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Training caregivers to facilitate communicative participation of preschool children with language impairment during storybook reading

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Abstract

This study reports the effects of training six adult caregivers to use an interactive reading routine, termed Complete Reading Cycle (CRC), during storybook reading with their preschool children, aged 3;2 to 3;5, who exhibited language impairment. Caregivers were taught to be more responsive to their children's communicative attempts during reading and to more actively engage the children in reading the story. Measures of child change included communicative participation and lexical diversity of utterances during adult-child shared reading. Children significantly increased the frequency of communicative turns, total number of words, and number of different words produced during shared storybook reading as a result of caregiver training. Five of the six children had higher mean frequencies for story initiations during training. However, increases in initiations were not statistically significant, with considerable variability across children for this measure.

Learning outcomes: (1) As a result of this activity, the participant will be able to discuss positive communicative changes in children with language impairment during adult-child storybook reading. (2) As a result of this activity, the participant will be able to use the storybook reading procedures with parents of preschool children exhibiting language impairment.

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Keywords: Complete Reading Cycle; Parent-child storybook reading; Language impairment; Caregiver interventions

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1. Introduction

The impact of early reading experiences on young children's language and literacy development is well documented (Chomsky, 1972; DeLoache & DeMendoza, 1987; Ninio, 1983; Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Snow, 1983; Snow & Goldfield, 1983; Sulzby, 1985; Wells, 1985). Researchers suggest that it is not only the frequency of reading, but also the quality of adult-child interactions during storybook reading that account for the language and literacy learning that occurs in the storybook-reading context (DeLoache & DeMendoza, 1987; Ninio, 1983; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Because adult-child shared reading is viewed as a natural context with a predictable routine, interventionists increasingly are using storybook reading to facilitate the communicative and linguistic development of children who exhibit language impairment (LI) (Bradshaw, Norris, & Hoffman, 1998; Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999; Crowe, Norris, & Hoffman, 2000; Whitehurst, Fischel, Caulfield, DeBaryshe, & Valdez-Menchaca, 1989). The purpose of this investigation was to examine the efficacy of an interactive storybook reading intervention termed Complete Reading Cycle (CRC) (Crowe, 1996). Specifically, the communicative behaviors of children with LI were examined for increases in active verbal participation, story initiations, and lexical diversity of utterances.

Although typically developing children and children with LI reportedly receive similar frequency of reading exposure during the preschool years (Marvin & Wright, 1997), the quality of the interactions and types of child participation have been found to differ. Recent studies show that children with LI interact differently during adult-child storybook reading than do their typically developing peers (Crowe, 2000; Ezell & Justice, 1998; Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1998; Marvin & Miranda, 1993; Ravidoux & MacDonald, 2000). Typically developing children are reported to ask questions, initiate topics, and elaborate on the topic during joint reading episodes (Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Ravidoux & MacDonald, 2000). In contrast, children with LI and other disabilities often sit passively, provide minimal verbal responses (Crowe, 2000), or respond negatively (Kaderavek & Sulzby, 1998; Ravidoux & MacDonald, 2000) to adult-child storybook reading.

Ravidoux and MacDonald (2000) categorized the child behaviors they observed during adult-child shared reading. They identified four distinct interaction patterns exhibited by children with LI and/or developmental delays. Children labeled as proactive initiated topics and responded to mothers' questions and comments. Reactive children were those who produced limited initiations and primarily responded to adult queries. Children identified as inactive were primarily observers, who used few initiations or responses. Resistive children attempted to disengage from the reading altogether.

It has been hypothesized that caregivers in response to the behavior patterns exhibited by their children with LI may assume a dominating role or reduce the linguistic expectations for their children. Caregivers may simply read the book from cover-to-cover or ask linguistically simpler questions (i.e., those requiring a nonverbal or minimal verbal response) (Crowe, 2000; Ravidoux & MacDonald, 2000). These caregiver reading behaviors have been interpreted as attempts to actively engage the child in the activity while accommodating the child's limited communicative abilities (Crowe, 2000). In doing so, the adult may establish interaction patterns that relegate the child to a passive communicator role or limit the language-learning opportunities of the book-reading context.

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