



Classroom Collaboration to Support Comprehension in Children With Developmental Language Disorders: A Case Study

Kristen Olivieri and Anthony D. Koutsoftas
Seton Hall University



Introduction

- Comprehension is a challenge for school-age students and is an important goal for student's who receive speech therapy.
- Traditional pull-out services for students are less desirable because they do not align with least restrictive environment and deprives the student of important instructional time.
- Recent studies have investigated the effects of Classroom-Based Intervention (CBI) commonly referred to as, "push-in" therapy (Causton & Tracy-Bronson, 2014) and show promise for this approach to support speech and language goals in the classroom setting.
- CBI requires the collaboration of the SLP, general education teacher, inclusion teacher, para-professional working with the student (if applicable), and at times other professionals (e.g., occupational therapists).
- The purpose of this case study was to demonstrate how an SLP was able to provide classroom-based intervention to a fourth-grade student receiving speech and language services three times per week. This particular student struggled with comprehension. Supporting this skill in the classroom was a challenge; however, the SLP was ultimately successful in targeting IEP goals within the classroom.

Acknowledgements:

- We thank the school district for partnering with the university to support innovations in the delivery of services in school settings by SLPs.
- We thank the student, teacher, supervising SLP from the district, and clinical adjunct instructor (Kathryn Snogans) for supporting this intervention.
- We also thank the Department of Speech Language Pathology in the School of Health and Medical Sciences for support of the ROW-Lab and this project.
- ROW-Lab: <http://blogs.shu.edu/row-lab/>
- Correspondence about this project should be directed to anthony.koutsoftas@shu.edu
- *There are no financial or non-financial disclosures associated with this work.*

Case History

- NB is a 9-year-old fourth grade student with developmental language disorder. NB is assigned to a general education classroom with support services including: testing accommodations, classroom modifications, and a special education teacher that adapts curricula as appropriate to the needs of the student.
- NB has goals targeting morphological, syntactic and semantic language skills; however, the goal focusing on improving comprehension was the target for this case study.
- The goal for comprehension focused on answering questions, sequencing, inferencing, recalling the main idea and summarizing information from orally presented material.

Results

Date	Number of Minutes	Description of Classroom Instruction	Speech and Language Strategies and Supports
1/29	10	Reading comprehension activity	Manipulating the text as described by Merritt and Culatta to organize and explain information in a more sequenced way to support comprehension.
2/23	30	Science activity: inference making (topic = high/low pitch)	SLP provided individualized support toward the lesson to help the child visualize the vibrations of different size tuning forks and the effect on pitch. SLP presented the discourse through gestures and provided simplified instructions.
2/26	30	Science activity: inference making (topic = sunlight)	Merritt and Culatta's strategy was used to manipulate the text to introduce a different type of narrative and simplify the content through pictures to boost comprehension for inference making.
3/14	15	Retell activity (topic = transfer of energy)	SLP provided individual supports for comprehension by manipulating the text into a linear format helping the child to comprehend the demonstration, thus supporting Merritt and Culatta's strategy to scaffold the text through organization.
3/28	30	Problem solving activity: researching answers to questions	Letting the child explain their thought process without interjections, as described by Merritt and Culatta.
4/18	30	Reading/auditory comprehension activity: using text and video to answer questions	Having the child relate the information to their personal life to assist in organizing the content, supporting a less demanding type of discourse also supporting contextual knowledge.
5/2	30	Reading comprehension activity (topic = science)	Decreasing the complexity of the text through visual scaffolds and supports as encouraged by Merritt and Culatta.
5/4	30	Reading comprehension activity (topic = science)	Decreasing the complexity of the text through visuals and gestures as explained by Merritt and Culatta.
5/21	30	Reading comprehension activity: with reference to book (topic = social studies)	Manipulating the text to ease the demands of the discourse through scaffolding.
5/30	30	Reading comprehension activity: with reference to book (topic = social studies)	Relating the text to personal scenarios helping the child to relate, thus decreasing the complexity of the narrative and increasing content knowledge.

Intervention

- Merritt and Culatta (1998) discuss strategies that teachers and SLPs can implement to improve student comprehension, these were used in the current case study and summarized below:
- Educating students about genres, discourse styles and different types of knowledge required for comprehension
 - Scaffolding through organization, content and genre of instructional discourse can lessen the demand of the discourse, thus improving comprehension
 - Introducing students to different genres and providing them identification strategies to distinguish between genres
 - Presenting instructional discourse through pictures, gestures, intonation or actions can make the discourse less demanding

Reflection

- Classroom-based intervention could be deemed successful based on this experience in a mainstream classroom. Classroom-based therapy provided a naturalistic environment for the student to generalize knowledge and skill.
- With many positive features, there is one drawback of CBI: distraction of a strange adult in the classroom; however, this can be eliminated or minimized with an introduction to the service model at the start of the school year to ease the students' curious minds. As the students became more familiar with the service model, they looked forward to the SLP entering the classroom to support comprehension and simplify classroom instruction.
- To improve this model, SLPs and classroom teachers should establish a routine meeting to discuss upcoming classroom instruction and thus discuss strategies to support the students' learning.

Summary

- Over the course of the academic year students miss approximately 40 hours of classroom instruction for pull-out services.
- CBI included consulting with the classroom teacher and assisting all students in the classroom when necessary in addition to supporting NB
- Merritt and Culatta's (1998) strategies were implemented and tracked during classroom instruction over 48 thirty minute sessions
- Comprehension was supported through manipulation of text and use of scaffolding to present discourse through pictures, gestures, intonation or actions
- CBI supported reading comprehension, inferencing, describing and answering complex academic questions