

Child Case Study

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ECE 5263 Observation & Assessment in Early Childhood

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Case Study of a 7-Year-Old Child

Identifying information

I conducted observations and assessments on a male, second-grade student named Ian. Ian attends Shepard Elementary School in the suburbs of Plano, Texas. Ian is mixed-race and has dark curly hair and brown eyes. He is of typical height and weight for his age. Ian was adopted at some point before kindergarten by two fathers who work as realtors. Ian's fathers are between 45-50 years old. Ian does not have any siblings at home. The background of Ian's biological mother is unknown.

Ian is a perceivably active and outgoing 7-year-old. He engages in frequent peer interactions and participates in both individual and group sports throughout the week such as soccer, gymnastics, and golf. While Ian exudes a bubbly personality, he also demonstrates high emotionality and is on a 504 plan for anxiety.

Physical Development

Allocating time for children to move and engage in physical activity is necessary for healthy growth and development (Friedman et al., 2022). By the age of 7, children typically exhibit well-developed hand-eye coordination and involvement in various physical activities including art, sports, and other forms of recreation (Sprenger, 2008). Gender differences in physical play can also be observed at this age, as boys tend to gravitate towards outdoor activities, physical play, and sports (Frost et al., 2012).

Ian demonstrated both typical and advanced gross motor skills. He expressed his weekly involvement in soccer, gymnastics, and golf. Additionally, Ian consistently participated in soccer and football games during recess with the other boys in his grade. During class time, Ian was observed engaging in various forms of high-energy movement. On one occasion while sitting on the floor during a video, I noticed Ian lying down and moving his legs around while watching.

On another day during a class voting activity, whenever a vote for “Lightening McQueen” was called he would stand up, cheer, smile, and jump up and down. Ian was also active during class brain breaks and was seen dancing along with the video at the front of the classroom. During assessments, Ian often moved around in his seat which also revealed his high levels of energy.

Ian displayed growing control in his fine motor skills as well. During recess sports activities Ian demonstrated the ability to hold, throw, and run with a football. He performed smaller tricks using his feet with the soccer ball. Ian also exhibited fine motor skills by successfully tying his shoes. Furthermore, Ian can form letters, words, and numbers, showcasing his growing abilities in fine motor skills as it pertains to writing. These advances in Ian’s gross and fine motor skills are indicative of his ability to practice skills for mastery, awareness of direction and distance, and ability to plan his movements (Sprenger, 2008). However, I believe there is room for improvement in terms of ease, precision, and cleanliness when writing, which may be enhanced with practice.

Moreover, providing opportunities for energy expenditure following periods of prolonged sitting is necessary for optimal development in primary-age children (Friedman et al., 2022). This may be especially crucial for children who demonstrate heightened energy or restlessness, similar to the observed behaviors of Ian. In summary, the observations of Ian in physical domains demonstrate mastery of gross motor skills and advancing refinement of fine motor skills.

Social-Emotional Development

Ian demonstrated many typical social-emotional skills for children his age. Throughout the school day, he engaged in conversations and collaborative play with his peers. Fostering peer relationships is healthy for the growing child and their socio-emotional skills as it allows them to learn to create and manage friendships, build social skills, and understand diversity (Jensen &

McConchie, 2020). While sharing about an upcoming sleepover at his friend's house he smiled and moved around excitedly, suggesting feelings of positive anticipation and happiness related to friendships and shared activities. One day during indoor recess, Ian and a large group of other boys sat in a line against the wall playing together on their Chromebooks and conversing.

Ian also showed progress related to advances in humor and was frequently observed telling jokes, laughing, and smiling throughout the day. During the Wordless Picture Assessment by Bear et al., (2020), Ian joked about completing it backward and laughed. While my observations lead me to believe Ian is social in nature, he also displayed extended periods focused on independent work, especially with online activities. On many occasions, I observed Ian sitting alone on the floor of the classroom completing online assignments or reading on his Chromebook. In addition to socializing, enjoying time spent alone is a common behavior of 7-year-old children (Sprenger, 2008).

As children grow and mature, they develop the ability to recognize and manage a range of emotions (Friedman et al., 2022). Children at the age of seven may cry easily or exhibit mood fluctuations as they learn to manage their emotions over time (Sprenger, 2008). Accordingly, there were many periods where I observed Ian's high emotionality during peer interactions. During lunch, Ian sat next to two girls in his class. Shortly after he started eating, I heard him yelling, "It's not funny! It's not funny! Stop!" A teacher then directed him to move to another spot in the cafeteria. He said, "They kept making annoying noises and wouldn't stop... everyone is always making annoying noises!" On another day during recess, Ian was playing soccer with another male classmate. When his classmate decided to play something else, Ian stormed off with his arms crossed and shouted, "Fine! I'll just play football with my real friends!" While I believe that Ian is personable and loving in his nature towards others, my observations suggest that there are certain moments where he can get easily overstimulated, impatient, or frustrated with his peers. Such conflicts are normal for children of his age, however, individual differences

in temperament may be observed due to “variations in children’s level of frustration tolerance, expression of empathy, the way children respond to new situations, and how well they manage stress” (Friedman et al., 2022, p. 117).

Language Development

Based on my observations, Ian displayed advanced abilities in language development and speech. In much of his dialogue, Ian can be observed using adult-like sentence structure, exaggerations, and animated body language. When speaking about the sleepover mentioned earlier, Ian stated that it “feels like it’s going to be a thousand years from now”. While playing on his Chromebook with his peers during indoor recess, Ian would use gestures to emphasize his words. For example, he reached towards his classmate’s computer saying, “Let me help you!”, and used begging hand gestures while exclaiming, “Bro, guys, please wait!”. When another group tried to join in on a football game during recess, he asserted, “Guys, we’re in the middle of a game right now”. During the game, he said to a peer, “Just punt the ball, bro!”. Recognizing the ecological contexts and the unique features of one’s upbringing, as shown through variations in language use, is crucial for gaining a comprehensive understanding of subsequent development and observed behavior (Friedman et al., 2022).

Moreover, children at this stage of development are expected to grasp relational terms and demonstrate basic reading skills (Sprenger, 2008). After accurately completing the Caption Reading assessment by Bear et al., (2020), Ian opted to create longer sentences to extend the story. He said, “The dog sits and waits for his owner. Then she gives food to eat. Then he settles down to sleep.” He expressed his enjoyment with these types of activities by nodding and saying he wanted to do more of them. When completing the Draw a Rhyme a Line at a Time assessment by Zgonc (2000, p. 53), Ian was able to utilize language to express his frustrations. After guessing the first rhyme of the poem as “bed” during this assessment, Ian quietly whined, “I can’t think of anything. I don’t know. I don’t know.”

Based on my evaluations and in alignment with 7-year-old developmental milestones, Ian has experienced a vocabulary surge, developed the ability to use linguistic devices expressively, and become proficient in reading and comprehending simple texts (Sprenger, 2008). These linguistic skills will be further expanded upon in relation to cognition in the following section.

Cognitive Development

Educators must recognize the interconnectedness of all developmental domains as they relate to cognition (Friedman et al., 2022). Based on my observations and assessments, Ian demonstrated both emerging and advancing cognitive skills. Ian was able to list out the days of the week and articulate specific extracurricular and medical activities associated with each day. When asked the months of the year Ian listed them as, “January, February, March, April, May, July, August, November, December”. According to the Texas Education Agency (2019) understanding chronological calendar time including months of the year is a first-grade skill.

In contrast to this emerging milestone, Ian demonstrated an understanding of liquid conservation despite changes in form. He expressed, “If you pour water in a different thing, it’s still gonna be the same amount of water”, while explaining variations in height due to the glass being thinner, taller, wider, or shorter. These results align with 7-year-old expected milestones by showcasing Ian’s understanding of object properties (Frost et al., 2012). Additionally, Newman & Newman (2023) state that conservation impacts combinatorial skills, such as addition and subtraction. Ian’s proficiency in mathematics, as noted by his teacher Ms. Russo, may be propelled due to his ability to conserve. Ian also showed mastery in the understanding of cause and effect. During a cause-and-effect activity I created, Ian responded to prompts such as “If I don’t shower...If I don’t sleep... If I yell at people... If I am kind... If I am late for school...”. He said, “If you don’t shower, you’ll get stinky”, “If you don’t sleep, your eyes will turn purple. It’s happened to me”, “If I yell at people, they yell at you back”, “If I am kind, other people will be kind and then you can be friends”, “If I am late for school, I get a tardy”.

Furthermore, children in primary school are expected to demonstrate growing abilities to screen out distractions and concentrate when completing various tasks (Frost et al., 2012). In the classroom, Ian often needed multiple reminders to transition between activities or to stay on task. These observations may suggest challenges for Ian in sustaining attention and focus when completing tasks or following directions.

The following assessments highlight Ian's cognitive development as it relates to language skills. Various literacy assessments were administered to Ian, beginning with the Wordless Picture Assessment by Friedman et al., (2022). Ian took a moment before telling the story but did so accurately and in the correct order. Using the pictures provided in the assessment, Ian narrated the story about a mama bird laying eggs, flying away when they hatched, returning with worms, and leaving the nest as the babies learned to fly. He concluded the story with "the end". This demonstrated Ian's ability to sequentially tell a story and utilize sequencers to organize his speech for comprehension and closure (Sprenger, 2008).

According to Friedman et al., (2022), the ability to decode text, use prefixes and base words, and identify irregularly spelled words are foundational reading skills. Subsequent syllable and phoneme assessments by Zgonc (2000, pp. 36-38) showcased Ian's proficiency in word deletion, segmentation, isolation, and blending, with only one error in syllable deletion. To expand upon the findings of the phonics assessment by Zgonc (2000, pp. 36-38), his teacher Ms. Russo utilized Elkonin squares to understand Ian's skills in blending and spelling out words. She used the words "my, dad, hat, must, shop, and plant". While he pronounced every word correctly, he misspelled "must" and "shop".

Ms. Russo also provided me with three mid-semester evaluations for reading skills and comprehension. These assessments included both a regular and nonsense word reading sheet, as well as a reading comprehension story called "Pay Phones". In the nonsense word assessment, Ian correctly pronounced 66% of the words. In the regular word assessment, he read nearly 70%

of the words correctly. While completing the provided assessments Ian voiced uncertainty when distinguishing the letters b and d. Ian also occasionally struggled with correct pronunciation while sounding out words, which led to a lack of coherence in the final word.

Based on the Elkonin squares and assessments provided by Ms. Russo, I noticed that Ian occasionally confused letters such as b, p, and d. For example, in the Elkonin square assessment, Ian wrote the “p” in “shop” backwards. Fatigue also appeared to be a factor when completing the mid-semester assessments due to the numerous amounts of words presented on a single page. Despite this, Ian was able to read the “Pay Phones” assessment with minor errors and demonstrated comprehension by recounting the information provided in the story. These assessments demonstrate Ian’s strengths in spoken language and comprehension, as well as areas to build upon in reading and spelling.

Summary of Developmental Domains


In addition to my observation notes, multiple assessment tools were utilized. To track Ian’s developmental milestones, I employed Developmental Milestones by Skill (n.d.) and Developmental Checklist (Petty, 2009). Next, I assessed basic reading skills using Beginning Consonant Sounds and Letters, Caption Reading, and Wordless Picture Reading assessments by Bear et al., (2020). In addition to these, I administered the phonics and rhyming assessments provided by Zgonc (2000). Finally, Ms. Russo provided me with three mid-semester assessments for reading nonsense words, regular words, and reading comprehension.

The observations and assessments of Ian indicate his advances in physical and language development. However, there is room for growth in developmental aspects of self-regulation, attention, reading and writing skills, and some areas of basic semantics. The previous observations and assessments serve as a foundation for the following recommendations provided for both teachers and parents.

Teacher Recommendations

Based on my observations and assessments, I believe Ian has acquired the foundational skills necessary for enhancing his language skills, specifically in reading and writing. On multiple occasions, Ian demonstrated heightened interest in reading material that he feels confident in comprehending. Based on this, scaffolding Ian's reading skills could be particularly beneficial. Establishing a connection between his existing knowledge and the new content being learned may enhance Ian's intrinsic motivation and engagement to strengthen his reading and writing skills (Friedman et al., 2022). Within this domain, Ian may benefit from additional lessons related to alphabetic principle, decoding words to support comprehension, and pronunciation of digraphs and vowel sequences. The following activities can be implemented to support Ian's learning.

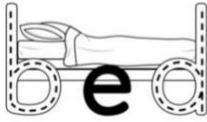
In the Classroom:


KIDS 3

NAME: _____
TEACHER: _____ DATE: _____

Practicing Bb and Dd

- Trace the letters b and d in the word **bed**.
- Draw a line to match the uppercase to the lowercase letters.
- Color the square with the letter b **blue**, and squares with the letter d **orange**.
- Draw a line to match the beginning sound of the picture to the correct letter.
- Trace the lowercase d and b.






B
D

d
b

b	d	d	b
d	b	b	d
d	b	d	b

b
d






Figure 1. *B and D Reversal Worksheet*

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Additionally, my observations indicate that Ian can often become easily frustrated and overwhelmed. Ian's self-regulation skills could be improved by learning and practicing emotional management strategies that promote more effective coping and behavior. Breathing techniques, affirmations, and mindfulness practices, for example, are activities used to promote self-regulation skills and can be implemented in the classroom daily. A calm corner or stimulus shelter would also be a great classroom addition for children with stress or anxiety who may

need space to decompress. Moreover, displaying self-regulation posters around the classroom can help students in understanding emotions and coping strategies. The following images are examples of such informative posters.

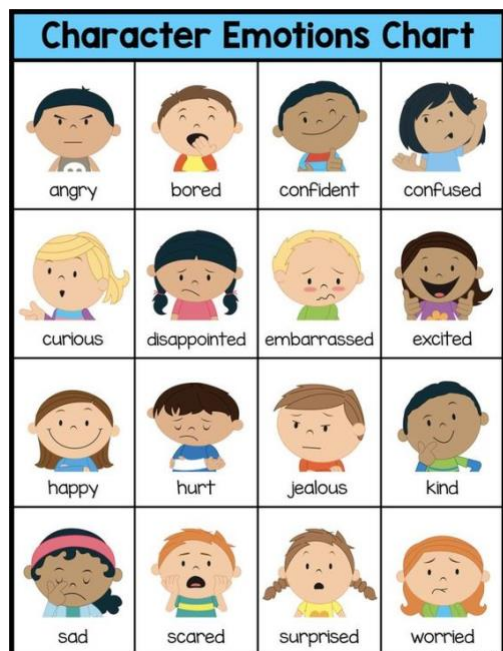


Figure 3. *Characters Emotion Chart*

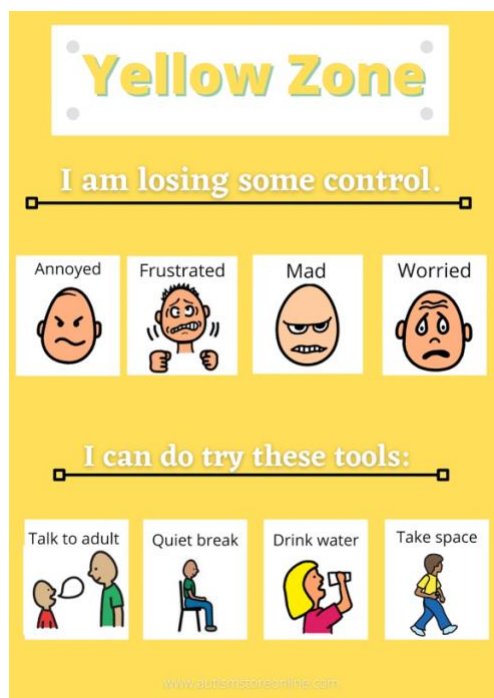


Figure 4. *Zones of Regulation Chart*

Finally, based on the considerable amount of energy observed in Ian, incorporating opportunities for movement between activities throughout the day could help release some of this energy. For instance, role-play activities where children can learn to deal with their emotions can be used to promote self-regulation and impulse control while engaging children in physical movement and interaction (Jensen & McConchie, 2020). Playing “Red Light, Green Light” can also help children become better at learning how to start and stop activities. These types of games may improve the flow of transitions between activities. Fostering this type of control is the key to formal learning, especially in literacy (Miller, 2023). Additionally, incorporating nature walks or short periods of offline play in between long periods of sitting could also be advantageous for children, such as Ian, to expend energy and refocus for lessons.

Parent Recommendations

Based on my observations, I believe Ian would benefit from engaging in enjoyable forms of reading and writing practice at home. Interactive games such as Word Jenga, with vocabulary words on the blocks, could be played as a family. Take turns pulling the blocks and if the word is read correctly, have Ian keep the block. Another great family game could be playing a blends and digraphs board game or a junior version of Scattegories. More ideas to enhance writing skills suggested by Reading Rockets (n.d.) include having your child create grocery lists, family letters or stories, and even scrapbooks. These ideas serve as fun and easy ways for Ian to effectively work on his reading and writing skills at home. Such activities may also provide Ian with additional confidence in his linguistic abilities.

During my observations, Ian seemed very engaged in storytime. If not already a regular practice, consider incorporating reading a book or two with Ian every day to promote Ian’s reading engagement. It may also be beneficial to extend story time activities to allow for the discussion of the emotions of various characters to facilitate social and emotional development (Sprenger, 2008). Other activities to foster self-regulation skills could include yoga and

mindfulness exercises. The following image is a “Feelings Check-In” that could be used both at home and at school to build self-regulation skills.

FEELINGS CHECK-IN

I am feeling:

☐ Happy ☐ Peaceful ☐ Scared ☐ Surprised ☐ Sad ☐ Overwhelmed

☐ Angry ☐ Frustrated ☐ Confused ☐ Nervous ☐ Confident ☐

I Feel It In My:

☐ Head ☐ Neck or Shoulders

☐ Heart ☐ Arms or Hands

☐ Stomach ☐ Legs

The Feeling Is:

★ Tiny ★ Medium ★ Big

Some Thoughts In My Head Are:

If my feeling is causing me stress I can use the following **coping skills** to feel better:

Relaxation Skills	Distraction Skills	Movement Skills	Thinking Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take 3 deep breaths Get a hug or give a hug Tense and relax my muscles Other: _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count from 1 to 100 Find a trusted person to talk to Watch a funny movie Other: _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a break Exercise/Run/Jog Jump up and down Other: _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use encouraging self-talk Think of a peaceful place Challenge unhelpful thoughts Other: _____

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www.mentalhealthcenterkids.com

Figure 5. *Feelings Check-In*

Additionally, considering my observations of Ian, I believe he would benefit from exploring extracurricular activities related to theatre or plays. Not only do these activities provide reading practice, but they also offer a platform for strengthening self-regulation skills and an outlet for releasing energy through performance.

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