

6-1-2023

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Recommended Citation

Haughney, Kathryn L. and Wakeman, Shawnee (2023) "Tempe Wilson: An Observation-based Case Study," *The Journal of Case Learning and Exceptional Learners*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 4.

<https://doi.org/10.20429/jclel.2023.010104>

<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/jclel/vol1/iss1/4>

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TEMPE WILSON: AN OBSERVATION-BASED CASE STUDY

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title	demographics	grade band	dis/ability	setting/context	purpose	focus
Tempe	Cisgender BIPOC female	Elementary	Intellectual Disability/ Multiple Disabilities	Suburban SPED Classroom	Observation-based	Psychological Evaluation

Setting the Stage

Psychological assessments are often provided to support educational decisions in Individual Education Program (IEP) establishment or reevaluation. In this case, a student has been referred for an updated psychological evaluation in the process of updating her IEP. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, comprehensive psychological evaluations often include a variety of assessments to gather information about a student's academic and functional performance to determine if a child has a disability and the content of the student's IEP. Students with extensive support needs (ESN), may require a broad selection of data describing physical, emotional, adaptive behavior, cognitive, and social needs, as Pennington et al. (2023) described students with ESN as "often having developmental or intellectual disability, and in some cases, other support needs (e.g., physical disabilities, sensory impairments)..."(p. 1). For students with extensive support needs, Wakeman et al. (2023) recommended the use of multiple assessments over time to collect the most accurate data from the student and design effective instruction appropriate for a range of content areas and settings. The assessment information is only useful if data is collected accurately (reliable), valid for how the data is used (interpretations), and administered fairly (e.g., flexible administration, includes accommodations; Wakeman et al., 2023). For students with ESN with complex learning and communication needs, a variety of assessments (e.g., observations, interviews, scales, assessments) is important to create a comprehensive evaluation. The use of supports including augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices and visual response options as well as accommodations for read-aloud text or multiple sessions for an assessment should be used to eliminate barriers that prevent students from being able to show what they know and can do.

Positionality Statement

This case was initially developed for a course covering special education methods for instruction. Although based on a compilation of experiences based on real individuals, this case was initially modified to maintain confidentiality. The case was altered further for this publication by combining the previously developed case with information gathered from the collective experiences of the authors. The authors identify as white or Euro-American cis-women and are compiling descriptions of the experiences of individuals from marginalized groups. Care was taken to acknowledge cultural differences and perceptions to situate the case within various cultural influences.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tempe identifies as a black, cis-gender female, and a self-titled “horse girl” who loves anything and everything about horses and horseback riding. Initially diagnosed with a developmental disability when she was 2 years old, Tempe has more recently been identified as having an intellectual disability and a significant speech disability that consistently impacts her communication at home and in the learning process. She is very affectionate with her family, teachers, and friends in the classroom, but frequently gets in trouble in what is perceived as attention-seeking behavior. Her mother describes her as a “sometimes good” big sister – although affectionate toward her younger brother, Tempe often asks her brother to go “away” when competing for her mother’s attention. Tempe does not spend much time with others outside of her family. Her mother explained that other kids have trouble understanding Tempe when she speaks, and although “she seems just like them at first,” she is often teased or ignored by other children her age. Tempe’s favorite time with friends is during the “after-school horse camp” where she learns to ride horses for free through her church’s horse therapy program. At home, she enjoys watching the children’s show *Go, Diego, Go!* for a few minutes at a time with her brother; she is often “up and down” (as her mother describes) or moving around and seeking attention from others in the middle of television episodes. She also seems to enjoy swinging on the swing in her backyard.

<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/jclcl/vol1/iss1/4>
DOI: 10.20429/jclcl.2023.010104

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Tempe lives with her family, consisting of her mother and brother. Her grandmother and cousin, who is in the 3rd grade (whom Tempe agrees is her best friend), live a few doors down on her street, and she sees them daily. About 9 years before this evaluation, the family immigrated to a rural area less than 1 hour from an urban center in the southeastern United States. Everyone in the family speaks fluent Spanish and English. Both languages are used in the home. She is of Jamaican and Dominican descent, and both cultures influence her family’s daily lives. Her grandmother describes herself as mixed-race and “Euro-centered” (a cultural term that describes her choice to raise her children in Christian religious traditions) “fishwoman” who fishes daily and often cooks the catch for the family dinner. Tempe often joins her grandmother (who she calls “Ramma”) at a lake or local river and is learning to fish.

Tempe enjoys helping others both inside the classroom and at home. Her mother mentions that Tempe “lights up” when it is time to volunteer with her church group at the local food pantry. She loves smiling at people coming to these events and handing out baskets to shoppers, but often gets distracted and follows family members around the room. Tempe’s family moved to the area when Tempe was 2 years old and has built a network of support, but her mom describes difficulty accessing services for Tempe. The school recently referred Tempe’s mom to a local community action agency, where she realized that Tempe qualifies

for several support programs (travel assistance, social group therapy, medical aid). Tempe’s mom expressed reluctance to accept assistance such as attending medical appointments and managing care since Tempe’s grandmother (who helps Tempe’s family to manage responsibilities) sees this as her primary role.

SCHOOL FACTORS

Her teacher describes Tempe as a social 10-year-old girl who joined her new 4th-grade class by greeting each student at the door. The teacher’s first impression is that Tempe has a boisterous and magnetic personality but struggles to recognize personal space, maintain friendships, and stay on task. Based on Spanish and English assessment results and observations in her inclusion classroom, the teacher suspected that Tempe was bilingual with some competency in both Spanish and English, but Tempe rarely speaks Spanish at school, even if prompted to do so. For the “Meet the Teacher” event, the school provided only essential school registration forms in Spanish, and many of Tempe’s family members did not speak to the teacher. Instead, they spoke to one another in Spanish while the teacher spoke in English with Tempe’s mother, Mrs. Wilson. It was in this meeting that Mrs. Wilson confirmed that Tempe is bilingual. She reported that Spanish is spoken regularly between adults at home, but predominantly English is spoken with Tempe and her brother due to an early suggestion from a family doctor. Recent interviews with family members revealed that all family members are fluent in English and Spanish. Tempe’s mother recalled this first school visit as very intimidating for the family.

After getting to know Tempe, the teacher recognized the need to learn more about Tempe’s family to better understand her strengths and address some of her needs. For example, when her teacher first met Tempe and her “whole family” (as the teacher recalls), Tempe seemed to have “no boundaries” with others -- moving others physically around, interrupting, and taking things from others without asking first. Tempe’s

grandmother and cousin were also in attendance and seemed curious about the school environment, following Tempe from area to area around the classroom. Upon meeting, the teacher was taken aback by Tempe’s insistence on helping to hand out papers at the door despite the teacher’s request that she keep the papers with the students’ folders on each desk. When the teacher first intervened, Tempe became upset and the teacher turned to Tempe’s mother for help. Tempe’s mother took a small stack of blank papers from the shelf, said “Here,” and switched the papers that Tempe was holding with the blank papers. Tempe’s mother encouraged Tempe to ask the other kids if they would like to draw and soon several kids were sitting at a nearby table and drawing. The teacher described this as Tempe “getting what she wants” but after a few weeks of communication with the family, sees this intervention as potentially helpful in the classroom. Tempe’s family members regularly use replacement behaviors when Tempe does not understand a request which can help her to transition from one task to another without becoming upset. The teacher is working to implement this across school environments and use Tempe’s love for helping others to address some of her social and academic needs.

From Tempe’s perspective, her teacher observes that Tempe notices, but seems unaffected, when other students view her preferences (e.g., talking about Go, Diego, Go!) as too childish or her behaviors as unexpected. Based on the data from Tempe’s previous IEP and what she has gathered at this point in the school year, the teacher is questioning the current levels of recommended support. She reached out to the IEP team and suggested that the team update assessments including a psychological evaluation in preparation for Tempe’s upcoming reevaluation meeting to determine services. Her request produced the following report:

PSYCHOLOGICAL REPORT

Name: Tempe Wilson

Date of birth: 3/10/2012

Age at testing: 10 years, 6 months

Grade: 4th

School: Mountain Gait Elementary

Dates seen: 9/21/22 & 9/24/22

REASON FOR REFERRAL

Tempe was referred for a comprehensive reevaluation for Exceptional Children's Services to determine what updates or modifications need to be made to her current IEP.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tempe is currently eligible for services under the Intellectual Disability category. Tempe has been receiving speech services since Kindergarten, where she meets five times a week for 30-minute sessions to work on her oral fluency. She has difficulty with her social skills due to her severe stuttering problem. She was last reevaluated in 2018 and qualified for services while continuing to receive speech as a related service. Tempe is in good health and has a good school attendance record.

According to her general education fourth-grade teacher, Tempe performed below average in all academic areas, having tested in both English and Spanish. She has shown some improvement in mathematics and stated that math is her favorite subject. Tempe works best in a small classroom setting with a small student-to-teacher ratio. She is eager to please others but becomes non-compliant when she feels she is competing with other students for the teacher's attention. During some small group and social situations, Tempe engages "appropriately" with her peers (being social, taking turns, and sharing).

According to a parent report, Tempe lives with her mother, Mrs. Wilson, and younger brother, Taylor. Taylor is in the 2nd grade and attends Mountain Gait also. Their parents are divorced. Mrs. Wilson has sole custody of Tempe and her brother. She stated that her children do not have any contact with their father due to his living overseas. When he moved, Mr. Wilson did

not provide an address or phone number where his children could reach him.

Mrs. Wilson expressed concerns regarding Tempe's difficulty making and keeping friends in school and their neighborhood. She would like to see Tempe learn social skills to interact appropriately with her peers and participate in nonacademic activities such as a "lunch bunch." Mrs. Wilson also stated that she would like to see Tempe become a class or library helper, as this would give her an opportunity to exhibit some sort of responsibility.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION (ANECDOTAL)

Tempe was observed in her inclusive math setting. Tempe was seated with a small group of students with the special education teacher (also referred to as the Inclusion Intervention Specialist). Tempe's behavior in the class seemed typical (e.g., talking with seatmates, sharing), although some behaviors were not age-appropriate, such as not waiting for another child to finish speaking before speaking and putting her face near another child's face to get attention. Her attention had to be redirected often as Tempe would try to join in with her peers on their work or conversations rather than work on the task presented to her.

BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATIONS

Tempe is in generally good health. She came to school casually dressed in jeans, a sweatshirt, and a pair of sneakers. She recently passed her vision and hearing screening at the beginning of this school year and does not require eyeglasses or hearing devices. Tempe does not have any apparent physical presentation or visible characteristics of need. Tempe displayed stuttering behaviors in her speech, but the examiner found it comprehensible. A good rapport was established between Tempe and this examiner.

During the administration of the Key-Math, eye contact was made, and there was a good deal of spontaneous conversation during and in

between subtests. Directions were explained thoroughly as noted in the manuals, and she completed all sample questions. She seemed to comprehend the directions but often was concerned with how long the test would take. When she finished, she did not check her work. Tempe had an adequate attention span (about 20 minutes), and then she would have some difficulty focusing and would start to daydream. She does not use her hands when talking but often searches for words. Tempe wrote with her left hand in the claw grip during the test and gripped the pencil tightly. Her writing is of average pressure; however, the numbers are somewhat shaky (e.g., the pressure seems to vary). When she writes, she holds her head very close to the paper. She understands her left and right and can identify the left and right of others. While testing, Tempe worked in her seat and seemed frustrated with some of the more difficult questions. She seemed most frustrated with the subtests that required her to work with the student worksheet. She persisted with the difficult questions; though, she would smack her lips and sigh. She always seemed very confident in all answers and was not very concerned about what this examiner wrote down. Tempe worked well with verbal praise and encouragement.

During the administration of the Brigance Diagnostic (Brigance, 1977), Tempe was very conscientious. She often asked if she was doing “good” on the test. At the end of the testing, she asked if she was “smart.” During the administration, she would show frustration if she did not know the correct answer. She was allowed to complete some sections even after she missed several answers consecutively to help reduce her frustration when the page was taken from him. Overall, she was very compliant with testing procedures. She showed persistence at times throughout testing. Based on the rapport established and the behavior observed, these results are considered valid estimates of her overall achievement.

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The KeyMath3 (Connelly, 2017) is a standardized individual diagnostic assessment that assesses abilities in math (see composite score domains below). Composite standard scores are reported with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15; subtest scale scores have a mean of 10 and a standard deviation of 3. The full battery of the KeyMath3 using Form A was administered and the Fall Norms were used for scoring.

TABLE 1.

KEYMATH3 SCORES

Composite Scores	SS	Range
Basic Concepts	71	Significantly Below Average
Numeration	5	Significantly Below Average
Rational Numbers	6	Significantly Below Average
Geometry	3	Very Significantly Below Average
Operations	60	Very Significantly Below Average
Addition	5	Significantly Below Average
Subtraction	5	Significantly Below Average
Multiplication	3	Very Significantly Below Average
Division	3	Very Significantly Below Average
Mental Computation	1	Significantly Below Average
Spelling	8	Very Significantly Below Average
Applications	55	Very Significantly Below Average
Measurement	6	Significantly Below Average
Time and Money	6	Significantly Below Average
Estimation	2	Very Significantly Below Average
Interpreting Data	2	Very Significantly Below Average
Problem Solving	1	Very Significantly Below Average
Total Test	61	Significantly Below Average

Note: SS = Standard scores: Composite: $X=100$; $sd=15$ Subtest: $X=10$; $sd=3$.

During this administration of the KeyMath3, Tempe’s Total Test score fell in the significantly below average range. Tempe’s Basic Concepts score fell in the significantly below-average range. Tempe’s Operations score and Applications score fell in the very significantly below-average range.

TESTS ADMINISTERED AND EVALUATION RESULTS:

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT

The Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale (VABS; Sparrow et al., 2005) is a behavior rating scale that purports to sample an individual's personal and social proficiency. The Classroom Edition consists of four adaptive behavior domains, with each domain consisting of sub-domains: Communication (Receptive, Expressive, and Written); Daily Living Skills (Personal, Domestic, and Community); Socialization (Interpersonal Relationships, Play and Leisure Time, Coping Skills), and Motor Skills (gross, fine; for children under the age of six). Results are reported in Standard Scores (mean = 100; standard deviation = 15).

Tempe obtained an Adaptive Behavior Composite standard score of 71 which, compared to her age peers in the normative sample, is significantly below average. Her Communication and Daily Living Skills Domain scores are significantly below average. Tempe's score in the Socialization Domain is average.

TABLE 2.

VINELAND ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SCALE (VABS) SCORES

Domains	Standard Score	Descriptor Range
Communication Domain	70	Significantly Below Average
Daily Living Skills Domain	72	Significantly Below Average
Socialization Domain	66	Significantly Below Average
Adaptive Behavior Composite	71	Significantly Below Average

Within the Communication Domain, Tempe understands the meaning of “yes” or “okay” and proceeds with an activity. However, she

demonstrates some understanding of the meaning of “no.” When told to “stop” or “no,” Tempe will sometimes continue with the activity, despite the request that she stop. She is able to follow directions that require an action and an object, such as: “Get out your pencil.” Tempe sometimes loses focus when longer directions are given, and she does not attend to lectures or talks by school employees or guests that last 15 minutes or longer. She uses sentences of four or more words and usually uses correct grammar. She seems to enjoy telling stories about past experiences, and she provides vivid detail. However, when trying to talk about the details of a story just read to her, she often leaves out important information. When prompted about future vocational goals she provides answers like, “I want to be in the army” or “I want to be a doctor.” She does not provide significant details about why she is interested in these vocations when prompted further. Tempe does write many basic sight vocabulary words correctly. She is not currently able to write basic sentences that include subjects, adjectives, and verbs.

Within the Daily Living Skills Domain, Tempe seems interested in maintaining a neat appearance. She requests to call home for a change of clothing when she becomes soiled by food or dirt. However, she does not always dress in anticipation of weather changes. She does not care for her fingernails without assistance; they are often dirty and untrimmed. She does not cover her mouth with her hands when she coughs or sneezes and usually does not avoid peers when they exhibit cold or flu symptoms. Tempe is capable of feeding herself and using a fork and spoon appropriately. She requests to use the restroom as needed. When the teacher asks, Tempe will put away materials in appropriate locations. At home, she is able to assist with simple aspects of meal preparation but does not plan or prepare a meal independently. Tempe shows an understanding that hot things are dangerous. However, she often ignores other safety rules. She seldom looks both ways before crossing the street. She does not fasten her seat

belt without being reminded, nor does she obey “walk” and “don’t walk” traffic signs when crossing the street.

Within the Socialization Domain, Tempe responds well to positive statements directed toward her. She sometimes responds verbally and positively to the good fortune of others. She does not respond to hints or indirect cues during conversations. For instance, if a peer stops responding to her and directs her attention to a new topic, Tempe still attempts to maintain a conversation about the initial topic. She does have a close “best friend” who is also her cousin but does not regularly engage with the same group of friends. Tempe enjoys sharing her toys and playing with others. She also enjoys playing alone. She has been seen engaging appropriately in many activities with her peers in and out of the classroom. She attends a horse-riding after-school activity but does not play extra-curricular sports. She usually shows good manners by saying “thank you” and “goodbye” when appropriate. She does not always show good table manners in the cafeteria. She sometimes talks with her mouth full of food or enters other students' personal space with little or no awareness of their discomfort. Although she can show appropriate social behavior, Tempe has been heard discounting others by stating that a drawing was ugly, and a peer was “stupid.”

CRITERION-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT

The Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills assesses an individual in readiness, speech, listening, reading, spelling, writing, research and study skills, and math. In this particular assessment, Tempe was tested in Word Recognition, Writing, Spelling, Word Analysis, and Math Grade Placement. The results are reported in grade levels, as this is a published criterion-referenced test.

For word recognition and word analysis, Tempe scored on a first-grade level. In the word recognition section, Tempe did identify initial

consonants and substitutes initial-consonant sounds, as well as short vowel sounds. Tempe did complete the task of substituting initial-blend and initial-digraph sounds, such as /t/, /d/, /rk/, /sh/, /nk/, and /rt/, and read words with common endings such as -eep, -ick, -ide, and -ink. She did not substitute long vowel sounds nor final-consonant sounds such as /th/, /lt/, /rd/, and /rm/. She did not substitute initial-blend and initial-digraph sounds such as /ch/, /pr/, /sp/, and /str/.

TABLE 3.
BRIGANCE TEST SCORES

Skill Area	Grade Level
Word Recognition	First grade
Word Analysis	First grade
Spelling	First grade
Writing	Kindergarten
Math Grade Placement	Second Grade
Math Addition and Subtraction	First Grade

Within Spelling Skills, Tempe also scored at the first-grade level. She did spell words such as car, long, and many, and wrote initial consonants of dictated words, but struggled with words with long vowel sounds. She did appropriately spell initial blends and digraphs of spoken words. She did not complete tasks that pertained to suffixes and prefixes, which is at the third-grade level on this criterion-referenced measure.

Tempe’s writing skills are also at the Kindergarten level. She did not write in cursive. Tempe appeared to have difficulty maintaining focused attention and implicated that she did not want to write. She had a problem putting words into sentences, and it was difficult to get her to copy her sentence onto the paper. Tempe did write down personal data such as her name, age, date of birth, address, telephone number, and parent’s names. When writing a sentence, Tempe did not capitalize the first word in each sentence or place periods at the end of each sentence.

Tempe placed at a first-grade level (with addition- she placed 2nd-grade in some areas) in the math placement part of the assessment. She did add and subtract single-digit numbers in standard form and in word problems. She did add a single-digit number to a two-digit number using her fingers. Tempe did not complete items with regrouping either by addition or subtraction or with multiplication or division. However, Tempe seems to really enjoy working on math. She was eager to answer any math question and was very attentive during this part of the assessment.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Tempe is a 10-year and 6-month-old child who qualifies for special education services within the Intellectually Disability exceptionality in the moderate range. These results are considered to be a valid representation of her current level of performance. The test results show that math skills fall in the significantly below average and the very significantly below average range as measured by the KeyMath3.

Tempe's adaptive behavior functioning level, as measured by the Vineland, Classroom Edition, is significantly below average compared to her same-age peers, as the teacher report indicates. Her scores in the Communication and Daily Living Skills Domains are significantly below average indicating a higher need for support within these areas. Her score in the Socialization Domain is also significantly below average.

Based on the above-reported information from the Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills, Tempe's academic strength seems to be in math, where she did score in addition at the second-grade level. She gets very excited about math and is very cooperative with this material. According to observations made during this administration of the Brigance, Tempe has a difficult time with writing. Tempe admitted that she does not enjoy writing and does not seem to take pride in her work. Her handwriting is very sloppy and difficult to read.

Suggestions to help Tempe improve her mathematics skills:

- Build foundational skills in basic math fact computation.
- Build upon her addition skills to more complex problems.
- Provide activities for Tempe to solve math problems mentally.
- Focus on developing strong multi-digit addition, multiplication, and division skills.
- Utilize real-world application exercises in math instruction.

Suggestions to help Tempe improve her adaptive skills:

- Increase Tempe's ability to attend for longer periods by teaching self-monitoring skills (e.g., utilizing checklists in reinforcement systems).
- Utilize active student response strategies to increase Tempe's engagement when attention is waning.
- Provide opportunities for Tempe to become more adept at stopping an activity when asked – identify the function for why she is inconsistent in ending activities when asked.

Suggestions to help Tempe improve her daily living and socialization skills:

- Provide simulated activities where Tempe must apply and adhere to safety rules. Explicitly teach the consequences of not following safety rules.
- Encourage participation in school clubs or teams.
- Allow Tempe opportunities to learn how to read social cues through video demonstrations and role-playing.
- Create a school-home partnership to encourage the development of more refined hygiene and self-care development.

Suggestions to help Tempe improve her reading skills:

- Provide explicit instruction in word analysis – teach syllable types, vowel combinations, and affixes.
- Select texts that allow Tempe to practice her reading words containing multiple syllables, vowel teams/ combinations, and affixes.
- Combine reading instruction with writing and spelling activities.

Other criterion-referenced information:

- When competing with peers for teacher attention, Tempe will talk out negatively to peers or the teacher 70% of the time.
- When completing written work, Tempe vocalizes (lip smacks and sighs) 100% of the time.
- Tempe copies 3-5 sentences correctly (15-20 minutes).
- Tempe uses 1% of fourth-grade words when communicating orally.
- Tempe can write 15 correct numbers per minute.
- Tempe can compute basic math facts (1 digit) (+,-) at 20 FPM (facts per minute).
- Tempe looks both ways when crossing the street and follows safety directions in 50% of simulation trials.

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Reflection Questions

1. *What are the benefits of a comprehensive evaluation? What are the barriers to gathering the information that you need on students? What are the barriers to reporting an accurate description?*
2. *Based on the recommendations from the school psychologist and observations from the family and teacher, how would you plan to aid Tempe in using her cultural assets to address areas of support?*
3. *In what ways is language development a barrier for Tempe? If you need more information, what information do you need?*
4. *What areas should likely be addressed by Tempe's next IEP? What would an example goal for two of those areas look like?*
5. *What other information might the teacher want to gather before conducting the IEP meeting with Tempe and the stakeholders in her success?*