Teaching a child with ASD to request information

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BACKGROUND

- 4 year-old-boy with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Started treatment in October 2016
- Attends TPAS program for 24 hours weekly
- Attends a typical senior kindergarten classroom for 6 hours weekly with a teacher and an educational assistant
- Relative strengths: visual performance, receptive language and imitation
- Relative weaknesses: intraverbal, requesting and social and play
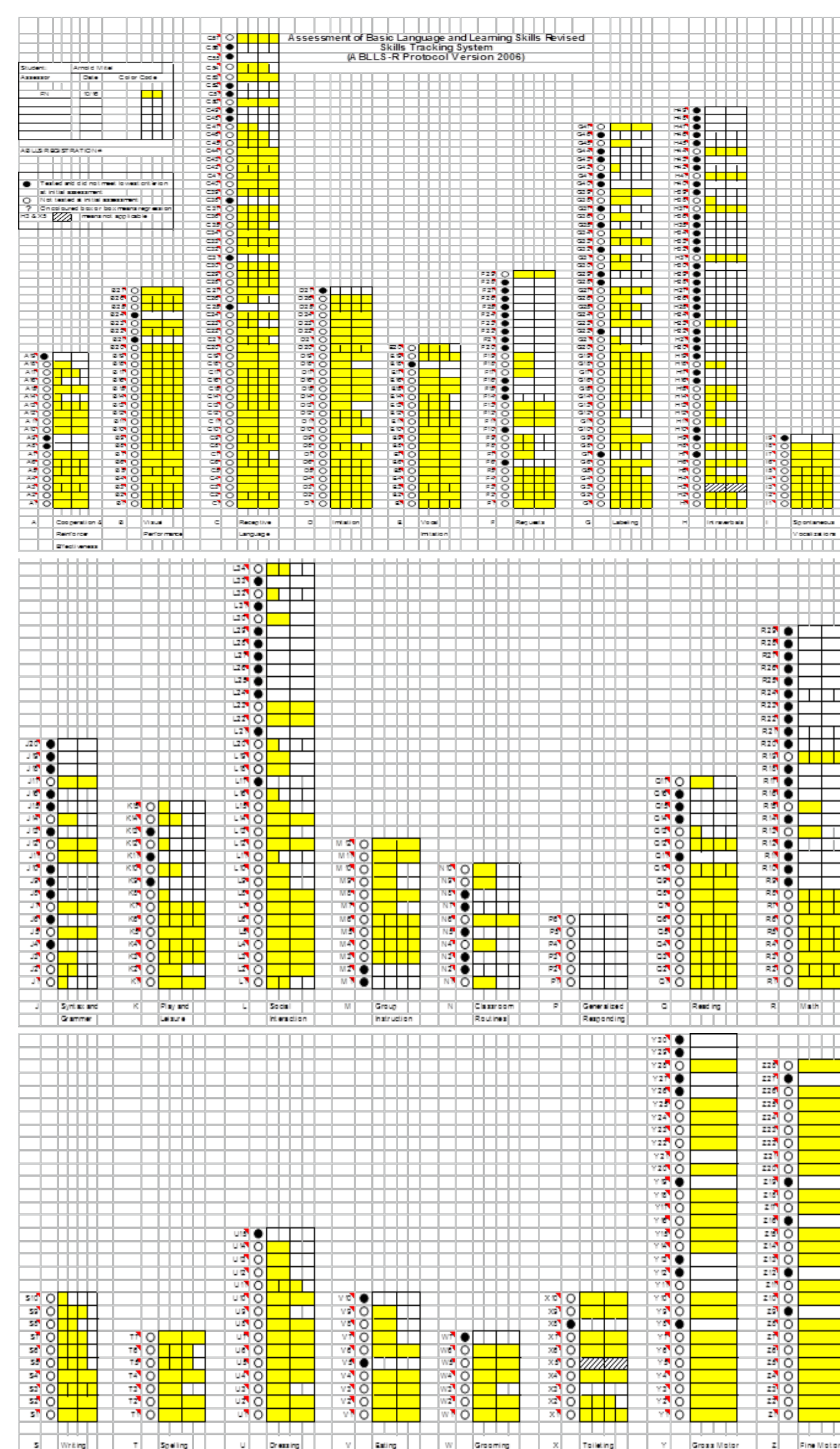- It has been observed that the client does not ask wh-questions at the center or in the home environment

Fig.1. The client's ABLLS-R assessment results

PURPOSE

The purpose of this skill acquisition program is to:
- Teach the client to request for information with wh-questions (where, who, when)

METHODS

TARGET RESPONSES:
- Correct response: client will emit the appropriate wh-question within 3 seconds of the antecedent verbal and nonverbal stimuli
- Incorrect response: client responds with any other vocal verbal or no response after 3 seconds of the antecedent verbal and nonverbal stimuli

BASELINE:
- During baseline, each scenario (4 total) per wh- question (3 total) was presented once daily across three days for a total of 3 probes each per scenario.
- A scenario is defined as the pre-determined antecedent manipulations created to contrive EO and evoke the target mand (see Fig. 2) based on the teaching strategies used in Shillingsburg et al., 2011.
- After the presentation of verbal and/or non-verbal stimuli, the client was given 5 s to respond:
  - If there was no response or an incorrect response, no reinforcement or attention was given and his routine continued as usual.
  - If a correct response was emitted, no reinforcement would have been provided but his questions would have been acknowledged by staff (i.e. "I don't know", "I'm not sure", etc.).
- During baseline, the client did not emit the target response. Some responses included: no response, echoing the verbal sd given by staff, and/or tacting (e.g. "it's empty").

TEACHING:
- EO manipulations and textual prompts were used to teach requests for information (Shillingsburg et al., 2011; 2016).
- Depending on the target scenario, the nonverbal and/or verbal stimuli were presented to the client (see Fig.2)
- Textual prompts were faded using a constant time delay (Shillingsburg et al., 2016). After 3 prompted correct responses, the textual prompt was faded by a 2 s delay to allow for independent responses.
- If a correct response occurred, the client was given the information needed to access the desired item.
- If an incorrect response occurred, staff would represent the verbal sd for the scenario with a decreased time delay.

Wh-Question Target: WHO HAS IT? WHO IS IT?
A. Attempting to play with a preferred toy/activity with a missing piece (e.g. telling him to color but the marker is missing) and stating "someone took your _____ (marker)"
B. Stating that someone has a surprise for him in the presence of 2 other staff members
C. Presenting three containers/boxes each with a picture of a classmate inside and stating "one of your friends wants to play with you"
D. Attempting to get his lunch bag for snack/lunch (but it is missing) and stating, "someone has your lunch bag"

Wh-Question Target: WHERE IS IT? WHERE IS _____?
A. Presenting him with a box two times in a row with a toy in the box and then on the third time, presenting the box without a toy
B. Instructing him to sit in his chair, but the chair is missing
C. Following a mand for an item, tell him to get it but it's not in its typical location
D. Instructing him to get his pencil from his pencil case, but the pencil case is missing

Wh-Question Target: WHEN ARE WE GOING? WHEN CAN WE PLAY?
A. Telling him "we are going to go visit west 1 but not right now"
B. Stating "let's play with the _____(preferred toy, e.g. water table), but not right now"
C. Stating "we are going to play in the gym but not right now"
D. Stating "soon it will be time for _____ (e.g. snack, lunch, home, circle, etc.), but not right now"

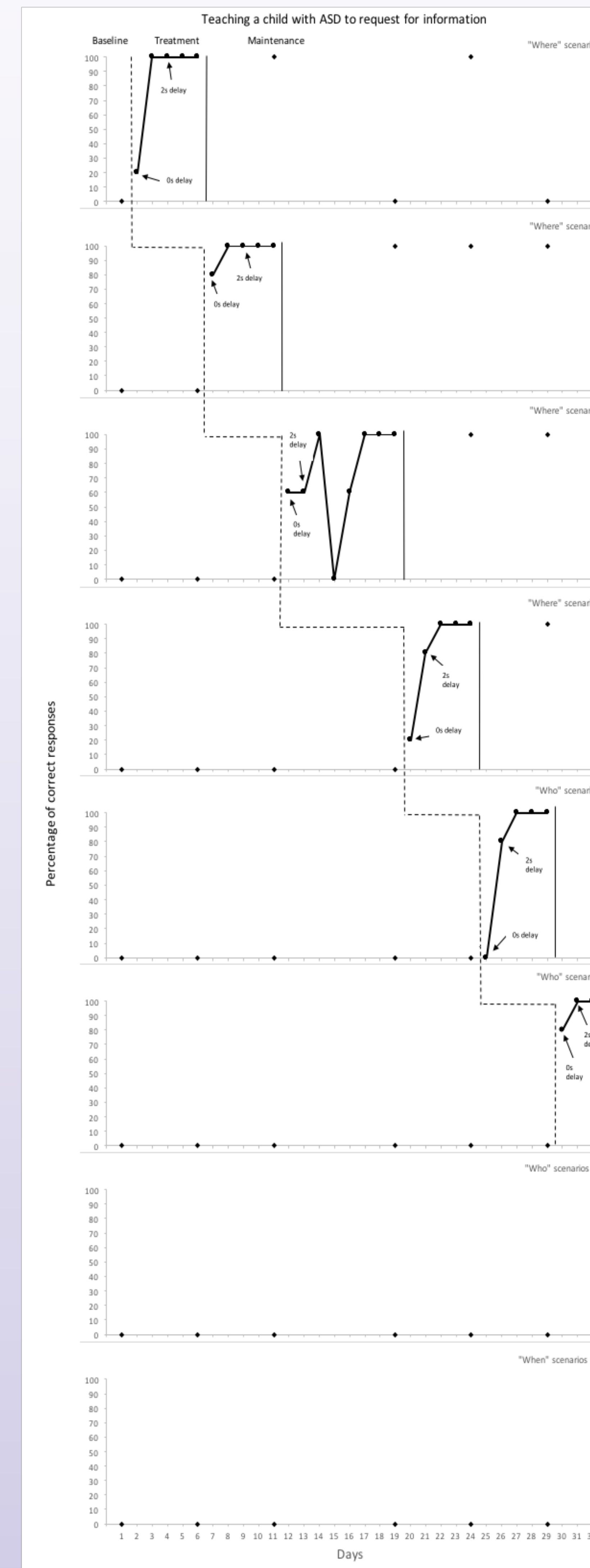Fig.2. Predetermined scenarios to evoke mands for information during teaching (Shillingsburg et al., 2011)

Fig.3. Client's mands for information using "where", "who", and "when" are depicted.

RESULTS

- By contriving EO and using textual prompts and prompt fading, the client has successfully learned to independently emit requests using "where?" across all 4 scenarios and "who?" across 2 scenarios thus far (see Fig. 3)
- In addition to learning to request "who has it?", the client also emitted an additional mand for the desired item after approaching the identified individual without direct teaching
- A functional relationship between treatment and increases in responding is demonstrated by the untaught wh-questions and scenarios remain in baseline at 0%.
- Although in the study by Shillingsburg et al. (2011) generalization occurred across scenarios for most of the general response topographies taught, probes in this case have not demonstrated that generalization has occurred.
- Staff have anecdotally reported the client using taught wh-questions in novel situations; however, the data does not reflect this observation

LIMITATIONS

- Frequent absences of client limits teaching opportunities
- Contrived nature of teaching scenarios may lead to difficulty when generalizing to novel situations
- It is unclear if the requests for information are entirely controlled by EO versus the verbal and non-verbal discriminative stimuli

REFERENCES

Shillingsburg, M. A., Gayman, C. M., & Walton, W. (2016). Using textual prompts to teach mands for information using "Who?". The Analysis of Verbal Behavior, 32(1), 1-14. doi:10.1007/s40616-016-0053-7

Shillingsburg, M. A., Valentino, A. L., Bowen, C. N., Bradley, D., & Zavatkay, D. (2011).. Teaching children with autism to request information. Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 5(1), 670-679. doi:10.1016/j.rasd.2010.08.004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS