

Critical Review: The effectiveness of narrative-based intervention on increasing the production of narrative forms in preschool and school-aged children

Katz, I., M.Cl.Sc. (S-LP) Candidate

The University of Western Ontario: School of Communication Sciences and Disorders

This critical review examines the effect of direct narrative-based intervention approaches on increasing the ability to produce narrative forms amongst preschool and school-aged children. A literature search was completed, and yielded the following article types: one randomized controlled trial, three quasi-experimental designs, one case study, and several informational articles. Overall, the literature provides reasonable support for clinicians who wish to implement narrative-based intervention approaches with their clients. However, such interventions merit further research involving standardized intervention and outcome measures, larger sample sizes, randomization and follow-up data.

Introduction

The relationship between early narrative abilities and literacy, as well as its impact on academic success has been well researched. Oral narratives are a method of verbally recapitulating past experiences and as a means by which people organize and make sense of their world (Davies et al., 1994).

Narratives encompass a broad range of language abilities that have been shown to impact a child both within the classroom and in social situations. Children may be expected to produce oral narratives in order to describe, explain or interpret events. Crais & Lorch (1994) success in these activities reflects the degree to which they understand the academic material, both to their teachers and peers. Research also indicates that oral narrative abilities are a powerful predictor of long term language and literacy skills (Davies et al., 2004; Gillam, 1995).

Fewer research studies have been completed on the efficacy of providing direct narrative-based intervention, particularly to children with language impairments for improving their skills. Not only do children with language impairments have a limited ability to understand and tell stories (Davies et al. 2004), their oral narratives have been shown to differ from those of their typically developing peers in many ways. These include: fewer total words and different words, fewer story grammar components, fewer complete episodes, fewer protagonist attempts, fewer story openings and closings, improper amounts of information, fewer successful repairs, fewer accommodations to uninformed listeners and more incomplete cohesive ties (Crais & Lorch, 1994).

According to previous research, it has been assumed that improvement in narrative abilities would have a positive effect on the child, both academically and socially (Gillam et al., 1994; Crais & Lorch, 1994; Johnston, 2008). Research also suggests that teaching children to organize language in a story telling format provides a structured intervention approach that will allow the child to generalize the information and carry it over into the classroom (Klecan-Aker, 1993). As speech-language pathologists, it is important to consider this research and its implications for clinical practice in order to provide the best intervention for children with language impairments.

Objective

The primary objective of this paper is to provide a critical evaluation of the existing research on the effects of narrative-based intervention approaches in preschool and school-aged children. In doing so, evidence-based recommendations regarding

Selection Criteria

Studies selected for inclusion in this critical review were required to evaluate narrative-based intervention approaches for ability to produce oral narratives. Authors of the

individual data for each participant was provided as well as a detailed description of the intervention plan, making future reproduction of this study possible. Overall, this study provides support for practicing clinicians to use narrative-based intervention in their clinical practice.

Davies, Shanks and Davies (2004) looked at the effects of a collaborative teaching model on targeting language skills within a group setting. Specifically, researchers looked at the effects of intervention developed to improve the oral narratives of children with delayed language development. Thirty-one children with delayed language development, aged five to seven years old, participated in this study. Children were taught to recognize the structure of their own narratives, as well as the narratives of others, by focusing on the use of Wh-Questions. Children were seen for treatment three times each week by a Speech-Language Pathologist or trained learning support assistant, for a period of two months. Researchers assessed each participant pre- and post-intervention, evaluating the amount of information

complexity, the story type classification and any additive, temporal or causal connections.

Statistically significant improvement in the pre- and post- assessments ($p < 0.001$) were reported. Qualitative data was also collected. Reports from teachers and learning support assistants indicated significant

study provides support for practicing clinicians to use narrative-based intervention.

Nathanson, Crank, Saywitz and Ruegg (2007) evaluated the effectiveness of narrative elaboration training (NET) on a group of 39 children ages 7 to 12 years old who were learning disabled. NET is an instructional program with the goal of aiding in the organization and retrieval of information of a past event. This study utilized visual cues

