Using literacy-based therapy to address social objectives in students with ASD
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Learner Outcomes:

- Describe a general framework for implementing group social/literacy-based interventions
- Explain how writing is a social tool for use in social action
- Discuss 3 ways that utilizing a meaning-based group writing approach can facilitate socialization among peers with ASD.

Agenda

- Introduction
- Background/Relevant Literature Review
- Framework & Video Demonstrations
- Conclusion/Q&A
ASD

• (APA, DSM-V, 2013)
  • Social communication and interaction
  • Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, activities

= vulnerability for impaired social interactions


Background

• 80's-90's: shift in direction to focus on social aspects of development in IASD.
• Coincided with a movement in the field toward:
  • the social aspects of language (i.e., USE)
  • and addressing them in more authentic contexts
  • (e.g., “Pragmatic Revolution,” Duchan, 1984; Duchan, Hewitt, Sonnemeier, 1994)
• Manifest primarily through oral language and play-based approaches
  • (e.g., Greenspan & Wieder, 2006; Rydell, 2012; Schuler & Wolfberg, 2002)

Literacy?

• Here, we focus on literacy, especially writing, as an intervention context for facilitating social interaction with school-age children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
• Though literacy is increasingly acknowledged as an important scope of practice for SLPs (ASHA, 2001), the focus is often on literacy as a set of skills to be taught step-by-step, rather than as a tool for meaning-making in social action.
Strengths-based Framework

- Damico & Nelson 2005
  - Vocal creak & sparkle hands
  - Strategies (likely unconsciously) used to change clinician’s behavior/focus or indicate a desire to request object, shift activity or location
- Herrera, Seelburger, Nelson, & Abendroth, 2009
  - Finger flapping in shared reading contexts
  - Behavior was systematic and served specific functions

Writing: A tool for socialization

- “Through participation in play children construct shared meanings and transform their understanding of the skills, values, and knowledge inherent to society and culture at large (Schuler & Wolfberg, 2002, p. 256).”
- Writing, like play, must be considered an additional modality for individuals to engage in, build upon, and share social-cultural knowledge.
- Olsen (2001) argues that more important than learning to transcribe, are the culturally embedded ways of interpreting and producing written texts. These influence our understanding of ourselves and our environment.

Writing: A tool for socialization

- Much like oral and gestural language, which “serve children first and foremost as a means of social contact with other people (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 28)”...
- ...writing, as a manifestation of underlying language capacity, is both a demonstration of social action and a means of social action (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Deford, 1980; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984).
- Writing, as a symbolic tool, mediates our interactions, and demonstrates the relationship between the development and use of written language and social relationships—especially between peers (Dyson, 1999; 2003).
Typically Developing Writers

- DeFord (1980): Writing develops through participation in meaningful social and situational contexts.
- Harste, Woodward, Burke (1984): advocated that children “can communicate—and do so quite creatively—whether or not [their] speech or writing is conventional” (p. 27).
- Additionally, they observed that writing is a social action, “mediated through and with language” (p. 150).

Writing: A tool for socialization

- Lensmire & Beals (1994):
  - Interested in what material children use for their writing, where they get it from, and how it is appropriated.
  - The POINT: To ignore WHAT and HOW of a writer’s products is to overlook the purpose of writing: to express something to someone (p. 422).

Why does what we know about typically developing children matter?

- “All children are special; some have more needs than others. More needs – not different ones” (Waterland, 1989)
Meaning-Based Literacy: What do we mean by this?

- Marie Clay, Reggie Routman, Brian Cambourne, the Goodmans, etc.
- Continuum of mediation
- Focus on meaning

*Shared writing and read alouds gave us the most mediational “bang for our buck” with this population, so this was a large portion of our sessions.

Putting this into practice: Example 1

- Damico, Damico, Nelson, Weill, & Maxwell (2017)
- Literacy project with preschoolers with ASD
  - Used literacy as the vehicle for development of play, language, socialization
  - Based on 5 practice-oriented principles:
    - Emphasis on meaning
    - Contextual embeddedness
    - Contractiveness
    - Active engagement
    - Recurrence

Putting this into practice example #2 (and 3): A Pilot Study

- (Maxwell, 2015; Maxwell, Damico, & Weill, 2017)
- Primary goal of the intervention: to enhance the socialization skills of the participants
- Purpose(s): To use literacy as a vehicle to target socialization; to investigate how students with ASD used literacy-based contexts to engage in socialization
Typical Session

• 3 main “sections”
  • Reading Aloud
  • Shared Writing
  • Cooperative Learning Activities
    • Author's Chair
    • Science Projects
    • Small group projects

Social Aspects of the Read Alouds

• Through read alouds we were able to:
  • Highlight feelings and affective states of characters when appropriate
  • Model think alouds and demonstrate metacognitive strategies for talking about the reading
  • Highlight character motivations, feelings, authors choices
  • Relate readings to personal experiences
  • Encourage and facilitate interaction with peers during discussions
  • Provide model of writing processes as well (look at what authors do, provide ideas for writing topics, etc.)

Social aspects of writing events:

• Social aspects:
  • Sharing work with others
  • Talking about readings/writings
  • Sharing writing with writing buddies (product, but also the process)
  • Peer collaboration on literacy-based activities
  • Looking at writing as a two-sided manifestation of language
  • Language processes at work during composing process—mediational effect of writer's workshop
  • Social processes at work during sharing of both writing task during writer's workshop and sharing the finished product in author's chair.
How can writing facilitate socialization?

- Shared writing process as an opportunity for dyadic interaction and joint attention
- Opportunities for social monitoring behaviors
- Opportunities for emerging audience awareness
- Opportunities to socialize/affiliate with peers

What did we see?

- A difference in regulation...
- Social monitoring
  - Appropriation
  - Monitoring the response of his peers
  - Revised presentation when he did not get the response expected
- Audience awareness
  - Writing meant to be shared
  - Writing structure clearly implied a specific audience (the group)
- Opportunities to socialize/affiliate with peers
  - Active engagement of the peers in the audience

  THIS WRITING IS A SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH HIS PEERS

Clinical Implications

- Embrace the chaos! Importance of authenticity of task and student choice in writing topics
- Emphasis on writing process versus product
- Importance of dialogue during the composing process and emphasis of sharing/discussing written products (Dyson, 2003, p. 138)
- Given the core deficits of this population: They may need increased opportunities to perform their writings in authentic settings to emphasize the pragmatic functions of writing
Allowing students to choose their own topics

**Pros**
- Allows students to write about what they know
- High interest/motivation
- Creating space for affiliation, appropriation, social interaction with peers, etc.

**Cons**
- Background knowledge
- Awareness
- Billy
- Kameron
- Difficulty with repairs
- Difficult to provide appropriate mediation

Setting Appropriate Expectations

- **EMBRACE THE CHAOS!**
  - Not EVERY session had demonstrations of brilliant socialization.
  - There was dysregulation...
  - There were days where engagement, attention, & topic maintenance issues prevailed...
  - There were days where we, as clinicians, GOT IT ALL WRONG!

"It's about the PROCESS!"

Implications

- Looking at writing through a wider lens (PROCESS VS PRODUCT)
- Importance of the peer group
- Dialogue during composing process
- Sharing/discussing written products
- Mediational implications of a strengths-based approach
- Dual potential: socialization AND literacy
- Grouping/workload
Selected References