

Oral Language Techniques

How to engage children with tried and true oral language techniques

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Effective language intervention requires us to provide instructions to students that are structured and that provoke thought. Part of our role, as teachers of oral language is for students to be able to understand the form and function of the target intervention and use it in their everyday communication.



The goal is for the children to learn the target language skills and thus become better communicators. This essay features proven and effective oral language techniques that can be used to scaffold targeted language behaviour in young children.

How to Use Parallel Talk

In this technique we talk about the child's actions rather than our own. It's called parallel talk because we comment and remark upon the actions of the child as they participate in an activity. For instance, Clinician: *'You put your yellow bike at the start. It's your turn. Wow, you rolled a six! You've counted 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Fantastic! Now you're moving six spaces with your yellow bike,'* etc.

How to Use Imitations

With imitations we simply repeat what the child has said. By repeating the child's utterances we increase the amount of times the child produces lexical, syntax and morphological forms and there are more opportunities for feedback. If the student repeats out feedback we have the opportunity to provide other forms of language stimulation.

How to Use Expansions

When we expand a child's utterance we lend grammatical and syntactical details to it that supports the child's words so that they more resemble adult language forms. For example, if a child moves a motorbike several spaces and says, Child: 'bike go fast,' we can expand the utterance with, Clinician: *'Yes, the bike goes fast. The bike is going fast,'* etc.

How to Use Immersion

The focus of this language stimulation method is to provide a high number of the target in different but related form while interacting in a game, reading a book or any other language activity. The child does not necessarily have to express the target form, but it's always an advantage if they do. By the clinician immersing the child in targeted language where the target form is repeatedly provided, it is anticipated that the child will be enticed to attempt the new form in his/her own communication.

For example, the clinician wishes to teach the concepts **fast/slow** while playing a board game which features motorbikes. Clinician: *'Let's start here. You go first* ,(child rolls dice). *'That's five.'* (child moves playing piece five spaces.) The clinician then rolls a four. Clinician: *'Wow, look how fast you are going? Your bike is fast. My bike is not as fast as your bike. My bike is slow. You rolled a five. I only rolled a four. So my bike is slower. Your bike is faster than my slow bike. Can you point to the*

slow bike?’ No, that’s your bike. Your bike is fast. It’s faster than my bike. My bike is slow. Try again. Point to the slow bike.’

Cloze Procedures

Cloze procedures are a useful language stimulation technique that uses the context of a situation to assist the child to identify a word they find difficult to say, or have yet to attempt. The child is effectively prompted to fill in the blank or gap in a sentence or phrase. For instance, *‘My bike is green. Your bike is y....’* The clinician produces only the first phoneme. The child is prompted to say *yellow*. Cloze procedures work well in tandem with immersion techniques, where a child has repeatedly heard the target word in context before attempting to produce the target word themselves.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is used to reword text or a student’s statement. It can be used to define a difficult word or reword a complex sentence into shorter simpler sentences.

Example: Text – *‘The sun shone for a moment, but its warming rays were quickly engulfed by the angry and bruised sky.’* Clinician: *‘It sounds like the sun shone through the clouds. So while it was able to shine it provided some warmth. It didn’t last very long though. The angry and stormy sky enveloped the sun’s rays again.’*

Questioning Techniques

Avoid yes/no questions, as they only require a simple response. The best questions are what/, why, how, who questions. What/why questions tend to be open-ended and require the student to provide more information with more detail. Good questioning encourages expressive language use. For example, Clinician, 'Did the girl save the bird?', can be followed by "Why did the girl save the bird, how did she save the bird,' etc.

Choice and contrast questions are an excellent way of giving the student choices to think about. For example, Clinician, '*Why did the frog follow the boy back home?*' *No response from child. 'Was the frog lonely or was he just curious?'*

Question to the student's response. After you have asked a question and received a response, use the student's response to probe for more information. This does require a bit of practice but can produce good results. For example, Child '*The man is climbing a ladder to the roof.*' Clinician, 'Yes he is. I wonder what he will find on the roof. Is there anything that can go wrong when he gets to the top of the roof?'

Good questions require us to ask for increasingly more abstract responses from a student so that they may think of a statement or written passage in more complex ways that requires more involved and varied responses. The three main types of questions we use when prompting student thinking are literal, interpretive and inference questions. Inference questions in particular require the student to go beyond surface details in a story or passage to find the meaning.

Example passage from text: '*The storm tossed the tiny boat on the seas as if it were a matchstick. The sun shone for a moment, but its warming rays were quickly engulfed by the angry and bruised sky.*'

Literal Question: A question that has a specific answer. 'What happened to the warming rays of the sun?'

Interpretation Question: A question which asks about something that is implied.

'What would a bruised and angry sky look like?

Inference Question: A question that does not rely on textual information. 'Will the boat and its crew survive the fierce storm?'

How to Use Extensions

We can assist children to expand the length of their sentences by using extensions. Extensions both acknowledge the utterance of the child and add extra information to it. Extensions act as a little push to prompt the child to attempt more complex forms of language. In our previous example, Child: 'bike go fast,' we can extend this utterance, Clinician: *'The bike goes fast along the track. Your bike is very fast and its colour is red. It is a red bike that goes very fast. brrmmm'...etc.*

References

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