

Facilitating Emotion Words in Children with Social Communication Impairments



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Purpose

Research shows that many children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and Language Impairment (LI) exhibit problems with social communication. However, interventions aimed to help these children improve their social communication skills are limited. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the efficacy of a story enactment intervention to increase the accurate production of emotion words.

Research Question:

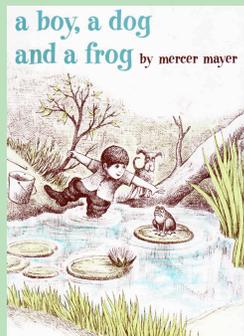
Do children with social communication disorders increase in the appropriate usage of emotion-based words expressing happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust during a 20-session story enactment intervention?

Methods

The intervention program consisted of 20 individualized sessions two to three times per week.

Activities in the program included:

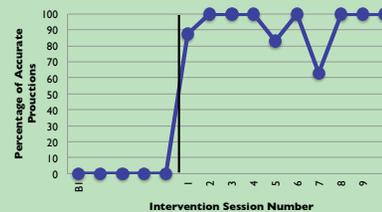
- Story enactment with wordless picture book series *A Boy, a Dog, and a Frog*¹
- Journaling
- Mind-Reading Software



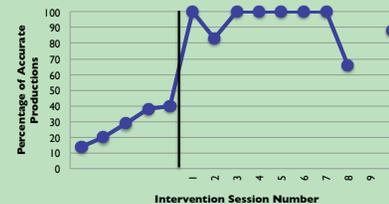
Results

Five baseline sessions and ten treatment sessions were analyzed for the participant's accurate production of emotion words during the course of each session.

Participant TS "Anger" Productions:



Participant TS "Sadness" Productions:



TS Results

The graphs above show the production progress for TS, a male participant diagnosed with LI. According to the Identification of Emotion testing performed pre- and post-intervention, TS improved more than any other participant in his ability to correctly identify emotion. Throughout the course of the intervention program, TS demonstrated the greatest gains within the categories of *sadness* and *anger*.

Participants

Six participants were recruited from a local elementary school. The children ranged in age from 5:1 to 6:10.

Of the participants, three boys and one girl were diagnosed with LI and two boys were diagnosed with ASD. At the beginning of this program, all participants were involved in language intervention in the school setting.



Props used in story enactment of *A Boy, a Dog, and a Frog*



A sample journal page from a participant depicting story events

Discussion

Although each participant's performance was variable, the improvements in accuracy of emotion-based word production seen in this study show promise for this particular social communication intervention.

For participant TS, the intervention seemed to be effective in teaching more appropriate usage of all five of the emotional categories that were specifically targeted during intervention.

Five of the six participants scored higher ratings of prosocial behavior following treatment. This was assessed using the Teacher Behavior Rating Scale (TBRS).

Results of accuracy of emotion-based word productions are currently being analyzed for the other five participants.

¹ Mayer, M. (1967). *A Boy, A Dog and A Frog*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.