

THEY STARTED TO SAY THEIR TEACHER'S NAME

meet

KRISTEN WHOOLERY

Kristen Whoolery is a Speech Language Pathologist who works with children in the classroom. She's easily integrated Robot-Assisted Instruction (RAI) into her sessions, stating that it's been life-changing for her.

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- kristen whoolery

takeaways

- the children light up when they see the robot
- children with anxiety seemed more relaxed
- the children generalized what they learned in therapy

ABOUT KRISTEN WHOOLERY

Kristen Whoolery is a Speech Language Pathologist who works with children in preschool through second grade, at an average of 30 minutes per session. Her group therapy sizes have ranged from 3 to 5 children during the COVID-19 pandemic and up to 12 children in years before. Ms. Whoolery has worked with Robot-Assisted Instruction (RAI) for two years. “My students have a positive response to the robot,” says Ms. Whoolery. “They see the robot as their friend [and] respect his personal space. They love to give the robot a hug goodbye and hello.” Since the robot is always happy and smiling, comments Ms. Whoolery, children with anxiety seem much more relaxed. In one example, a child who didn't like loud voices refrained from covering his ears, even when the robot was set to its highest volume. RAI easily and naturally fits into her therapy sessions with students. She reinforces her work with the RAI by using YouTube Videos and imitating what the robot is doing: “Improvements have been joint attention, turn-taking, patience, following directions, social skills, pragmatic language, [and] maintaining skills.” Ms. Whoolery notes that children love imitating the robot's lessons, such as Warmup and Brushing Teeth, pretending to go through the task the robot leads them in. “It has been life-changing for myself,” Ms. Whoolery says in sum, “and I have really enjoyed seeing the robot's interaction with the students and how it has changed their lives.”

THE CHALLENGE

Ms. Whoolery works with lower-functioning children with autism who have minimal receptive and expressive language. They are echoic and have a mean length of utterance of 1 to 4 words. When greeted by their name, they would repeat the exact greeting back instead of stating the teacher's or peer's name in place of their own. Most of these students use augmentative alternative communication (AAC) during group (e.g., signing, iPad, PECs, etc.). These students work primarily on attention and participation.

HOW MOVIA HELPED

At the sight of the robot, low-functioning children light up. The main focus of using RAI has been just getting the children to sit and comply with working on the task at hand for up to five minutes. With these children, matching games have proven valuable in increasing attention, sitting, and engagement. Some of the lessons Ms. Whoolery uses includes matching baby farm animals to adult farm animals, pop the bubbles/snowflakes, learn farm animals, and learn basic emotions (happy, sad, mad). Using free text, students learn customary language-greetings (hi, bye, how are you). This tool allowed Ms. Whoolery to teach these lower-functioning children how to say “Hi, Robot.” They then began to generalize this skill into the classroom, saying teachers' names instead of echoing greetings. Ms. Whoolery has seen improvement in her patients' behaviors, respect for boundaries, working with routines, and functional communication.

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