

CLASSROOM SCENARIO

Tony

Tony had a difficult first day in his inclusive kindergarten. His teachers saw his crying, tantrum-throwing, and acts of aggression, and, unfortunately, realized that much of his behavior reflected not simply the fact that he had autism, but rather his inability to communicate in a new environment. His teachers used the Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS) to train him in socially appropriate ways to obtain what he wanted, using the six phases of the training programs (Scott, Clark, & Brady, 2000). In the first phases, they determined that Tony enjoyed playing with a particular toy truck. When he reached for it, they placed the picture card of a truck in his hand, then guided him to give the picture to his teacher. The teacher immediately gave him the truck. In later phases, Tony was encouraged to go to a touch board of the picture, then discriminate the truck from other pictures, and then build sentences structure by choosing first the “I want” card, followed by the picture of the desired object. In the fifth phase, Tony responds to “What do you want?” questions, and in the sixth phase, Tony uses the PECS cards to answer teacher questions, such as “What do you have?” or “What do you see?”

As Tony learns the PECS program, his tantrum-throwing and inappropriate behavior diminishes, and he learns socially appropriate ways of interacting with others. Other students use the PECS materials to interact with Tony. The PECS training continues to include additional language concepts, such as adjectives, verbs, and yes-no responses. Tony is learning important lessons for communicating and socializing with teachers and classmates.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Why do you think using the PECS system is easier for Tony than using spoken language?
2. Why would a language training program help to improve Tony’s social behavior?
3. How could Tony’s classroom peers assist in developing Tony’s communication skills?