Article Review #7

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Article Review #7: “Repeated Storybook Reading as a Language Intervention for Children with Autism: A Case Study on the Application of Scaffolding”

**Fundamental Question**

*What is the process for repeated storybook reading with scaffolding?* The article, “Repeated Storybook Reading as a Language Intervention for Children with Autism: A Case Study on the Application of Scaffolding” by Bellon, Ogletree, and Harn (2000) looks at the use of repeated storybook reading alongside adult scaffolding with individuals on the spectrum. The authors wondered how this approach would impact echolalia and spontaneous verbalizations. To implement this approach, the adult reads the storybook to the child on at least two occasions to allow for additional time to practice and learn the skills through repetition (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). The scaffolding procedures that the adult employs are cloze procedures, binary choices, expansions, and questioning; in addition, modeling and time delay can be used (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Each scaffolding procedure is operationally defined: cloze procedures including pausing and letting the child fill in the blank for the question or storybook phrase; binary choices involve modeling two options for the student to choose from; expansions mean that the adult elaborates what the child has said; and questioning involves gleaning more insights about the student’s story comprehension and can increase language complexity (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000, p. 53). These strategies are executed in a natural yet planned manner.

**Part-Whole Questions**

*Why did the authors conduct this study and what is the reasoning behind this approach?* This study stems from research that focuses on and recommends joint attention and turn taking in natural settings (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). While social stories are preferably replaced with videos and role playing, they wanted to see if repeated readings with scaffolding would lead to speech gains for those on the spectrum (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Stories can be used for joint focus and interactions and the structure and turn-taking aspects of many books model natural conversation patterns (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Books can provide a context for student’s language use and can promote pragmatic use of language (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Furthermore, the repetitive aspect of this approach lends itself to further comprehension gains and increased practice with the language (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000).

*How does this approach apply to individuals on the spectrum?* The results show that this approach works best with individuals who are high functioning (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). However, this has more to do with language use than other areas of impairment. This approach is best for those who have some verbalization abilities but is applicable for any stage of echolalia (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). I believe that this approach could work for many of our learners, such as those who are learning English as an additional language, and/or those with reading difficulties, and/or those with other speech concerns. Furthermore, this approach is often implemented during carpet time in many primary classrooms.

**Hypothetical Question**

*If this strategy occurred in schools, what would happen, what would it look like, and what would be different?* This strategy can be implemented by having predetermined fiction and nonfiction books selected. These books can be from a set, but it is not necessary. The reason predetermined books would be best is that the read aloud should include manipulatives and activities to solidify and extend the learning (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). For instance, if a teacher read the book, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?* by Eric Carle, character puppets can be made and distributed. This can assist with the retelling of the story and student engagement. Activities, such as crafts and writing prompts, can be completed after reading. The readings can occur as a whole group during carpet time but small groups with a teacher and individualized readings with an Educational Assistant would also be possible. Bellon, Ogletree, and Harn (2000) recommend play and opportunities to communicate beforehand in the natural environment to increase comfortability, which classroom schedules would allow for. I would recommend a simple data sheet to check off when students exhibit the desired vocalization behaviors, especially in the whole group setting where individual transcripts would be impossible to scribe for each learner. Furthermore, these sessions were videoed to help with transcription but that would not occur in the classroom setting. With a few minor variations, this approach can easily be implemented in our inclusive classrooms.

**Critical Questions**

*What are the disadvantages of the study or strategy?* The study involved intervention over a 7-week period with one boy who was 3.10 years of age. He had recently been diagnosed with ASD and presented with immediate and delayed echolalia (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Sessions were 45-minutes in length and involved 5 books, each read twice with additional manipulatives and activities (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). The study design was ABA single-subject with the independent variable being adult scaffolding and the dependent variable being the child’s spontaneous speech, as measured by comparisons between the baseline and posttest data (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Baseline sessions included the same book reading and questioning process as sessions thereafter, however, with no additional scaffolding (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). The sessions were video recorded and then transcribed immediately thereafter. When the adult used scaffolding procedures, this was noted on a checklist and all three types of echolalia – immediate, delayed, and mitigated – were noted (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). They used multi-test reliability measures; an advantage of this study is that they had 85-97% transcript reliability (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000).

In general, the limitations include it being a single-case study over a short timeframe. Furthermore, no other treatment approach was studied as a comparison (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). I am interested if the child was also receiving speech therapy at the time of the study or if these sessions ceased during that time. In general, there are limited studies that look at this specific approach but there are some reports of verbalizations, self-stimming behaviors, and length of utterances increasing after storybook readings with scaffolding (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000).

*Was this strategy effective or ineffective?* The strategy was found to be effective for this child. His delayed and immediate echolalia tapered by the end of the study and his mitigated echolalia increased (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Bellon, Ogletree, and Harn (2000) note that “this progressive evolution of echolalia is consistent with the current view of echolalia as a product of gestalt learning in autism” (p. 55). Furthermore, the child’s verbal perseverations decreased (Bellon, Ogletree, & Harn, 2000). Overall, repeated storybook reading with scaffolding shows great promise.

Works Referenced

Bellon, M. L., Ogletree, B. T., & Harn, W. E. (2000). *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities,* *15*(1), 52-8.