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Dear SPAA,

I attended the SAC 2016 conference in Halifax. I would like to thank SPAA for granting me $450 to attend this function.

I attended the following sessions at the conference. On Thursday I attended Tools for Supporting Reading Development: Focusing on Building Blocks of Language and Text Comprehension: Scaffolding Active, Strategic Learners. Friday I attended Planting Two Trees with One Seed: AAC Supports for Problem Behavior in Children with ASD. Then on Saturday I attended Making a Difference: Best Treatment Practices for Preschool and School-Aged Children’s Speech Sound Disorders. I found these sessions interesting and informative. I hope to be able to use the knowledge gained during my therapy sessions and during my ASD consults.

Summaries:

Tools for Supporting Reading Development: Focusing on Building Blocks of Language

This presentation focused on teaching children roots and affixes. As speech-language pathologists we work with phonological awareness. Morphological awareness was introduced as the sensitivity to morphemes and one’s ability to manipulate them. Research was discussed about children’s awareness of morphemes. It was found out that children are aware of morphemes in language and are able to manipulate them. Morphological awareness is important for spelling, reading, vocabulary development and reading comprehension. By giving children the knowledge of these morphemes, they will build their understanding of complex language and use these concepts for spelling, learning new vocabulary and increasing their reading. This is important for both strong and struggling readers. Helene Deacon suggested this approach might be a good way to present language to children who are not responding to phonological awareness instruction. Since morphemes are large meaningful units, this gives concreteness to print. The presenter gave the audience testing ideas, activities and lists of common morphemes children should be taught.

Text Comprehension: Scaffolding Active, Strategic Learners

Teresa Ukrainetz, Professor at the University of Wyoming, discussed reading comprehension. Reading comprehension uses a multitude of skills. In order to comprehend what is written three aspects need to be combined: reader (abilities, knowledge, effort, attitude), activity (print size, lighting, distractions, purpose of reading) and text (topic, level of detail, discourse structure). Comprehension involves vocabulary knowledge, specific and general knowledge, memory and cognitive processes, factual/inferential/evaluative/applied understanding of read discourse, purpose and attitude of reader, readability of text and conditions of activity. Dr Ukrainetz discussed the development of reading, reading expectations in certain grades, challenges of teaching literacy, multi-model text comprehension, reading strategies and how SLPs can make a difference in reading instruction. She used the acronym RISE+ for quality SLP treatment: repeated opportunities, intensity of scheduling, systematic structural and interactive support, explicit skill focus and + learner factor. Examples and research were given throughout the session.

Planting Two Trees with One Seed: AAC Supports for Problem Behavior in Children

The presentation by Pat Mirenda focused on problem behavior in children with ASD. Two assumptions were given: there is a clear relationship between the problem behavior and communication and the problem behavior results between a mismatch between the person and the environment. The five parts of behavior were discussed using the Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA): setting events, person, antecedent, behavior and consequences. Examples were given to for the audience to learn about each aspect and how they related to each other. AAC supports were then discussed to help deal with the problem behavior in children with ASD. These included Functional Communication Training (FCT – assessment, intervention, instruction, key requirements), visual schedules (including between-activity schedules, within-activity schedules), contingency maps, choice making, wait signals and conversation books. Pat Mirenda gave examples and research to support these types of AAC systems.

Making a Difference: Best Treatment Practices for Preschool and School-Aged Children’s Speech Sound Disorders

Debra Goshulak, SLP from The Speech and Stuttering Institute, spoke about motor speech disorders. She reviewed typical motor speech development from one month of age to 2 years of age and the position of vowel sounds in our mouth (oral speech more distorted if our vowels are distorted). She spoke about several places where our communication can break down in our speech production processes. These places include: auditory perceptual encoding (auditory input transformed into phonemic and lexical representations), memory processes (storage and retrieval of representation), transcoding processes (plan and program representations into motor gestures) and neuromotor execution (production of the speech movements). Of preschool children. 15% have a speech sound disorder. This can be broken down further: 75% of these children have a speech delay but 25% have a motor speech disorder. (10% dysarthria, 5% apraxia and 10% missed sound disorder, not otherwise specified). Potential causes for the motor speech disorder may be cognitive linguistic processing constraints, auditory perceptual processing constraints related to fluctuating conductive hearing loss or psychosocial involvement. Children who are classified with a motor speech disorder are children who are constrained in their ability to plan, sequence, control and coordinate positions and movement of muscle groups to generate speech. This included significant impairment with speech sound deletions, substitutions and distortions. Debra taught us to use the motor speech treatment hierarchy. This hierarchy guides SLPs in their assessment and treatment approach and follows the typical motor development from tone, phonation, planes of movement, sequenced movement and prosody. The emphasis is on planes of movement: vertical plane (jaw), horizontal plane (lips) and anterior/posterior plane (tongue). Numerous examples were given for each stage through examples, video demonstrations and hands on materials. A list of books was also given to help target and monitor the motor speech goals.

Thanks

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