

My O.T. Story
The Un-Bored Board
Savannah Coffey, OTS



Prologue:

In 2015, I observed Karyn Garland, an Occupational Therapist at Harold McCormick Elementary School. I spent about 4 months there, gaining knowledge, experience, and interest in working with the pediatric population. I developed therapeutic relationships with multiple children and was able to be a part of helping them reach their personal goals. Now, three years later, I have been able to reconnect with a few of the same students that I had worked with at Harold McCormick Elementary School. These students were my inspiration for this project, and watching them have fun while learning was one of the most rewarding aspects.

Chapter One - Getting Started:

My project began in January after proposing the idea of an expo project to Karyn Garland. I met with her, and asked her what the school and/or students would benefit from if I were to construct a project that specifically catered to a few students. She immediately was open to my question and encouraged me to observe the school, the students, and the different classrooms in order to develop my own idea that would be most beneficial. Through many discussions and conversations with Karyn Garland, Dr. Christy Isbell, and Mrs. Crosby, I developed the idea of a “busy board”. I drew several rough drafts, researched materials, costs, and took measurement of the classroom in order to develop a basic design that would be best suited for my chosen client population.

Chapter Two – Reconnecting

My second visit to the school involved reconnecting with the students and gaining an idea of who my chosen client population would be. Karyn took me to the cafeteria at 7:55 am and introduced me to the teachers, and the students. I immediately recognized one student, Eric, who was at another school that I had observed Karyn at during 2015, while I was finishing up my bachelor’s degree at ETSU. Surprisingly enough, Eric remembered me! It has been over three years since I last worked with Eric, but both him and I must have made a lasting impression on one another.

Chapter Three – Reflecting

After reconnecting with Eric and immediately knowing who I want my client population to be, I started to reflect on what I could remember from 2015 when I worked with him at Harold McCormick elementary. I could remember he wouldn't talk much, he would smile pretty much the entire time with Karyn and I, and he struggled to stay on task after a minute or two. He was a delight to be around, a sweet student, but was struggling with certain tasks. I also remembered that he has a younger brother, who I also worked with, but he attends a different school than Indian Trail. During my reflection, I collaborated with Karyn, gaining knowledge of what she has been working on with Eric and any goals that have been not been reached. I wanted to make sure I had enough understanding and knowledge that I could develop a busy board that would not only benefit Eric, but would also benefit the entire classroom.

Chapter Four – New Student

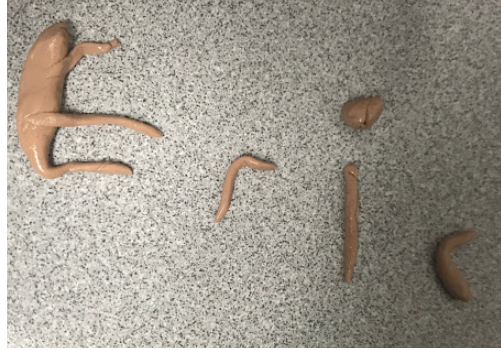
My first actual visit in the classroom felt like I was a new student in their class. I introduced myself, gave multiple hugs and was put on the spot by many of the kiddos by them asking me if I remembered their name. I was also introduced to the classroom schedule, and the “stations” that the teachers implemented into the daily morning schedule. Each student rotates stations every 15 minutes, and each station focuses on a different subject/topic. Usually the students rotate in pairs, but Eric rotated by himself, which worked out great because I was able to be the “other student” and acted as if I was his classmate, rotating stations with him. I didn't take any activities with me the first visit, because I felt like I needed to build a relationship with Eric and understand the flow of the teacher's classroom schedule. I could tell I was a little distracting to some of the students, but after 45 minutes, they adjusted and returned their attention to their assignment stations. This was also a great opportunity for me to observe the interactions of the students among each other, and the stimuli that is required for each student. For example, one student needs constant auditory stimuli, so the teachers play music in the background which doesn't seem to bother the other students. If the music is not playing, then the student who needs that stimuli tends to be very vocal, yelling, and mumbling for music. It was a great first day for me being the “new student” and a great first day that allowed me to observe the strengths and weakness of Eric, as well as his peers.

Chapter Five – Learning is Fun

Beginning in February, I started implementing the activities I designed specifically for Eric. The activities I chose and created were based off my observations during my first visit in the classroom as a “new student”, as well as knowledge from Karyn, and reflection from my time working with Eric in 2015. I began by bringing a matching game, time game, and artificial counting money. I discovered a lot during those activities, such as needs that Eric must have in order to help him stay on task. He requires having something in his left hand at all times to “fidget” with, and the items vary day to day. If he does not have items, such as erasers, silly putty, stress ball, or buttons, then he spends a lot of his time during tasks searching on the floor for items. This has led me to the idea of hidden pictures. I wanted to see if giving him a worksheet that required him to find the hidden objects would increase his attention and then carry over to following tasks, such as handwriting and math; which it did.

Throughout the following weeks, I worked with Eric every Tuesday morning and some Fridays. Some days Eric was extremely tired and would only pay attention to the “fidgety items” he is provided daily, which showed in his performance. However, I took that as a challenge and with trial and error, I took the distractions and turned them into a fun spelling game. One day in particular, Eric was very tired, and yawned consistently. All he wanted to focus on was the silly putty, eraser, and beads he found in the floor. Even with verbal cues, Eric could not stay on task for more than one minute. During the journaling station, Eric refused to write, so I asked him to spell his name using the silly putty. I demonstrated by

spelling my name, and he followed, spelling his with a capital E and the rest lower case. Even though he was unable to complete his journaling worksheet, he wrote out sentences with the silly putty and that increased his arousal level and attention.



Chapter Six – Counting to Success

Counting money is a current topic that Eric is learning during his “math station”. I observed Eric struggling to stay on task during completion of his math worksheets, which consisted of one picture of 2 quarters and then a blank space for a total. He would look at the picture of the quarters, and then start to play with the items he carries around with him (erasers, stress ball, or putty). That’s when I discovered a sorting activity, with play money would be great for Eric, especially since he loves having small objects in his hands for tactile stimulation. That same day I went to work (RBI Tri-cities) and found this plastic container that was about to be thrown away. It was perfect for sorting money, all I needed to do was figure out a way to cut small slots in the top for quarters, dimes, nickels and pennies. On Easter, I took the container to my grandfather, who instantly said, “maybe a dremel tool would work”. Thanks to him, we were able to successfully make slots for each coin. That following Tuesday, I took the container and a handful of coins for Eric to sort and practice counting. He loved it and what’s even better is he had a math test that day that required him to count money on the worksheet. The hands-on counting with the coins carried over to his test, resulting in him to score much better than he had on past tests.

Eric is counting to success.

Chapter Seven – Un-Bored

Eric has shown improvement in his attention and concentration while working with me on the chosen activities. The activities that have been introduced to Eric have been securely placed on the board, which is painted with chalk board paint. The chalk board paint will give the students and teachers more options for new activities to come. The board is not only designed to increase skills and learning, but it is also designed to be fun and appealing, attracting the students and increasing their interests in learning. Every day that I visit Eric and his classmates, he always asks if we can play tic tac toe, sort money, and find hidden pictures.

Chapter Eight – The Story Continues: The Fun Has Just Begun

A Whole Lot of Fun Just Begun, so there’s a million more chapters to come, but that will be a story for Eric and his classmates to experience. Eric and his classmates will be able to increase multiple skills and improve learning by using the busy board, while having fun.

Appendix A – Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Karyn Garland for helping me get this project started, as well as providing me with support and encouragement throughout the past four years. Thank you to Eric, the student who allowed the project to be possible and a success. I also would like to thank Indian Trail Intermediate School and Mrs. Crosby for allowing me to visit the school

weekly to implement my created project. Thanks to both of my professors, Christy Isbell and Jill Smith for making this project possible with much support and guidance.

I would like to thank Lowes for donating the wood, and thank you to John O'Keefe for helping with the design and construction of the easel.

Appendix B – Contact Information

Savannah Coffey, OTS

Email: scoffey@my.milligan.edu