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The power of stories: Facilitating social communication in children with limited language abilities

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Abstract

Children with limited language expression and comprehension abilities are at risk for academic failure, particularly in literacy acquisition. In addition, these children often have poor social outcomes, including difficulty forming friendships, social exclusion, withdrawal, and victimization. The academic and social difficulties that these children experience are associated with their poor language processing skills, limited conversational ability, and weak social and emotional knowledge. A social communication approach utilizing children's literature is suggested as one approach to address these three areas simultaneously. This approach involves sharing books with a strong story structure, rich social and emotional content, and engaging illustrations. Flexible scripts are created to guide interventionists to elicit the production of complex sentence structures, highlight conversational cooperation, and facilitate emotion understanding. To provide continuity of instruction, these bibliotherapeutic procedures can be implemented by special service providers in intervention sessions as well as by teachers in general classroom activities.

Keywords

bibliotherapy, emotion understanding, language delay, language impairment, limited language, scripted conversation, social communication, story

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Around the world, many children do poorly in school because they struggle with the language demands of the academic setting. In fact, in the United States, approximately 7% of kindergarteners have language impairment (LI) (Tomblin et al., 1997), also referred to as specific language impairment, language delay, language disorder, communicative disorder, or language-learning disorder. In comparison to US prevalence rates, research suggests that LI is as prevalent or more prevalent across international settings (Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2009; McLeod & Harrison, 2009; Thapa, Okalidou, & Anastasiadou, 2016). In addition, children identified with other disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual disability, social communication disorder, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, often have associated language problems (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Children with LI experience various levels of difficulty understanding and/or producing spoken language even though their hearing and nonverbal intellectual abilities are within typical limits (Leonard, 2014). LI was traditionally considered a focused or specific disorder because of the uneven profile of abilities that these children often present. That is, the deficits these children demonstrated were considered to be limited to difficulties understanding and producing language. However, problems with language processing are only part of the picture. Many children with LI experience a range of conversational, social, and emotional difficulties as well. Researchers have long recognized an overlapping co-morbidity between language difficulties and social emotional problems (Cantwell & Baker, 1991; Cohen, 1996). More specifically, recent research has documented that children with LI may experience anxiety, depression, loneliness, isolation, poor peer acceptance, difficulty establishing friendships, isolation, and victimization at school (Beitchman et al., 2001; Conti-Ramsden & Botting, 2004, 2008; Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2007; Fujiki, Brinton, Morgan, & Hart, 1999; Gertner, Rice, & Hadley, 1994; Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012; Wadman, Durkin, & Conti-Ramsden, 2008; Yew & O'Kearney, 2013). These negative social and emotional outcomes are not limited only to individuals who have been formally diagnosed with LI. Students who have not been identified with LI per se but who demonstrate weak language skills and poor academic performance have significantly more social, emotional, and behavioral problems than do typically developing students (Joffe & Black, 2012).

To account for the variety of symptoms that children with LI may present, it may be helpful to conceptualize LI within a social communication framework. Social communication involves at least three interwoven domains: Language processing, pragmatics, and social and emotional learning (Adams et al., 2012; Fujiki & Brinton, 2017). Language processing includes receptive and expressive language: The ability to comprehend and produce the words and grammatical structures used to convey meaning. By definition, children with LI show delays and differences in language processing. That is; their ability to understand and produce language is limited. As toddlers, these children may be slow to produce words, and as they mature their expressive language continues to be immature, limited, and effortful. They may struggle to understand verbal directions as preschoolers and have

trouble interpreting complex or abstract language as they proceed throughout their school years. They may also be slow in acquiring new vocabulary and less sophisticated in formulating complex sentence forms. It is very likely that these children will experience difficulty learning to read and write because underlying problems with language sabotage their acquisition of literacy.

The term pragmatics includes a range of skills, perhaps most notably the ability to convey communicative intent and to manage conversations. Many children with LI experience difficulty exchanging turns in conversation, manipulating topic, responding to conversational bids such as questions, and generally meeting others' needs in social interaction. Difficulty managing conversations may be interpreted as a lack of responsiveness, impoliteness, apathy, or even hostility toward others. Weak pragmatic ability can undermine conversational interactions with adults and peers and interfere with interpersonal relationships and friendship formation. Ketelaars, Cuperus, Jansonius, and Verhoeven (2010) found that pragmatic competence predicts behavioral problems in a way that structural language ability (language processing) may not. Pragmatic ability requires knowledge about how conversational interactions work, and this demands thinking about the perspectives and needs of others. Thus, pragmatics, or conversational skill, overlaps with social and emotional learning.

Social and emotional learning includes the wide range of abilities and knowledge needed to interpret meaning within social contexts, appreciate the perspectives of others, understand and regulate emotion, and make social inferences (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2012). Considerable research is available supporting the benefit of programs that highlight social and emotional learning in typically developing children (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). There is also emerging evidence that similar types of interventions are effective with children with disabilities (Elias, 2004).

Children with LI often have deficits in social and emotional learning. In particular, many children with LI lag behind in basic aspects of emotional intelligence. For example, compared to their typically developing peers, they are less adept at interpreting and recognizing facial expressions associated with emotion (Merkenschlager, Amorosa, Kiefl, & Martinius, 2012; Taylor, Maybery, Grayndler, & Whitehouse, 2015); interpreting emotion cues in tone of voice or prosody (Fujiki, Spackman, Brinton, & Illig; 2008, Taylor, Maybery, Grayndler, & Whitehouse, 2015); inferring emotions experienced in specific situations (Ford & Milosky, 2003); and regulating their emotions (Fujiki, Brinton, & Clarke, 2002). Many children with LI also struggle with important social tasks. For instance, they may have difficulty entering work or play groups with peers. Even when these children do enter, they may have problems making a meaningful contribution to the interaction (Brinton, Fujiki, Spencer, & Robinson, 1997; Craig & Washington, 1993; Liiva & Cleave, 2005). Children with LI also struggle to collaborate with peers in order to negotiate, solve problems, and resolve conflicts (Brinton, Fujiki, & McKee, 1998; Grove, Conti-Ramsden, & Donlan, 1993; Horowitz, Jansson, Ljungberg, & Hedenbro, 2005; Timler, 2008). Because of their poor language

ability and limited social and emotional knowledge, children with LI are often excluded from or not fully included in many important learning contexts such as cooperative and collaborative groups.

As might be expected, difficulties with language processing, pragmatics, and social and emotional learning are associated with poor academic, social, and emotional health outcomes. The effects of LI, once considered to be quite specific in its manifestation, are far reaching. As a parent of a son with LI reflected, 'Language impairment affects every aspect of his life'. Children with limited language ability need educational programs designed to incorporate language processing, conversational ability (pragmatics), and social and emotional learning simultaneously. However, because of the complexity of children's needs and the limited resources and special services available, such approaches are challenging to implement. To assist teachers and special service providers (referred to as interventionists) in better supporting children with language problems across the curriculum, more techniques and procedures are needed.

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy approaches hold great promise for facilitating growth in children with LI as well as in typically developing children. Story sharing techniques that facilitate language and social and emotional learning simultaneously can be implemented in therapeutic contexts as well as in regular classroom literacy activities. That is, bibliotherapeutic techniques can be incorporated into book-sharing activities that are already part of a classroom routine. There are several important considerations, however, in maximizing the value of bibliotherapeutic activities and lessons. These include selecting appropriate books and identifying and highlighting specific concepts illustrated within those books. A plan or script may then be created to guide the interventionist's presentation of most important concepts within the book. In addition, there are specific techniques that can be employed in story sharing to support story comprehension in children with limited language. Finally, there are a number of procedures that can be employed to help children connect with and experience a story.

Selecting a book

Story sharing can be a demanding task for children with language deficits, and they may not enjoy books in the way that most typically developing children do. Children with weak language may have difficulty understanding the language (words and linguistic structures) of stories. In many cases, picture books with limited print are less intimidating for children with language problems. In addition, it is important to recognize how challenging emotional content may be for these children as they often struggle even with basic emotion words and concepts. Therefore, picture books should contain rich social and emotional content.

That is, the emotions that characters experience should be important to the plot, and clear links should be evident between events and the emotions these events elicit. Vivid, engaging illustrations are important as well. At the same time, it is important to balance the language demands of the book with the social and emotional content. Some picture books are specifically written to teach social and emotional concepts, but the stories may contain fairly complex language structures and vocabulary. When books overly tax linguistic comprehension, children may not be able to attend to the emotional content. On the other hand, some books may have fairly simple language but the emotional content requires sophisticated inferencing skills. It is therefore critical to select developmentally appropriate books with clear emotion content, accessible language structure, strong story grammar, well-defined plot, and appealing illustrations.

It is important to select books that highlight specific emotions or social situations that are critical to children's social and emotional development. Children with language problems typically have a limited repertoire of emotion labels, and they tend to overextend the emotion words that they know. For example, they may produce basic emotion labels such as happy, mad, and sad. These words may be extended to describe a number of other emotions. For example, one six-year-old with LI referred to a range of emotions simply as either 'happy' or 'not happy'. Some young children with language problems may confuse the valence of emotions, identifying negative emotions as positive, and vice versa (Ford & Milosky, 2003). Even older children with language problems may confuse or fail to identify emotions such as surprise and disgust (Taylor et al., 2015).

Picture books depicting clear examples of characters' experiencing these emotions in specific situations help children learn emotion words. Situations that compare a single individual's reactions to a variety of different events help children differentiate between emotions (e.g., 'Tim felt happy because he got a new toy, but he was mad when Albert took his toy'). Examples where a variety of individuals react differently to the same situation are also helpful (e.g., 'Mary loves tacos. She is happy because there are tacos for lunch. Peggy does not like tacos at all. Peggy feels disgusted because there are tacos for lunch'). In addition, books can be selected to depict specific social situations and challenges as needed.

Books are particularly helpful when they illustrate characters who are learning to express feelings appropriately, manage emotions positively, and behave in friendly, prosocial ways. In some cases, series of picture books are available that feature the same characters in a variety of situations. The well-known series format helps peak children's interest and supports comprehension as children become familiar with the emotional dispositions of characters and anticipate successive events. Additionally, selecting a variety of picture books with similar themes and plots helps children to connect events across stories and to better understand the emotions these events elicit (e.g., sadness when losing a toy, fear when entering a dark room, anger and frustration in a peer conflict).

Identifying concepts to highlight

After selecting a book based on its appeal, emotion content, and accessible language, it is useful to zero in on which concepts the book is well equipped to highlight. For each book, at least three overlapping content areas should be described; aspects of emotional intelligence, prosocial conversational behaviors, and structural language. Emotional intelligence may include the specific emotions that characters experience and the words that label those emotions. It is helpful to identify basic emotions that may already be familiar to most children (e.g., happy, mad, sad), more complex emotions (e.g., fear, surprise, disgust), and any sophisticated emotions that may be unfamiliar to children (e.g., guilt, pride, insecurity). Specific sources of those emotions can be identified as well as effective (and not so effective) strategies for expressing and managing them.

Often, main characters in a story display a range of emotions that are quite obvious. In some books, however, the emotional impact of the main character's actions on others is depicted quite subtly. It is important to consider the emotions and reactions experienced by supporting characters as well. For example, if the main character crowds into a lunch line, the emotions depicted on the face of each child in the line may not be described in the text and so might be easily overlooked. Since these reactions are important to understanding the effects of the main character's actions, incorporating them into the script that guides the presentation of the story adds rich content to the story presentation. Additional teaching opportunities arise in instances where characters experience mixed emotions. Clarifying these points helps children gain a deeper understanding about emotions and the precursors of these emotions.

Conversational and prosocial behaviors might include instances in which characters demonstrate specific behaviors such as responding to others, cooperating, helping, or resolving conflicts. Again, some picture books are available to address specific social situations. Language structures might include vocabulary as well as complex sentence structures characterized by clauses connected by words such as *because*, *so*, *if-then*, and *when*. These sentence types can link emotions with the sources that elicit them (e.g., 'Timmy is so sad because he lost his bear; Janie gives Tom a hug so he will feel happy; If Maryanne cannot play outside, then she will feel frustrated; Sally felt so angry when she fell down').

Once the emotional, prosocial, and structural language concepts within the book are identified, a supplementary script can be created to highlight this content. The script then guides the interventionist's presentation of the story.

Creating a script

A script helps the interventionist supplement and explain the story text and illustrations. A script consists of a brief introduction, prompts, and a short summary. The introduction of the picture book includes the title and author followed by a brief preparatory statement designed to familiarize the children with the nature of

the book and draw attention to the emotional content of the story. An example of a preparatory statement might be, 'This book is about a boy named Tommy. Tommy has a problem with one of the kids in his class. Let's think about how Tommy feels in this story. Let's think about how the other kids feel. Let's see what Tommy does about this problem'.

A series of prompts forms the bulk of the script. Prompts are formulated to guide children through the story and highlight the most important concepts within each page or event. Since children with poor language skills may not readily attend to emotion cues in a book, prompts can be employed to draw their attention to the illustrations of facial expressions and to help them produce words to label emotion accurately. Prompts may consist of comments ('Wow! That bear found Goldilocks'); directions ('Oh, look at the bear's face' 'Can you make a mad face?'); questions ('How does the bear feel?'), *cloze procedures* where the child is provided with a sentence to complete using rising intonation ('The bear feels _____?'); or other probes.

Prompts may be used to highlight new information and concepts. For example, prompts may describe facial expressions ('That boy looks surprised! See, his eyes are open very wide and his mouth is open too'). Prompts may also introduce vocabulary words ('Do you know what a llama is? A llama is an animal sort of like a sheep with a long neck'). The prompts may emphasize, complement, or elaborate on the written text and illustrations in order to support children's comprehension of the story.

In addition, prompts may guide the child to draw comparisons between events in the story and experiences within their own lives ('Have you ever felt scared?', 'Tell me about a time when you felt scared'). Prompts can also be designed to connect children with the story. For example, the child might be asked to provide dialog ('What should Sally say?'). Occasional prompts can guide children to reflect on a situation and offer suggestions for managing emotions or behavior ('What would you say to Goldilocks?', 'What should the bear do?'). Specifically, prompts help the interventionist emphasize important concepts, model new behaviors, and elicit particular responses.

Usually, it is possible to devise prompts that emphasize social and emotional knowledge and structural language targets simultaneously. For example, in creating a script for a page from *The Three Little Pigs*, successive prompts might be, 'Look at the pig's face' (drawing the child's attention to facial expression of emotion); 'How does he feel?' (inferring emotion); 'Why does he feel ____?' (linking perceived emotion with source); and 'Right, the pig is scared *because* the wolf is chasing him' (modeling complex sentence construction linking emotion with source). Scripts should be flexible to allow the interventionist a number of opportunities to emphasize particular concepts and behaviors. Because a script may provide multiple prompts for each page or event, it is helpful to use a variety of prompt types. For example, traditional questions can be alternated with forms such as 'Tell me about that' or 'Talk about that'. More subtle comments such as 'Hmmm, look at that!' or 'I wonder about that . . .', 'I wonder what will happen next . . .', are also effective prompts.

Following the conclusion of the book, a brief summary is presented to review the basic story events and highlight important concepts. The following is a possible summary:

> The three pigs felt a lot of things in this story. First, they were happy and excited to build their new houses. But, they were a little scared too. They were a little scared because they were leaving their mom. They were excited and a little scared at the same time. When the wolf came, they were very scared. They were very relieved when the wolf could not get in the brick house. When the wolf ran away forever, the pigs felt very happy.

The summary may direct children to draw conclusions, explain new concepts, and apply information to their personal situations. For example, a summary might ask, 'Have you ever felt very scared? Tell me about that'.

Sharing the story

In preparing to share the story with an individual child or with a group of children, it is helpful to review the book and the script carefully. It is neither practical nor advisable to refer constantly to the script or read the prompts word for word while presenting the story. Rather, the script serves as a framework to help engage children's attention, make an emotional connection with them, and immerse them in the story content. Thus, after considering the script beforehand, the interventionist refers to notes or selects from memory those prompts that are likely to be most effective in presenting each page of the story. The interventionist may read the printed text on each page before offering a prompt. However, if the text is too long or complex, the interventionist may paraphrase. School age children may want to read the text with the interventionist. In this case, the interventionist points to each word and reads with the child in order to reduce demands and allow the child to concentrate on the story content. Some children with limited language may find longer segments of written text very intimidating. In this case, it may be possible to cover all or part of the written words and paraphrase.

Even though the interventionist employs a script, it is important to adapt the story sharing to children's needs and interests as much as possible. As the story proceeds, the interventionist gears successive prompts to the children's responses and comprehension level. If children show particular interest in certain aspects of a story, those parts can be discussed in more detail, and children may be encouraged to draw comparisons to their own experience and elaborate on story content. If children range too far off topic, however, it may be necessary to guide them back to the story content.

Some children with poor language skills may be unable to respond to prompts appropriately. This may stem from a variety of problems, including poor receptive and expressive language, difficulty making inferences, or poor emotion

understanding. It is important to avoid peppering children with repeated questions, especially if they are having difficulty responding.

When presenting a story, there are a number of techniques that facilitate comprehension and expression in children with limited language as well as in typically developing children. These techniques, described in the following sections, (a) advise the interventionist to slow down, (b) simplify language structure, (c) capitalize on stress, intonation, facial expression and gesture, (d) offer prompts with increasing support, (e) expand on children's responses, (f) repeat the story, and (g) check for comprehension.

Slow down. It is tempting to complete a story quickly in the midst of a demanding schedule. However, children need time to process language and learn new concepts. A relaxed pace is helpful in presenting a story. Reducing the rate of speech when presenting a story aids comprehension in typically developing children (Haake, Hansson, Gulz, Schotz, & Sahlen, 2014) and may be essential when working with children with limited language skills. Children with language problems often require extended time to reply to probes, so it is important to allow pauses that are long enough to allow these children to think and formulate their responses to prompts.

Simplify language structure. Using relatively simple, short sentence structures aids understanding. Children who have difficulty with language comprehension may attend to the final or initial words in a sentence, but may miss the information in the middle. Simplifying language structure helps children grasp the most important content. At the same time, building in some repetition and redundancy provides multiple exposures to concepts and offers children more time to process information. For example, a sentence such as, 'The pigs were afraid of the wolf so they wanted to build houses that would be strong enough to keep the wolf out so they would be safe when he came after them, didn't they?' is too complex for many children. Expressing the content using simpler structures and redundancy eases the demands on children (e.g., 'The pigs were afraid of the wolf. They wanted to build strong houses. They wanted to keep the wolf out. The pigs wanted to be safe in their houses when the wolf came, didn't they?')

Capitalize on stress, intonation, facial expression, and gesture. It is important to bring stories to life. Exaggerated vocal stress and intonation are powerful tools to help children attend to the most critical elements within a story. Since children with poor language often have difficulty with emotion understanding, it is particularly important to provide multiple cues to emphasize emotion content, including accentuated vocal intonation, stress, facial expression, and gesture. Directing children to make the facial expressions while looking in a mirror supports emotion understanding as well ('Wow! That bear looks surprised. Can you make a surprised face?' [show child's face in a mirror] 'Oh, you look surprised—just like that bear!'). For some children, it can be helpful to direct their attention to specific

characteristics of facial expressions of emotion ('Oh, look at that boy's face! His eyes are wide open. His mouth is open. He looks very surprised. We can tell by his wide-open eyes and his open mouth. He looks so surprised!')

Offer prompts with increasing support. If children are having difficulty responding, it is possible to offer a graduated series of prompts that offer increasing support. For example, if a child cannot respond to, 'How does Tommy feel?' the next prompt might be, 'Does Tommy feel happy or sad?'. If the child does not respond, the next prompt might be, 'Does Tommy feel sad?' (pause for response) followed by 'Tommy feels sad, doesn't he?' (pause for response), 'Yes, Tommy feels sad because he lost his yo-yo'.

Expand on children's responses. Children with poor language skills may offer minimal responses to probes. The adult may assist by expanding on children's responses, modeling more complex and appropriate language forms, and supplementing emotion content. For example, if a child responded to the prompt, 'How does the boy feel?' with 'Him sad', the interventionist might say, 'He is sad. He is very sad. He is sad because he lost his ball'.

Repeat the story. Sharing a story using a script focuses on story content in some depth, and it usually takes more time than reading a book straight through. More than one session may be needed to complete a book. Even if a book is completed in a single session, it is helpful to share the book more than once, especially when reading with young children. Once children have some familiarity with the characters and plot, they may begin to understand emotion content that they did not appreciate during the initial presentation.

Check for comprehension. As a story is being shared, it may be difficult to determine how well a child is understanding the story. Children with poor language skills frequently have difficulty monitoring their own comprehension, so they may be unaware that they have missed story elements. Even when recognizing a gap in their understanding, children with LI may be too shy or reticent to ask for clarification. In order to determine which story elements may need to be repeated or explained, it is helpful to offer prompts that check how well a child understands the story. For example, prompts such as 'How does the bear feel?' (wait for response) 'Right, the bear feels scared. What scared the bear?' can be used to check the child's understanding of story events.

Experiencing a story: Story enactment

After sharing a story, it is important to find ways to reinforce new concepts and extend students' learning. A 'hands-on' experience that involves children with the story content is particularly valuable for children with poor language skills. A number of techniques to involve children in story narratives have been described

(Culatta, Hall-Kenyon, & Black 2013). Story enactments and dialog elaboration are two such techniques that help immerse children in a story.

Story enactment helps children with language problems to understand story content and to connect with story characters. In addition, story enactment helps foster more sophisticated symbolic play, enhances perspective taking, and facilitates emotion understanding. Story enactment involves guiding children to pretend or act out a story. There are a number of ways to approach story enactment. To maximize the benefits of story enactment for typical students and children with limited language skills, however, it is important to structure enactment activities and to provide sufficient support. It is helpful to review the content, assign roles, support pretending, determine roles, obtain props, guide the enactment, and reflect on the activity when it is completed.

Review the content. The first step in enacting a story is to familiarize the children with the story content. This usually takes place during the story sharing activity. Children often require more than one sharing of the story before they are prepared to enact the events. In addition, it can be helpful to briefly review the story plot and highlight the most important concepts before the enactment.

Support pretending. Next, children are invited to act out the story. This may seem like a simple proposition, but children with poor language skills may have immature symbolic play skills and limited experience with socio dramatic activities (Westby, 2000). They may need substantial support learning to 'pretend', such as providing a voice for characters and acting out events. Initially, children may need specific coaching when enacting conversations and interactions among characters. The interventionist may need to model and encourage children to 'act their parts'.

Determine roles. Roles may be assigned based on children's preferences. A child may act a single role or multiple roles according to the story plot and the number of children participating (Culatta et al., 2013). Although children usually enjoy choosing their own roles, it is important for individual children to rotate roles in subsequent enactments. Otherwise, some children—especially those with disabilities—may tend to 'own' roles and enact them rigidly. Rotating roles also helps children take other perspectives and explore the emotions of different characters. In addition to the various character roles, most enactments require a narrator to provide some context for events and to guide the story as it unfolds. The interventionist may act as the narrator and may also take a role in the story as needed.

Obtain props. Simple props may be used to help dramatize a story. Props add interest to the activity and support children's engagement in enacting events. In some cases, children may play the part of a character and use props (e.g., act Baby Bear and use a chair, etc.) to enact out the events. In other stories, children may manipulate dolls, toy animals, or puppets as the characters and provide the voices. Sometimes, a combination works best (e.g., one child voices a toy bear and another

acts as Goldilocks). Plush animals and toys are commercially available for some picture books, but generic props work just as well. Simple costumes (e.g., paper pig snouts for *The Three Little Pigs*) add interest to the activity and help children assume roles.

Guide the enactment. As previously indicated, most story enactments require a narrator to help children organize story events (Culatta et al., 2013). The interventionist usually acts as narrator, at least initially. The narrator helps tell the story and comments on events the children enact. The interventionist also serves as director to guide and prompt children through their roles. Children who are not accustomed to acting out stories usually need some support to enact a coherent story. Referring back to the story helps children remember and sequence the story's events. For example, the interventionist might say, 'Let's see. What happened next? Let's look at the book. Oh, see? After she breaks the chair, Goldilocks goes upstairs to the bedroom'.

It is important to remember that children need not repeat the story's exact dialog. Rather, it is much better if children formulate their own dialog to convey the intent that is explicit or implicit within the book. Culatta et al. (2013) noted that children can be guided to create and enact interactions within stories even when those exchanges may not be present in the story text. For example, the *Three Little Pigs* picture book may not present dialog in which the pigs discuss their fear of the wolf and their plans to thwart him, but children can create such dialog in their enactments. In particular, children should be encouraged to include the content and concepts that were emphasized and prompted in the previous story sharing activity, including emotion understanding and prosocial behaviors. To illustrate, if children were enacting *The Three Bears*, the interventionist might urge the children to have Baby Bear tell his parents how he feels when he sees that his chair is broken (e.g., sad, angry, frustrated). The interventionist could then encourage Mama and Papa Bear to comfort and advise their baby. When children are conveying emotion content, it is particularly important to emphasize producing and recognizing facial expressions of emotion (e.g., 'Show me how Baby Bear's face looks. Oh yes, his face looks so sad! Look at his frown'). In addition, it is particularly important to help children appreciate how the emotions that the characters experienced in the story informed their behaviors (e.g., 'The pigs ran *because* they were afraid of the wolf'). It is also critical for children to understand how the characters' actions affected the emotions and actions of other characters (e.g., 'When Eddie butted in line, Suzy felt mad. She was so mad that she told the teacher').

Multiple reenactments allow opportunities for children to practice new behaviors and increase their understanding of concepts. Initially, the interventionist may provide considerable support in directing the enactment and prompting the role play. In subsequent reenactments, the input of the interventionist may lessen as children become more adept at the activity. Culatta et al. (2013) suggested providing props for children to access at learning centers and during activity times, encouraging story-based role play activities.

Reflect. Providing an opportunity to review and reflect on a story enactment reinforces new concepts and builds episodic memory. Culatta et al. (2013) explained that story enactments can be expanded into a play or a reader's theater production. Both younger and older children are often highly motivated when enactments are video recorded on a smart phone for later viewing. If time permits, video-editing software is available to present video recorded enactments as movies (Fujiki & Brinton, 2017). Pictures or drawings can be used to make a journal record of the enactment as well. Regardless of the medium employed to review the enactment, it is important for the interventionist to guide children's reflection and to draw their attention to the most important concepts and behaviors within the story.

Dialog elaboration. As indicated previously, picture books rarely include enough explicit dialog or text to explain and describe all of a character's thoughts and feelings. Rather, stories are designed to lead readers to speculate and infer what characters are thinking and how they are feeling. Creating additional dialog for story characters can be useful in helping children infer characters' perspectives, emotions, and motivations within a story. In story enactment, children may be encouraged to produce such dialog to elaborate on characters' thoughts and feelings. Creating written dialog for characters is another method to help children focus on characters' internal experience. Basically, children work with an interventionist to formulate and write character's thoughts or utterances on paper dialog or speech bubbles that can be attached to the illustrations within the book. This procedure can be particularly helpful when working with older students who have some literacy skill. To maximize the benefits of dialog elaboration for typical students and children with poor language skills, it is important to provide sufficient support. It is helpful to review the content, give characters voice, read together, and reflect on the completed activity.

Review the content. As with story enactment, it is important for children to be familiar with the story before they create additional dialog. It is helpful to review the story content briefly and to prepare children to extend the story's dialog ('We are going to add some words to this book').

Give characters voice. The purpose of dialog elaboration is to encourage children to give voice to the thoughts and feelings of characters in specific situations. This may require elaborating on dialog already expressed in the printed text as well as creating additional dialog associated with the book illustrations (e.g., 'The book does not tell us what these pigs talked about. Let's think about that. Let's add some more words in this book'). In sharing the familiar book together, the interventionist guides the child to consider the internal experience of characters within the context of salient story events and to give voice to the thoughts and feelings that the events elicit (e.g., 'How does Baby Bear feel about his chair? What would Baby Bear say to his mama and papa?'). The child-formulated dialog can be written on

sticky-note dialog bubbles (commercially available or created) and attached to the picture book.

In creating the dialog bubbles, the focus should be on the child's thinking about the story characters' perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and motivations rather than on the literacy demands of the activity. Therefore, children may dictate all or part of the dialog for the interventionist to write on the dialog bubbles. In most stories, characters experience thoughts and emotions that are internal as well as expressed. Dialog elaboration provides excellent opportunities to help children distinguish which thoughts and emotions might be spoken out loud, and which might be kept to oneself. As is common in cartooning, dialog that is spoken may be written on dialog bubbles with tails leading to characters' heads, while internal dialog may be connected to the character with small circles. In some cases, a character may think one thing internally and express a different thought verbally. For example, Little Red Riding Hood might verbalize, 'Grandmother, what big teeth you have!' while thinking, 'Those teeth are really scary!'.

Dialog elaboration provides an excellent opportunity for the interventionist to model and encourage new vocabulary items as well as complex sentence structures that link emotions with causal events (e.g., 'I am so frustrated because someone broke my chair!'). After inserting a dialog bubble inside the book, children should then be encouraged to read/recite the new dialog entry. This assists memory, reinforces concepts, and provides practice in producing new words and structures.

Read together. After the interventionist helps the child add dialog to the text, it is important to read the book together from the beginning. As much as possible, encourage the children to read or voice the dialog using appropriate stress and read intonation to provide emotion cues. This helps children connect the new content to the general story. During this phase, children may want to, and should be encouraged to, add additional dialog.

Reflect. Taking time to discuss and reflect on the story supports comprehension, reinforces concepts, and aids memory. In discussing the stories, children can be encouraged to compare characters' experiences with their own. In addition, a picture book with dialog elaboration lends itself well to expanded activities such as a readers' theater or play. As with story enactment, it is important to help children obtain a deeper understanding of the most important content and concepts within the story.

Conclusion

Children with language problems and limited language skills are at risk for difficulty in school for a number of reasons (Cantwell & Baker, 1991; Cohen, 1996; Yew & O'Kearney, 2013). Perhaps most obviously, their limited language undermines their understanding of classroom instruction and their acquisition of literacy skills. At the same time, their difficulty participating in conversation

sabotages their inclusion and participation in important learning contexts such as cooperative work and play groups (Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2007). To complicate matters, poor social and emotional learning may contribute to academic difficulties as well as poor social functioning (Joffe & Black, 2012). As a result, these children are at risk for academic failure, social withdrawal, isolation, and victimization.

Since educational resources are precious and limited, it is important to find ways to support children with limited language in special services as well as during general classroom instruction. Bibliotherapeutic techniques and activities capitalize on the power of stories to facilitate language learning, conversational skill, and social and emotional learning simultaneously. Stories with associated scripts can be shared with individuals and small groups in special services specifically for students with language problems; or in general classrooms that include all children, including those with disabilities.

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