

FOREST ACRES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE CHALLENGE:

- Students that are on all areas of the ASD spectrum (verbal to nonverbal)
- Language as a major obstacle
- Staying on topic, starting a conversation, paying attention, and taking turns

THE SOLUTION:

- Milo and robots4autism as a learning tool
- Working on social situations in and outside of the classroom
- Finding a common discussion point, rather than saying “This is what I want to do.”

THE IMPACT:

- One student has engaged, looked for social cues, and had a constant back-and-forth conversation for the first time in five years.
- Other students have learned appropriate greetings and ways to find common discussion points with their peers.
- Children feel safe and can step outside their comfort zones in in social settings.

BACKGROUND

Finding a way to channel what students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have to offer in today’s world has been the center of Ross Goodacre’s life. His focus as a special education teacher at Forest Acres Elementary in Easley, SC, is to help children with ASD learn how to approach social situations on their own; whether that be starting a conversation, paying attention, staying on topic, or taking turns.



Goodacre has had a wide range of kids working with Milo the facially expressive humanoid robot at his school, from verbal to non-verbal speakers. “They like to be challenged and are continually building confidence in themselves and the belief that they will continue progressing,” Goodacre said. “They put a lot of effort into thinking, watching and interacting with robots4Autism curriculum lessons. We’re having kids embrace (Milo) in all levels.”

One recent example is Noah, a student at Forest Acres Elementary who, over five years, had had little to no social interaction with students and teachers at his school. But with Milo, Noah engages and looks for facial cues. This is the first time in five years Noah has made constant eye contact with anybody or held a back-and-forth conversation.

When he was first introduced to Milo, Noah was hesitant. He didn’t make eye contact or participate in any activity. But once Noah sat one-on-one with Milo and a tablet in front of him, everything changed. Now Goodacre sees Noah maintaining that eye contact, following directions, and



responding to questions on a tablet all through his stimming, which usually involves rocking and leaning in his seat. With help from Milo, Noah’s schedule was expanded from two hours each day at school to four full days each week.

Milo has been a part of the curriculum for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in 27 states and 3 Canadian provinces. Teachers are finding out first-hand how Milo can be a non-threatening way for these students to become more comfortable with one-on-one interactions.

RESULTS

Without knowing what to expect, Goodacre has seen Milo truly make an impact on the children’s social and language needs. A big focus for students with ASD at Forest Acres Elementary is staying on topic while conversing with others. “Before Milo, we tried to do a lot of role play and situational things.” Goodacre said. “But with Milo, it’s specific. It’s all about that topic of the day. They feel very special with him—it’s almost like a reward.”

When spending time with Milo, kids like to be involved by listening and participating in the questions he asks. While every student’s story is certainly different, Milo has played the same role for all of these students by serving as a facilitator in their journey to successfully navigate those social situations.

“A shared world with them is going to be an amazing place,” Goodacre said. “They just need a chance to be let into your world. We have seen Milo open that door for so many of our ASD students in ways we never thought possible.”

Curious about the effects of technology on ASD Classrooms?

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