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Progress Monitoring Through The Lens of Distance Learning

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Capstone Project

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Abstract

       In this project, the topic discussed is progress monitoring in the lens of distance learning, specifically for those students qualifying for special education services under the umbrella of Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). Additionally, this project focuses on students who qualify for Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD), the characteristics of EBD and the procedures and assessments that have students' qualify for special education services under EBD. The reason why progress monitoring is important for distance learning and what that will look like for students who qualify for EBD will be addressed. Peer-reviewed articles that addressed distance learning and how it might serve students that qualify for special education, how access to distance learning materials will be provided, as well as which students are more likely to succeed and what students are likely to struggle are summarized. Lastly, the project highlighted the implementation and strategies for successful progress monitoring tools used to address students' growth in goals and objectives before and after distance learning, in one classroom.

Introduction

       Distance Learning, the new normal? To provide clarity the "new normal" is students working away from the classroom and learning at home through distance learning straining from the Coronavirus that forced schools in Minnesota to transition to the new normal on March 19, 2020 until the end of the school of 2019-2020 and the coming school year of 2020-2021. Recently, as the result effects of the Coronavirus, also known as Covid-19, distance learning has become the "new normal." However, with this new normal there were aspects of distance learning that impeded academic growth, specifically in special education settings and with the students it served. A significant impediment occurred in determining a way to effectively and

efficiently address progress monitoring for students receiving special education services. Furthermore, the topic and focal points of distance learning and the impact it has will be discussed on what qualifies a student for EBD, literature review of what impacts learning through distance learning and progress monitoring before and after distance learning and what may still be implemented once school is back in the classroom setting.

Characteristics and Assessments of Emotional Behavioral Disorders

The characteristics of students that qualify under Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD) are individuals that are emotionally or behaviorally disturbed by interior or exterior factors that affect their ability to act or respond rationally to a situation, (Kauffman and Landrum, 2009) These students often respond through their emotions and have trouble identifying their feelings or other people's feelings. Furthermore, this impacts student decision making, academics, life development, and other areas. Before providing services to a student or students under EBD they have to go through a referral and a series of assessments including norm-referenced measures, interviews, behavioral observations, and informal assessment procedures.

The identification and assessment process begins within the classroom with screening assessments. These assessments are generally administered to students and consist of a brief evaluation to identify children who are at risk for developing disorders or disabilities. Examples may include curriculum-based measurement (CBM), Fastbridge (FAST) testing, reading and writing inventories to see where the student is at compared to their other peers.   Examples of screening measures for EBD include: Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to find target behaviors, antecedences and consequences as well as environmental factors and develop behavior intervention strategies to address the students behavior. When a teacher notices a student struggling or difficulties in their academics and/or functional skills, such as reading,

writing or speech that impacts their academic growth, then the teacher may collaborates with other teachers to see if there is a consistent pattern across settings. In this case, once the student is observed and teachers have a consensus about the student's struggles, the process of an intervention system is in place, whether that is Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). These systems implement and monitor an intervention for students that may be at risk and may need more assistance in school through support or special education services. If struggles continue after monitoring the intervention, a referral process begins by speaking with parents/guardians and notifying the family of their child's concerns.

Parental involvement is essential because the school wants to assure the parents that school's best interest is the student's growth, and the parents trust and believe that the school is providing the necessary support for the student's growth. Therefore, when having meetings with parents, educators have to make sure that they have all the necessary data to show the strengths and challenges the child may be having and what can help the student develop their skills where they become successful independently in and outside of school. By parents believing and trusting in the school the parents will be more willing to try interventions and various strategies to help increase their child's success.

As part of the referral process, a teacher/s observes the child in various settings to determine if the problematic behavior is happening in every setting or if it is specific to one or two. The special education case manager will also select and administer an assessment, interpret the results from the assessment. The results will be shared in the intake meeting with the parent/guardian on the student's eligibility in the team agrees, next, develop intervention strategies and recommendations for student placement are put into place.

Diagnostic assessments provide a detailed evaluation of a child's strengths and weaknesses in various areas, such as cognitive, such as problem-solving, self-monitoring, and planning or scheduling tasks. Difficulties in completing tasks, low grades, and some instances of lack of academic motivation, and language difficulties where students will struggle with speech and developing reading comprehension skills may also be assessed, (Kauffman and Landrum, 2009). It is important to also consider that behavior being externalized is exhibited through aggression, hyperactivity and impulsivity, while the emotional aspect for this is internalizing behavior such as anxiety, depression and false perception. Finally, social functioning skills such as knowing what is appropriate and developing relationships with other people may be a problematic area that is assessed through a student strength informal and formal assessment as well as the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC).

Other assessments that are often used are the Woodcock-Johnson Tests, Brigance Basic Skills Inventory, Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC), and Adaptive Behavior Assessment System (ABAS), etc., which is used for student's academic level and skills. As for students that are culturally and linguistically diverse who are being assessed for special education services, their testing may differ as the assessments should be administered in their native or primary language.

Once it is determined a child is in need of special education services, the team (consisting of the parent/guardian, general education teachers, special education teacher, case manager, school psychologist, social worker, principal or assistant principal and any other services members that may be provide to the student and their needs, prepares an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for the student and create goals and objectives that are used to address the student's needs and areas of development. In order to determine if the goals/objectives are being

met, progress monitoring must occur. This may look like various observations, reviewing the students strengths and intervention strategies, collaboration with parents and teachers, core skill assessments, such as reading, writing and mathematics; depending on the student's needs and a quarterly progress report on the student's progress on the goals and objectives that are in place for them to be successful in school and developing their social skills.

Literature Review

In support of progress monitoring during the period of distance learning what goes into account is how to monitor student progress when being away from the classroom and using a computer screen. Three themes related to helping students succeed in distance learning were discussed in the literature: differentiation, technology and student support.

Differentiation

Differentiation is essential in the classroom, but even more so in distance learning. The definition of differentiation is "a philosophy or mindset that enables educators to plan strategically to reach the needs of diverse learners," (Wesley, p. 204). In doing so, as Wesley (2017) pointed out teachers with this mindset facilitate critical dialogue and create engaging learning environments in which content and skills are scaffolded to assist students' learning at various levels. They are able to intentionally and systematically differentiate instruction based on a wide range of students' needs. Thus, when implementing differentiation for students through distance learning educators have to create an engaging environment through the computer while, at the same time, addressing student needs by providing different ways for students to learn. This can be done through extensive scaffolding of both assignments and assessments, providing numerous examples, being flexible within the curriculum and reteaching

as needed, (Cooper-Kahn and Foster, 2013). Therefore helping students feel focused and

confident even as they are learning at home in a setting outside of the school walls.

Technology Access

As technology, including a device, the internet or printer, has become the norm for

educators and students to stay connected through distance learning, it is imperative that students

have access. This poses challenges for students' learning as they may have to wait for a device,

it may take some time for a student to get comfortable with the device, or there may be technical

issues or misuse of the device, (Ajmal and Ahmad, 2019). Therefore, the instruction and

curriculum through technology are extremely crucial, for instance, in the physical classroom,

providing a task and instructions is a fairly straightforward process. However, through distance

learning detailed examples have to be given and constantly checked-in with students to make

sure that they have an understanding of the instruction and example being provided.

Additionally, this was discussed to an extent in Clees and Greene (2014), though directed

towards social skills and having compliance through tasks, it can relate to various classes and

tasks being asked through distance learning. As Clees and Greene (2014) pointed out "…by

making the videos and related instructional materials available online at a centralized site. This

would allow students, teachers, and parents to view the materials and/or download them to

computers and handheld devices. It may also be beneficial to design such a site as a repository

that allows users to upload their video and print-based materials for future access in the school,

the home, or remotely in the community," (Clees and Greene, p. 15). Therefore, by providing an

instructional example and detailed task through a video or document accessed by the student, the

parent can know what the student is asked to do and support the students' work.

In correlation to the technology access and the instruction being presented through video and other accessible files, the communication aspect through technology is impactful and provides the purposeful presence of education as well as the relationship through corrective feedback whether that is synchronous or asynchronous described by Burdina, Krapotkina, and Nasyrova (2019). Synchronous and asynchronous is defined as "synchronous communication is a real-time way for students and teachers to interact at the same time, while asynchronous communication implies interaction in delayed time because of bandwidth gaps that arise from contextual issues," (Burdina, Krapotkina, and Nasyrova, p. 3). As a result, that helps with student support when completing assignments and remaining to understand the importance of education even through distance learning as well as maintains some kind of relationship between the student and teacher.

Student Support

Additionally, in support of the student's needs in content, curriculum, access to technology and communication the impact this has on students that qualify under emotional behavior disorders are seen as another main focal point because with the support in distance learning students still have their internalizing and externalizing factors that would even impact them through distance learning. For instance, Ajmal and Ahmad (2019) discuss internalizing factors, specifically anxiety and impact it has on students during distance learning schooling. They identified many factors in distance learning and have reports of poor results and high dropout rate or work refusal; boring classes [non-engaging], economic difficulties [access to device or internet], lack of feedback and encouragement, isolation and a lack of motivation (Ajmal and Ahmad, 2019). Whereas, students that qualify for EBD may struggle more because of the independence and needing consistency to help them be successful in school. Also, what

may occur as Ajmal and Ahmad (2019) stated "anxiety becomes a major concern among distance learners when they realize that they will have to give an oral presentation while using modern technologies such as multimedia presentations etc.," (Ajmal and Ahmad, p. 68).

Additionally, from results and what Ajmal and Ahmad study showed that "students feel more anxiety in distance learning approach because due to distance they are unable to discuss or share problems with instructors [teachers] on a daily basis," (Ajmal and Ahmad, p. 75). Therefore, educators can see how this can impact students that receive EBD services and who may have moderate to severe internalizing behaviors, which can increase of behaviors that may be negative and counter-productive.

Subsequently, students need the help and detailed instruction as well as examples, due to being away from the classroom and learning through distance learning. Cooper-Kahn and Foster (2013) stated students must learn how to organize their tasks. In doing so, and conducting education through distance learning, it is more essential to learn how to be organized, therefore, having students making calendars or planners to help monitor work will help with completing tasks or having students become comfortable with a routine to check on their classes. Additionally, Cooper-Kahn and Foster (2013) pointed out that "confidence scales," (Cooper-Kahn and Foster, p. 86). Confidence scales, which helps students build belief in their knowledge and check their comprehension, this can make the difference between anxiety and confidence, success, or failure as well as help with self-monitoring and teaches a reflective approach to task management which is needed during distance learning.

Another strategy Cooper-Kahn and Foster (2013) suggested entails, "Thursday teacher notes…the purpose of this strategy is for students to self-reflect, self-advocate, and, ultimately, take responsibility for the work. Research has shown that effective intervention for students with

weak organizational skills includes discussions to facilitate planning, due to being unaware of what is missing. Thus, Thursday notes highlight the value of plans and facilitate accurate self-evaluation, (Cooper-Kahn and Foster, p. 87). Overall, being aware and modeling and implementing strategies is critical because of the circumstances of distance learning and how it can impact the growth of the student. Therefore, it is important to consistently monitor the student work and collaborate with other teachers and find ways to address the students that need more and try to focus on the academics and the emotional aspect of student that qualify for EBD.

Implementation Before and After

The next section highlights how I monitored students' progress toward meeting specific goals and objectives, before and during distance learning. A student's goals and objectives are dictated by the their needs and the results of the assessments that were conducted, such as the screenings and diagnostic assessment, which were discussed previously. A goal is the main focus of the behavior/s or challenge/s the student is working towards and the objectives are small tasks and strategies used to reach the overall goal. Thus, progress monitoring becomes the contributing factor of making sure the student is making the strides to reach those goals or help identify other interventions to increase academic or behavior growth. Progress monitoring is important because it can be challenging with distance learning, due to most goals that students who categorized as EBD are physical and typically have to be observable. Additionally, they goals may be related to academics or socialization reaction that students have with their peers or adults.

Prior to distance learning, the lessons and student instructions were often directly and explicitly given in one-on-one and small group settings. This became very difficult during distance learning due to family home life, being away from the teacher and most importantly, the

lack of immediate feedback and consistency the students needed to continue to gain knowledge and skill. Progress monitoring became a major issue for students in special education, but particularly so students who qualified for EBD. Because of their need in emotional or behavioral areas, distance learning needed to look differently when addressing progress monitoring. For example, if a student's goal is to "increase the ability to start and complete non-preferred tasks from 30% to 80%," this goal focuses on self-management and would be easier to monitor than a student that has a goal that states the "student will increase social awareness skills (ability to state the perspectives of others, reducing aggressive behaviors towards others and make an empathetic statement) from 10% to 80% of opportunities." In the former goal, an educator might monitor the student progress though observation, teacher input and other documentation. With the latter, what might that look like? How would or could that be monitored? This becomes the situation progress monitor has in the distance learning process, the lack of physical contact that has to happen for this to be observed and addressed.

Additionally, what happens if the a goal is about self-awareness as in avoiding such as negative self-talk or self-harm; how will that be monitored? Before distance learning, it may have looked like a face to face conversation or meeting with parents about this serious self-perception of one's self. During distance learning, it looked like a tried contact with the parent or virtual meeting and difficult to have the face to face conversation with student because may choose to ignore or delete a message that may be encouraging as well as providing a sense of authentic concern. This highlights common goals and the difference between what instruction and progress monitoring looked like prior to distance learning, what it looked like during distance learning, and what it may look like if our school continues the practice of distance learning for the 2021-21 academic year.

Just as each student's IEP looks different, the progress monitoring of goals and objectives will look different based one each student and their needs during distance learning. Teachers will have to develop various strategies to help guide students through this new way of learning that can address students' growth and progress monitoring and nuance of distance learning. Subsequently, it will look like an intense collaboration between teachers, parents, and students as they choose areas of development to focus on and combine that with meaning and academic purpose. Therefore, teacher instruction, examples, and feedback will need to be detailed and encouraging so the student does not become discouraged and want to shut down. Also, to help students further is to have a designated whole class or individualized instruction to help the student; this will depend on the student's feeling and comfortability. As a result, specific instruction will look different for each child.

Goal	Instructional Strategy/Progress Monitoring Procedure/Tool Used **Before Distance Learning**	Progress Monitoring Procedure/Tool **During Distance Learning**	Revised Progress Monitoring Procedure/Tool to Use in **Future Distance Learning Situations**
1. Social Awareness	**Instruction looked like:** Modeling/Conversation through face to face Describing how to become aware of other people's feelings: examples/non-examples **Specific tools included:**	**Instruction looked like:** Video meetings or conferences Individualized help sessions Video assessments Independent learning Scaffolding	**Instruction looked like:** Independent learning Virtual individualized help sessions Constant/immediate feedback and check-ins (for understanding)

	Observation Notes, Student Reflection, teacher input and parent input	**Specific tools included:** Teacher input, parent input Attendance (log in and work completion) Email, virtual meetings, phone calls	Intensive scaffolding/modeling Video/ email meetings or conferences Whole class meetings for socialization Intensified teacher collaboration on student progress Video assessments **Specific tools included:** Email, virtual meetings, phone calls (daily, every other day) Teacher input, parent input Attendance (log in and work completion)
2. Self-Awareness	**Instruction looked like:** Face to face conversation Parent/guardian meeting about behavior Observations Physical in classroom examples	**Instruction looked like:** Video meetings or conferences Detailed examples/ outlined template Parent and child check-ins (emails, phone calls or virtually)	**Instruction looked like:** Intensive independent learning Intensive modeling/detailed examples Intensified visuals Provide accessibility

	Specific tools included:	Specific tools included:	Intensified teacher collaboration on student progress
	Observation in setting, social conferences on well being	Teacher input, parent input	**Specific tools included:**
		Email, virtual meetings, phone calls	Email, virtual meetings, phone calls (daily, every other day)
	Authentic concern through facial expressions and conversations	Attendance (log in and work completion)	Teacher input, parent input
			Attendance (log in and work completion)

Summary

        Progress monitoring in the lens of distance learning is important to reflect upon when

addressing students that qualify for Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). By knowing the

characteristics of these students with the intent to provide an opportunity in education, and

understanding that it may be difficult teachers can be prepared. Teachers will have to implement

various strategies to keep students engaged, motivated, and mentally stable, due to the stress and

anxiety that is pronounced in this new way of learning. When addressing a student's goals and

objectives during distance learning, the strategies will have to be intensely scaffolded and

examples will have to be provided all while there a near to perfect collaboration with teachers,

parents, and any support staff for the benefit of the child's education. As for assessments,

observations, and Extended School Year that was not discussed in this research, however, it is

essential to providing special education services to a student and will have to be further

researched.

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