**Marcus**



Marcus is a boy who has just turned 4 years old. He loves cars and trucks and prefers these to most other toys and materials. He is active and enjoys play outdoors and in the motor playroom at his child care center. He lives with his mom and dad and his newborn baby sister. Both his parents work full time and he has been enrolled in a large, well-established full day child care center since he was 2 ½ years old. Prior to that, he stayed with his maternal grandmother.

On entering the child care program, Marcus’s parents expressed minor concerns about his speech and language development. After several months in the program his teacher agreed that his speech and language appeared delayed compared to other children his age and that he did not show interest in many of the classroom materials, did not like art and “academic work” and did not like to leave preferred activities when it is time to do some-thing else. With help from the child care, Marcus’ parents referred him to their LEA for evaluation at almost 3 years old.

Evaluations revealed speech, language, and fine motor delays. The physical therapist noted mild low muscle tone which seemed to contribute to slight delays in gross motor skill development. Teacher reports of falling more frequently than the other children and sometimes bumping into things were attributed to low muscle tone and occasional inattention to where he is going.

Marcus’s parents shared that he has difficulty transitioning to school and occasional tantrums when he needs to transition to new activities at home. His teacher mentioned frequent tantrums in both his 2- and 3-year-old classrooms. He continues to have “meltdowns” when transitions interrupt his play and resists participating in most classroom activities, especially fine motor tasks. His play with other children is most frequently side-by-side in the block area with infrequent verbal exchange and no true cooperative play. He sometimes watches other children’s construction with blocks or tracks, but does not join in this play, choosing to only build towers for knocking down and pushing his favorite trucks. He needs frequent reminders to keep them in the block area. Marcus does not freely choose puzzles or manipulatives. His most frequent interaction with classmates is in active play during which he likes to ride a tricycle or wrestle and bump into others, which is not always welcomed by them. He almost seems to like to run and fall.

Marcus’ teachers have a range of training and experience, though most do not have 4-year early childhood degrees, and none have special education degrees. They are open to having therapists see children during the day and both school system and private practice therapists come and go throughout the week. Most teachers are welcoming and try to spare a few minutes to talk with therapists about children’s needs and their concerns when they have the time, which is not often. The program does not have the personnel resources to spare teachers for longer meetings. Most therapy occurs outside the classroom in several available rooms around the center and this appears to be the expected practice model. Marcus has recently been moved up to the 4 year old room in which stricter expectations for early academic tasks such as writing shapes and letters and verbally naming shapes, colors and numbers are in place. Speech and fine motor therapy are provided in a small room outside the classroom. The speech and language pathologist and occupational therapist have both experimented with asking a classmate to join them for some sessions to be potential models for Marcus. They are both concerned that he frequently refuses tasks that challenge him, saying “I can’t do it”, puts his head down, and sometimes climbs under the table. Together they have wondered if classroom demands for early academic tasks are age appropriate. A lot of classroom time is spent writing shapes and letters, sitting for long circle times focused on academics, hand raising, etc. Marcus loves center time, when he has free choice, and outdoor play the most.

Current speech and language skills are characterized by mild to moderate articulation delays, limited 2-to-6 word sentence length, and low expressive vocabulary, including language concept words for naming and low frequency of verbal interaction. He frequently substitutes one word for another that sounds similar and sometimes switches topics mid-conversation. This complicates his ability to be understood. In the recent sessions, he has responded well to use of a core language vocabulary picture board and an aided language topic picture board for car play. The O.T. has had some luck getting him to draw when adding elements to turn drawings into cars. The school district is asking therapists to provide more treatment in the context of children’s least restrictive environment which in this case is the child care classroom.