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Language Module

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Language Module

EDS 655

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Abstract

A study of children with learning disabilities and of children without provides a clear picture of the acquisition of language development of children. Language skills are generally typical of children at different age levels who do not have diagnosed learning disabilities. Language skills of the learning disabled are generally atypical due to constraints placed on the child during critical learning periods by the disability. Analyzation of the data in this study shows a correlation between Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and language development in young children. Strategies can be implemented by classroom teachers to enhance the acquisition of language.

For this study of language, I chose to use two children, Marcus and Lily, who are about 7 chronological months apart in age. School was not in session during this study and the projects were carried out in each child's home at the kitchen table, in hopes that the home environment would allow for a relaxed experience for the child.

Meet Lily

Lily is a 7 year old girl. She lives in a small rural town with her mother, father and older brother. They are a Caucasian middle class family, where father works outside the home and mother works part time out of the basement. Lily is an above average student, enjoys school and stated that she is looking

forward to summer to end so she can go into first grade. She is a sweet, well-mannered girl who giggles a lot. She pointed out to me immediately that we both have freckles and that her mommy told her those are kisses from angels. According to her mother, Lily has always had good health and seemed to develop the same skills as all of her friends' babies of the same age. Lily said her favorite things to do are read about Junie B. (a character in a book series), swim with her friends, go camping with her cousins and play Webkinz on the computer.

Meet Marcus

Marcus is a 6 year old boy. He lives in a very small rural community with his mother, father and two older sisters. His father works outside of the home, leaving very early in the morning and arriving home shortly before dinner. His mother is a home maker. Marcus has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and was provided with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for speech and language at the age of 4 while in preschool. He had a normal birth and has had generally good health. He didn't speak phrases until he was around 3 years old and was diagnosed with ADHD at the age of 4. He currently takes medication for the ADHD. According to his mother, Marcus doesn't really have any friends. She says the other kids at school try to avoid him, but he does play sometimes with the neighbor boy across the street. The family attends a local Catholic church together. Marcus just completed Kindergarten and will continue receiving speech services in first grade. He is currently slightly behind his peers academically, but his mother is more concerned about his social skills. Marcus says he doesn't like to go to Mass, but he does like to play on the swings in the backyard and shoot things with his tank on the Wii (a video game system he has). Marcus was very eager to take me by the hand and enthusiastically show me all of his favorite things and demonstrate how each worked.

The Project

For this project, I chose the option of having the children describe a collection to me. Because I didn't know either child personally before this, I decided to plan an activity that would allow me a little more time to get to know each child. I brought to each home a collection of foam bears and bugs, paper, glue and crayons. To build rapport, I sat alone with each child and allowed him/her to choose bears or bugs and then make a poster from the foam animals with the art supplies I provided. We engaged in light chatting during the creation of the poster and when each was satisfied that his/her poster was done, I asked them to tell me about what they had made. I recorded each child's responses and allowed them to keep their posters.

Lily was very neat in making her poster. She first colored a bright patchwork of colors as the background, and then added some clouds. She chose alternating sizes of bears and glued each bear in the center of a colored patch. Lily was careful to put just a dab of glue on each bear and informed me that her teacher told her if you flood, you're a dud. She labeled each bear with a letter of the alphabet using a black crayon. She was very deliberate in her work and took her time. I supplied her with about 30 bears and she only used half so she could keep the rest to play with later.

Marcus immediately dumped every crayon and the entire bag of bugs onto the table in one large pile. He used only the orange crayon to draw a few zigzag marks in the bottom corner of the poster. He emptied half the glue bottle onto the page in large puddles and smeared it around with his fingers, rubbing much of it onto his face and arms. Marcus then stuck every bug onto the center area, most of them overlapping, in a haphazard fashion. I had to pause and wash the glue from his body and table and used a paper towel to wipe the excess glue from the paper. He ignored any conversation and direction from me during his creation of the poster.

Data

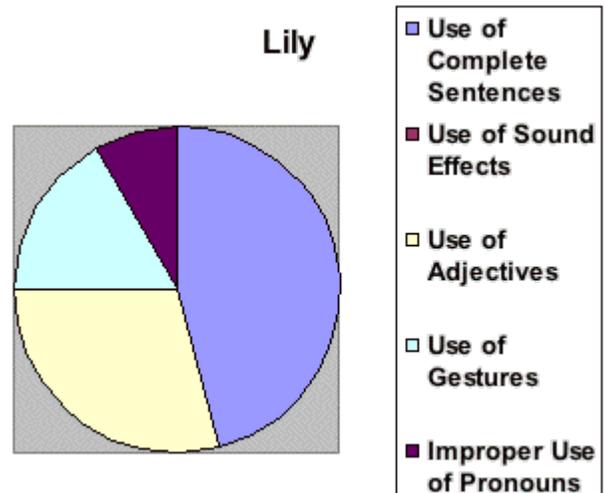
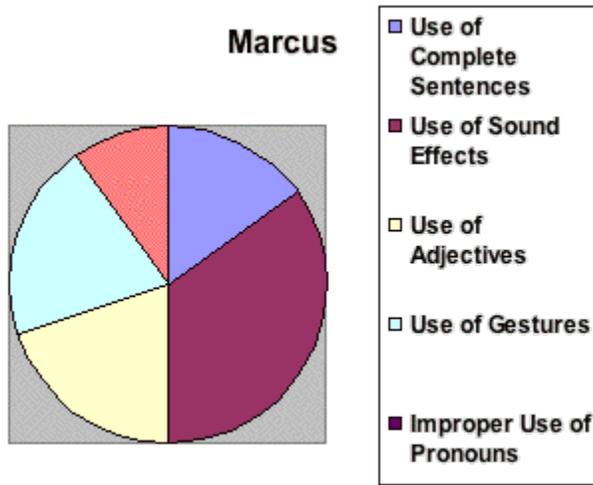
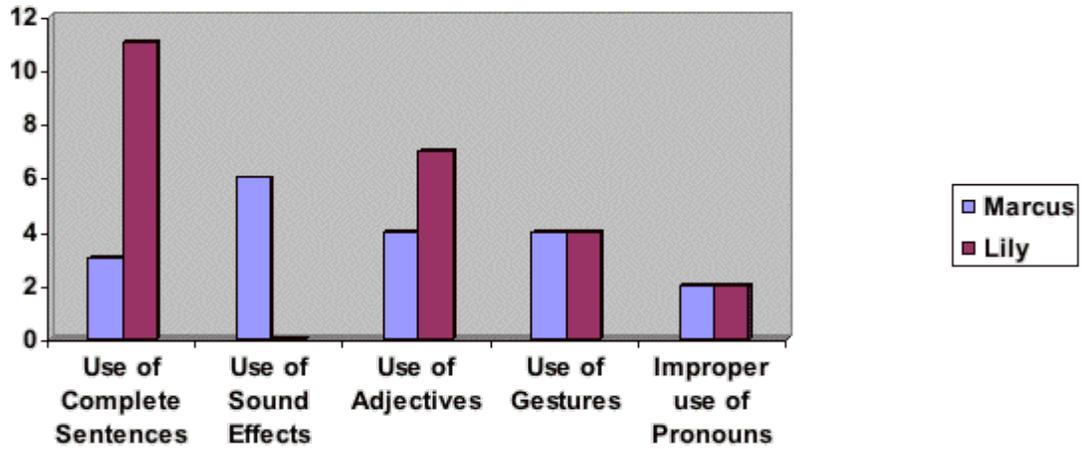
Transcribed response from Lily:

“This is a bunch of bears playing. They’re alphabet bears. They’re playing outside together... umm... its tag. (Points to one bear) That bear is “it.” His name is “g” because I put a “g” on it. Hey bear! I’ll take your nose off! (Wipes off a scrap of paper that was initially the bear’s nose) (Then points to the colored patches in the background of the poster) These colors are all around the globe. Every bear are on a country but I forgot our state. (Glues on another bear) Here is us! They are all brown, light brown and white and there’s big ones and medium ones and little baby ones.”

Transcribed response from Marcus:

*“Buzzing around. BUZZ! ZZZZ! ZZZ! (Flapping arms and jumping in circles) *I prompt him to tell me more.* They blue and green and red and yellow! ZZZZ! ZZZ! Shush it! (Slaps the bugs on the poster and gives the poster an angry look) *I prompt him to tell me more.* (Traces zigzag marks on the poster) They’s buzzing places! ZZZZZ! (Runs away with poster to show his mother.)*

Comparison of Marcus and Lily



<u>Usage in Response</u>	<u>Marcus</u>	<u>Lily</u>
Possessive Pronouns	Orange	Blue
Verbs	Blue	Blue
Subject-Verb Agreement	Orange	Blue
Adjectives	Blue	Blue

Conjunctions	Orange	Blue
Compound Sentences	Orange	Blue
Contractions	Orange	Blue

Blue indicates presence of skill.

Orange indicates absence of skill.

Skills taken from intermediate language development checklist (Capellini).

Analysis

Comparing the responses of both children, it is evident that Lily primarily uses complete sentences to convey ideas, whereas Marcus primarily uses sound effects to communicate. Both children used gestures to indicate ideas and equally misused pronouns in their speech. Because both children were from Caucasian, middle class, two parent, rural families, socioeconomic and cultural differences are not factors in the differences between their language developments.

Lily's language development seems to be on target. She consistently uses elements of language appropriate for her age. She uses some pronouns incorrectly, but this is considered age appropriate. The form of her speech is adequate as she forms words correctly and can arrange them in a sentence correctly, as evidenced by her statement "This is a bunch of bears playing." Her words were pronounced correctly and in correct sequence within the sentence. The content of her response showed competence of vocabulary and conceptual understanding. For example, she didn't just refer to the colored patches on her poster as colors. She specifically said the patches were countries, indicating that the background was a map. She also said "Hey, bear!" showing that she could substitute the word "hey" for "hi" and did not mean that the bear was made out of hay. Lily also showed a solid understanding of language use. She looked me in the eye while she spoke to me and gave me

appropriate attention as we conversed. She stayed on topic and added an element of storytelling to her response.

Marcus's language development seems to be delayed. By first grade, a child with normal language development should be able to use storytelling techniques and use simple and compound sentences consisting of eight words or more, according to a checklist from the National Institute of Deafness and other Communication Disorders (NIDCD). Marcus's descriptions weren't indicative of these skills, as evidenced by his longest sentence of three words while primarily using short phrases and sounds to convey partial ideas. Marcus demonstrated an ability to pronounce sounds and words correctly; however the sentence meaning was unclear. For example, he stated "They's buzzing places!" It was not evident whether he meant that the zigzag marks on his poster were to indicate movement by the bugs or if the marks were illustrations of a place that the bugs were moving towards. He relied primarily on onomatopoeic words, such as "buzz" and sounds, such as "zzz" to communicate. The content of Marcus' language showed little use of vocabulary or understanding of categories. For example, the bugs used in his poster were bees, butterflies, dragonflies and beetles. He repeatedly used "Buzz," indicating that all of the insects make that sound. Marcus' use of language seemed very primitive at times. This was evidenced by his inability to look at me or sit still. He flapped his arms and jumped in circles, mimicking the flight of an insect instead of verbally describing the poster, as was his direction from me. His method of communication aligned with the development of a preschool age child, rather than a child entering the first grade. According to Dr. Sam Goldstein, PhD., this is common for a child with ADHD. He says that as infants transition into acquiring language, sensory labeling of objects is critical. A child with ADHD cannot process sensory cues associated with language due to impulsivity. For example, a child with ADHD physically cannot see a puppy, touch the puppy and hear his mother say "puppy" and process all of the components together to learn what a puppy is.

Relation to teaching and strategies

After analyzing the data from this project, it is evident that there is no specific level of expectancy of language from a child with a speech disability. Education of these children will require a sound understanding of approximately where each child is developmentally and what the next logical level of communication should be. Use of developmental checklists should be used to measure progress and provide a clear picture of language development. Concrete strategies should be used with the child with a speech and language disorder to ensure enhanced learning opportunities.

1. Touch the child's shoulder and say his/her name when giving directions orally (Sluckin). This grabs the child's attention and introduces the habit of paying attention when the teacher speaks. Looking the child in the eye while speaking models appropriate communication habits through proper language use. This is a good method of modeling pragmatics.
2. Plan non-verbal activities that exercise the mouth (Sluckin). Play relay race games such as blowing through a straw to move small objects. Exercising the muscles of the mouth enhance morphological skills. These skills aid in correct pronunciation of phonemes and morphemes.
3. Use nursery rhymes in the classroom reading curriculum. Repetition of sounds builds a solid understanding of word parts. Seeing, hearing and reciting nursery rhymes increase the ability for the child to process all of the sensory cues involved in acquiring new vocabulary.
4. Use books on tape and supply head phones. The use of headphones blocks out background noise that may distract children from listening to the story. Provide the child with the book so that the child can make the connection between what the word looks like and sounds like.
5. Set goals for the child and reward accordingly. For example, set a goal such as "Jack will use action words when he speaks." Place a sticker chart in the room accessible to Jack. When Jack is observed

using verbs he receives a sticker to put on his chart. When his chart is full, he receives a reward, such as being line leader for the day or picking a trinket out of a prize box.

6. Make a picture vocabulary chart using words that the student needs to learn. The words may align with a story used in the curriculum or may be words the child simply needs to learn for daily use. Sit with the child daily and have him/her say the word for each picture out loud. Help the child graph the words he/she knows and can pronounce independently. When the words are mastered, begin using them daily in a sentence. Graph correct sentence usage until those are mastered before moving on to a new set of words.

7. Plan time for some free play with early elementary children. Encourage play with other children so that the child may engage in natural conversation with his/her peers. Observe the play and offer verbal praise when the child communicates appropriately with peers. For example, a student who normally grunts to acknowledge someone speaking to her and rarely looks up should be praised when observed looking at the person she is speaking to and attempting to use words.

8. Play games where the child cannot take a turn until he/she orally answers a question. This promotes active engagement in oral language. Use questions such as "What is your favorite toy?" This eliminates fear of incorrect answers and allows the child to express him/her self.

Activities such as these can easily be integrated into the daily classroom routine and instructional time. The only way a child will learn appropriate use of language is through immersion into a learning environment rich with language. The child should be spoken to and be encouraged to speak to others. Strong praise and encouragement should be used for attempts to use language. Finally, the teacher needs to promote a positive attitude towards language development and never convey frustration if a child progresses slowly.

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