, we will discuss observations that a professional should make from the information provided about each student. We will then discuss the conclusions we can draw from these observations, and then discuss potential interventions that may help each student.

What you will learn in this module:

20.1 Case Study Examples (3)

20.2 Making Observations

20.3 Drawing Conclusions

20.4 Proposing Interventions

20.1 Case Study Examples (3)

For the following case studies, read the information about each student, and make your own observations from the text before reading on to the next section, where we will give you our observations. See how well your observations match up with ours to assess whether you are on the right track or not.

20.1.1 Student A: Billy

You are a 9th grade Science teacher, and you teach a variety of levels of students. Some are in accelerated programs, and some are in classes for underachieving students. Your underachieving class can often be a challenge because students in the class struggle from such a diverse set of causes. You have a few students who do not take school seriously because their parents are not involved, and have not instilled in them the importance of education.



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You have a group of students with different identified learning disabilities who struggle to keep up with the material even with the accommodations that you make for them. You have two students who can definitely do the work, but they seem bored with the material.

Perhaps, they are not being challenged enough; but it is difficult to challenge them while still keeping the struggling students engaged. Then, there is Billy, who has been your saving grace in the class so far this year.

Billy is an athletic young man who often struggles with extended assignments. He is always smiling and looking to participate. Sometimes, his attempts at participation can be disruptive as he is not always entirely on task. He is very polite and respectful when you let him know that his behavior is unacceptable, and he genuinely wants to succeed.

He has a tendency to get out of his seat a lot, often to help other students or to help you, but it can be disruptive if the class is working on something that requires them to sit still for a long period of time.

Recently, you have noticed a dramatic change in Billy's demeanor. This is affecting the dynamic of the rest of the class because he is often the one to bring everyone together, and help you motivate them.

Billy looks sullen and distracted. He no longer wants to participate. His disruptions are getting worse. He no longer seems to be the friendly kid who genuinely apologizes when he realizes he is not behaving well, and wants to succeed.

You decide that you need to have a conversation with him about his performance. When you sit down with him, Billy is reluctant to answer your questions, saying phrases like, "I don't know," and "I don't care." So, you reach out to his parents.

When you ask them about the change in behavior, they tell you that they have also noticed it, and that it all started when Billy was released from the football team because of his grades. Billy has always been enthusiastic in class, but he has never had the best grades. He is often on the brink of failing your class because he forgets to turn in assignments, or is not able to finish timed assignments. You have had many conversations with his parents about it.

Meeting with his parents has not helped. Billy usually just goes on the way he was, carefree and fun loving, but forgetful and procrastinating. Now that he no longer has that optimistic attitude, his grades are seriously starting to drop.

Billy's parents plead with you, asking: "What can we do for him?"



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20.1.2 Student B: Margaret

You are a nursery school teacher with a class of 20 students, most of whom are between the ages of 4 and 5. In your current unit of study, you are having your students work on their basic reading and writing skills.

The majority of your students are reading and writing at grade level, with a few of your students needing extra help to get them where they need to be. One of your students named Margaret is causing you some concern.

Margaret is a very smart student who is always jumping at the chance to participate. She always seems to understand new concepts before the other students in the class. An outside observer might watch one of your class discussions, and identify Margaret as the strongest student. The student who probably has the highest grade in the class. While she is extremely intelligent, Margaret is not the highest performing student in the class.

She loves math, and excels at working with numbers and figures. She is having a lot of trouble with her reading and writing, and her struggles are starting to affect her in other areas of the class. She is starting to lose confidence. You have heard her on a number of occasions mention how “dumb” she is, and how she is “stupid” and “will never get this.”

You have tried to give her special attention when the class is working on reading and writing. She is resistant and has even started acting out and throwing things out of frustration. When you get her to settle down, you ask her to tell you what she is specifically having trouble with. She tells you, “I understand the stories when you read them to us. Can you just read this to us, too?” When you ask her why she is having trouble, she tells you that when she looks at the words, “they seem jumbled,” and that she has trouble “getting her ideas out of her head and onto the paper.”

You can tell by the look in her eyes that she is extremely frustrated, and does not know what to do. She is used to feeling like one of the smart students in the class. She cannot get it out of her mind now that she is just “too stupid” to understand the material. What can you do for her?

20.1.3 Student C: Jordan

You are running a nursery school class for 2-year old students. The class consists mostly of monitored playtime and storytelling. Occasionally, you implement more traditional lessons to try to help the children understand shapes, letters, and other basic skills.



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Most of the children in the class display typical behavior of a 2 year old, but you are noticing some atypical behavior from Jordan. You noticed that she was a little antisocial when she first started in the class, but after about a week, you are realizing that her behavior is more than just antisocial.

When you noticed that Jordan was not socializing very much with the other children, you took it upon yourself to interact with her, but you found this difficult. Jordan has a way of avoiding eye contact with people who are trying to talk to her, and when you tried to cheer her up, she did not smile.

She seemed to be struggling a lot with her new environment, and often seemed anxious when there were loud or foreign noises. This worried you because you want everyone to feel comfortable in your class. If she is feeling anxious or uncomfortable, how is she going to be able to have fun?

You decide to step back, and observe how she behaves when you are not hovering around her. She seems to be more comfortable once she gets to the corner of the room with the building blocks. She still seems to get nervous when other children enter her space or come to talk with her. Jordan is having some serious trouble adjusting to your class. You pride yourself on being able to help your students socialize, and get used to working with other children.

How can you help Jordan adjust?

20.2 Making Observations

20.2.1 Case Study A: Billy

It is clear from his attitude that Billy is struggling. And, judging by his grades, that have gotten him released from the football team, he is struggling in his other classes as well. Something needs to be done for Billy so that he does not go down this slippery slope, and end up really setting his life off track. Let us take a look at what we know, and what observations we can make from the information that we have. First, let us look at what Billy was like as a student before the behavioral change.

Billy in the Beginning:

- Billy is a cheerful, energetic kid who loves to participate in class.
- Billy's class participation can sometimes border.
- Billy is respectful, and genuinely shows contrition when his actions are inappropriate.
- Billy struggles with extended assignments, and assignments that are timed.
- Billy has trouble staying seated for long periods of time.
- Billy is very helpful to you, and to his other classmates.



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According to Billy's parents, the change in his behavior came when he was released from his football team because of his poor grades. Let us take a look at some observations we can make about Billy after this incident.

Billy Now:

- Billy still has trouble with speaking out of turn, but he is no longer apologetic for it. He seems to be acting out.
- Billy gets out of his seat often, and no longer helps others. He is more of a disruption than anything.
- Billy's disrespectful behavior has evolved from small and accidental, to constant and unapologetic.
- Billy seems sullen, and does not care about his schoolwork or his grades.
- Billy's parents attribute this attitude change to him being released from the football team.

Now that we have charted out all of the observations we can make about Billy, let us take a close look at his behavioral patterns in order to draw some conclusions, and identify what is wrong.

20.2.2 Student B: Margaret

It is clear that Margaret's main problem stems from her difficulty with reading and writing. We need to do something to help her immediately or she is going to allow this difficulty to affect her confidence in everything she does. Let us take a look at the details that we can pick out from our observations.

- Margaret excels at verbal communication. She loves to participate in class, and often understands concepts during discussions like these quicker than the other members of the class.
- Margaret excels in math.
- Margaret struggles with reading and writing.
- When she is reading, Margaret claims that the words "seem jumbled," and says she understands the readings when you read them aloud to the students.
- When writing, Margaret complains that she cannot get the ideas that are in her head onto the paper.
- Margaret has become very frustrated, bitter, and has begun acting out.

Margaret's frustrations continue to build, so it is very important that we come up with some sort of solution. Why is she struggling so much with her reading and writing?



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20.2.3 Student C: Jordan

It is clear that Jordan is having some difficulty in your class even though there is not a lot of academic teaching going on. Jordan's difficulties seem more social than anything. Let us take a look at the observations we have made about Jordan.

- Jordan is uncomfortable being in the class because it is an environment that is new to her.
- Jordan does not like to make eye contact when she speaks with you, and does not seem to want to respond to your voice.
- Jordan does not seem to smile even when you are specifically trying to cheer her up.
- Jordan enjoys playing by herself, and usually gravitates towards the building blocks.
- Jordan appears very anxious and uncomfortable when she is not being left alone or things are not going the way she wants them to.

The ability to adapt to new environments is a skill that will come in very handy when Jordan grows up, so you want to be able to help her as much as possible. But how can you help someone who seems to be against accepting your help? One thing is for sure: something needs to be done. Jordan has been in the class a week and still looks as if she is entering the class for the first time every time she shows up.

20.3 Drawing Conclusions

Now that we have charted some observations about each student, it is time to make some educated guesses about what is holding each of them back. Once we have drawn some logical conclusions, we can recommend each student for appropriate testing (if we feel it is necessary).

20.3.1 Student A: Billy

Billy's current change in mood and behavior are important to pay attention to. He was having some difficulty before he was released from the football team. Remember, he was released from his football team because he had poor grades, so the real catalyst for all of this is whatever was causing him to have poor grades before his behavioral change.

From the information that we have about Billy, we can conclude that he most likely suffers from some form of ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). How do we know this? Take a look at the following observations that we made in the previous section:

- Billy is energetic and loves to participate in class.
- Billy can sometimes be disrespectful in his outbursts.



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- Billy has trouble sitting still, and often gets up to help other students.
- Billy struggles to complete extended assignments, and timed assignments.

These are all examples of a child who has trouble focusing on what he or she should be doing. This is in line with a disorder like ADD or ADHD, that is characterized by inattentiveness, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. It was easy to write off his difficulties as quirks because he was a nice student who was eager to help, and wanted to learn. However, these difficulties are clearly affecting his grades in more than one class, which is why he was released from his football team.

As a result of his ADD or ADHD, Billy was not doing well in many of his classes. When he had to face consequences for his poor academic performance (being released from the football team), his attitude changed. After this incident, he still struggled with the same difficulties, but he was no longer the affable and fun loving student that you had come to know. Without the thing he loved most, football, he had lost all motivation to learn and succeed in the classroom.

20.3.2 Student B: Margaret

There is a contrast between the intelligence that Margaret displays verbally, and the difficulty she has displaying that intelligence when she is reading or writing. It is clear that Margaret is suffering from a learning disability. The disability will be confirmed through testing, but we can safely presume that Margaret suffers from dyslexia. Dyslexia is a disability that affects an individual's ability to identify words, and write fluently. Here are some of the common traits of dyslexia that we can observe in Margaret:

- Margaret is highly intelligent and expresses herself well verbally.
- Margaret most likely has a high IQ, as observed through her intelligent understanding of concepts that are delivered verbally.
- Margaret reports that words often "seem jumbled," and she understands them better when they are read aloud to her.
- Margaret assures you that she understands what to write, and has ideas but that she has difficulty putting those ideas down on paper.
- Margaret is beginning to display low self-esteem, and frustration due to her reading and writing difficulties.

Margaret's symptoms clearly point to dyslexia, a disability that does not need to be debilitating for her. There are plenty of people who have found success despite their dyslexia. Margaret needs encouragement to make sure that she does not let her disability define her.



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20.3.3 Student C: Jordan

Based on the observations we have made, it is clear that Jordan is showing symptoms of autism. Autism is a disorder that delays the development of children, and results in difficulty with language and social skills.

We can come to that conclusion based on the following observations:

- Many autistic children have difficulty understanding social situations, and reading facial cues. Jordan does not make eye contact and never seems to smile.
- Jordan is having trouble adjusting to your classroom because it is something new and foreign. She likes to feel comfortable in her routines.
- Jordan, like many autistic children, chooses solitude over making friends. She prefers to play quietly in the corner where she is comfortable, instead of interacting with other kids; which she is uncomfortable with.
- When Jordan plays, she tends to choose toys that are mathematical in nature, like building blocks. Toys like these can be comforting to autistic children who crave order and routine.

Without further testing, it is difficult to judge if Jordan has severe autism. However, her symptoms appear severe enough for us to conclude that she does not have mild autism. The severity of her disorder will greatly impact the types of interventions that we will need to use in order to help her grow and flourish.

20.4 Proposing Interventions

Now that we have gotten a sense of what is causing the struggles for each of these students, it is time to make recommendations on how we can support them, and help them succeed. As a classroom teacher or a special educational teacher, your recommendations will have a direct impact on the student's EHC Plan. You will be one of the experts that the local authority will consult when they are creating it.

20.4.1 Student A: Billy

Although the recent change in Billy's behavior is not the problem, but rather the result of the problem, it is still the aspect that needs to be addressed first. We can work to channel Billy's excitement, and need to move around the class. However, we first need to rebuild his motivation and attitude.



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Rebuilding Motivation

As we are trying to help Billy with his motivation, we do not want to overwhelm him by immediately sending him to a therapist. Instead, you should set up a meeting with him, and his parents. This meeting will not be about telling Billy what he is doing wrong. Instead, keep it positive and discuss all the great things that you have observed about him throughout the year. Conclude the meeting by discussing the strategies that you are going to use to help him succeed in the classroom, get back on the football team, and get back in better spirits.

If this meeting does not work, you may turn to options that are a little more extreme; like meeting with his guidance counselor, or suggesting that his parents find him a therapist that he can talk to.

Accommodating ADD and ADHD

Students with ADD and ADHD have trouble focusing on tasks because they are energetic, and inattentive. As a teacher, you can harness that energy, and make it something positive. For Billy, encourage him to continue helping his fellow classmates. When he feels the urge to move around, encourage Billy to work with other classmates or help you out with a task.

For his difficulty with extended assignments, and timed tasks try to break things down into parts. For example, if your students are writing a research paper, give Billy multiple due dates along the way so that he can complete the assignment in small parts.

For timed tasks, it may be appropriate for Billy to receive extra time. That is probably an accommodation on his EHC Plan. Besides extra time, you can offer Billy ideas for how to organize himself.

Giving him a visual or graphic organizer will help him make sense of his thoughts, and focus more.

If his need to move around is extreme, you may want to compromise with him. Allow him to get up every so often but only if he does so quietly, he does not disrupt his classmates, and he returns to his seat on his own.

20.4.2 Student B: Margaret

Dyslexia can be a difficult disability to work through but plenty of people have learned to become avid readers, and writers despite their dyslexia. For Margaret to continue to flourish in school, and maintain the confidence that she displays in verbal interactions; the proposed interventions need to be impactful. Moreover, they need to be put into place as soon as possible.

There are a number of accommodations that you can implement. Margaret will benefit the most from:



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- An organized, quiet reading and writing environment. For a dyslexic student, reading and writing requires a lot of focus. Distractions can make these tasks difficult.
- Margaret would benefit from simplified directions, questions, and prompts. Give Margaret the full directions along with a simplified version. It will help her understand the directions better, and it will help her see how to simplify the directions.
- At this early age, Margaret would benefit from specific, individualized reading and writing instruction. She would benefit from working with a special educational teacher for part of the day either in the classroom or in another environment.
- Margaret understands verbal communication better than anything. Repeating the directions or reading them aloud while she has them in front of her will help her a lot.
- Break tasks down into smaller, more manageable parts so that Margaret can complete the tasks at her own pace, and not get frustrated.
- Allow Margaret to express her ideas orally whenever the chance arises to help build her confidence.
- Provide the class with graphic organizers, and consumable material that Margaret can use to plan and practice her ideas.

There are many accommodations you can make for people with dyslexia. If you put these strategies in place as soon as possible, you can get Margaret back on the right path. She will be feeling confident, and intelligent again.

20.4.3 Student C: Jordan

As we mentioned previously, the interventions that we recommend depend heavily on the severity of Jordan's autism. We will not know the degree of severity until she is tested. The severity of her autism will not change the accommodations that we recommend, however it may affect her classroom placement. Some of the accommodations below will be more relevant as Jordan grows up.

Mild-Moderate Autism: For the most part, students with mild to moderate autism should be included in the general classroom.

Severe Autism: If Jordan's autism is severe, which early symptoms seem to suggest, she may perform better in a self-contained classroom.

Whether she has mild to moderate autism and is placed in a general classroom, or she has severe autism and is placed in a self-contained classroom, here are some suggestions for accommodations that you can make for Jordan:

- Use of visuals during instruction to make information more understandable.
- Give Jordan choices and control over her education when possible.
- Develop and maintain classroom routines (i.e. Seating chart, formula for class time, regular spots for classwork, homework, and other materials, etc.).



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- Constant communication with Jordan's parents, and special educational teacher to monitor progress, both good and bad.
- Include Jordan in activities when she is reluctant to do so, and avoid doing this in a way that overly pressures or embarrasses her.

It could also be helpful to educate your other students about autism so they will be able to further assist Jordan.

[Link to Exam](#)