

The Gray Area Podcast

Podcast Notes & Transcript

Episode: The Role of SLPs in Literacy Development

Resources

The Simple View of Reading

Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties:

This self-paced, asynchronous eLearning series was developed by David Kilpatrick, Ph.D., in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education.

Language in Brief

Developmental Norms for Speech and Language:

Norms for Oral Expression and Listening Comprehension

Oral Expression	Listening Comprehension
Kindergarten	
Speaks intelligibly.	Comprehends 13,000 words.
Uses 1500 words.	Understands opposites.
Retells a story or event.	Follows 1-2 step simple directions in sequence.
Takes turns during conversation.	Listens to and understands age appropriate stories.
Sentences should be mostly grammatical.	Recognizes meaning from tone of voice and facial expressions.
First Grade	
Tells and retells stories and events in a logical order.	Comprehends 20,000 words.
Expresses ideas with a variety of complete sentences.	Understands months and seasons.
Second Grade	
Uses increasingly complex sentences.	Follows 3-4 step directions in sequence.
Clarifies and explains words and ideas.	Understands direction words for location, space, and time.

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Oral Expression	Listening Comprehension
Uses oral expression to inform, persuade and to entertain.	Answers questions about grade level story or theme correctly.
Opens and closes conversation appropriately.	
Experiments with vocabulary.	
Third Grade	
Summarizes a story accurately.	Listens attentively in group situations.
Uses content area vocabulary.	Understands grade level material.
Explains what he/she has learned.	Expresses well-developed time and number concepts.
Varies verbal and nonverbal behaviors depending on the audience (more formal to teacher than with peers).	
Fourth Grade	
Understands some figurative language.	Listens to and understands information presented by others.
Participates in group discussions.	Forms opinions based in evidence.
Makes effective oral presentations.	Listens for specific purpose.
Identifies main idea and supporting details.	Asks clarifying questions.
Chooses vocabulary appropriate to the message.	Uses listening skills to understand directions.
Uses grammatically correct speech	
Fifth Grade	
Makes planned oral presentations appropriate to the audience.	Listens and draws conclusions in subject area.
Maintains eye contact, uses gestures, facial expressions, and appropriate voice during group presentations.	Distinguishes fact from fiction.
Summarizes main points.	

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Oral Expression	Listening Comprehension
Reports about information gathered in group activities.	
Middle School	
Presents ideas effectively in discussion with a wide range of audiences.	Recognizes stylistic elements, such as tone of voice and body language.
Uses a wide range vocabulary for different purposes.	
Uses figures of speech.	
Uses a variety of simple and complex sentence structures.	
Defends a point of view.	
High School	
Supports a point of view using various forms of persuasion.	Self-evaluates oral presentations.
Incorporates materials from a wide range of sources (newspapers, books, technical materials, etc.).	Recognizes a speaker's point of view, purpose, and historical and cultural context.
Selects and presents a focused topic.	Analyzes and synthesizes materials presented orally.
Experiments with stylistic elements.	
Uses language to solve problems.	

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TRANSCRIPT

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

child, language comprehension, word, speech language pathologist, language, classroom teacher, reading, kids, teacher, decoding, risk factors, classroom, area, phonological, speech, important, assessment, hearing, role, adult

SPEAKERS

Veronica Fiedler, Tami Cassel

Veronica Fiedler 00:15

Greetings friends and colleagues, welcome to the Gray Area, a podcast where we examine pressing issues and common questions about specific learning disability. I am your host Veronica Fiedler, the specific learning disability specialist of the Colorado Department of Education. Today, we are going to be discussing the role of the speech language pathologist and early reading development. And joining us today is Tammy Cassel. Tammy, do you want to tell us a little about yourself in your role here at CDE?

Tami Cassel 00:54

Yeah, I am the speech language pathology consultant. I've been in education settings. Since the beginning of my career, which is 30 plus years, we will not go into the detail of all the years. I started in some of our school districts as your typical speech language pathologists working with kids from preschool to transition age. And then I moved more specifically into assistive technology and became an assistive technology coordinator in one of the districts. And then I moved into, as my nephew always called, it the dark side of administration, and kind of got a different perspective of special education processes from that level. And then I moved up to the Department of Education where I've been supporting SLPs and parents and just in general, educators around areas and questions of speech language.

Veronica Fiedler 01:49

Well, thank you so much for joining us today and lending your expertise to this conversation. The catalyst actually for this for this particular topic is rooted in my own experience in the field as a special education generalist, you know, and so I always had students on my caseload that had speech language services, and but my understanding... I had a serious lack of understanding of the role of the SLP. And their, expertise, and the importance that that expertise is in reading specifically. And so, and I feel like this lack of understanding is kind of really common out there, especially among generalists that SLPs are really important, they play a really important role in supporting students with reading difficulties. So I wanted to explore this a little bit more and put this information out there for other people who are like me, and who just didn't know. And so, um, so to better understand the role of the SLP in early literacy, I want to frame the conversation in the Simple View of Reading. And so for listeners, if you have never heard of the Simple View of Reading, I encourage you to Google it and inform yourself a little bit

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more. So for the purposes of this podcast, I'm going to briefly go over it, the simple view of reading is basically a math equation. And it is decoding times language comprehension equals reading comprehension. And it basically lays out that these two things need to be in place solidly. So a reader needs to be able to decode the written language, and they also need to have language comprehension to be able to understand the language, they're reading in order to have reading comprehension. And so first, I want to talk about the decoding piece. And so when we're talking about decoding, we're talking about basic word level reading. So that involves letter sound knowledge, phonological phonemic blending phonemic awareness and orthographic knowledge. And so what are some of the early indicators or the risk factors that a teacher or a parent should be aware of that are specific to possible future decoding problems? And how can the SLPs expertise support the development of these decoding skills?

Tami Cassel 04:23

So, there are several key risk factors for dyslexia and one being genetics. So, I think that that's important. A lot of times we don't necessarily know the family histories, but that definitely plays a role in reading disabilities. And there's also weak oral language skills. So students that are challenged with their oral language skills that could be another area that pops up. Hearing difficulties and it doesn't have to just be specifically to kids who are deaf and hard of hearing. Obviously, those children are going to have issues here in the phonological sounds in our language, but children who have hearing difficulties in the sense of like an auditory processing difficulty, that could also be considered a risk factor to be aware of. And then obviously, the speech sound disorders. And there are some cognitive factors that play into this as well, such as language and executive functioning skills. So classroom teachers and parents may be able to observe children having difficulties in these areas, and one of the areas would be multi syllabic words. So children who are developing there's an age appropriate range in which kids will kind of reverse syllables in multisyllabic words, for example, it's often you'll hear a child between the ages of two to four saying "aminals" for the word animals, or "rysaurosus" for rhinoceros. And so with spaghetti or pisketti for spaghetti is one of the more common ones right and up to a certain point up to around about the age of four. This is typical developing. Kids are hearing the sounds they're working on the sequencing of these different multisyllabic words. And so that that's not a big warning sign. But if that continues beyond about kindergarten age, then it is more of a warning sign that says, okay, something is amiss in their phonological system, and kids with speech sound disorders. So the example of the "aminals" and animals that would not be considered a speech sound disorder because a child's able to say all the sounds correctly, and you've got kids who have a speech sound disorder, where they might be not able to say, their Ks or their G's, and so their cookies turned into tooties, and but that would be consistent across all words that have Ks and G's in there. So that would be more of an articulation or speech sound disorder that would need to be corrected. That disorder is also a risk factor, a warning sign, something to be aware of because still There's something going on with that child's phonological system that they're not able to produce the sounds accurately. There could be a motor speech component to it, as well as phonological sounds. So that's the piece where it's a could be, it's a risk factor. It's not definite. But roughly 18% of kids who have speech sound disorders later go on to become identified as having a reading disability.

Veronica Fiedler 07:25

So something that you said is, you mentioned like hearing difficulties and how that can potentially affect their ability to learn to read. And so I know I've heard that, that sometimes kids

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who have had a series of ear infections when they're young like is this is something that we probably should be aware of as case managers, right?

Tami Cassel 07:46

Absolutely. Yes. Kids with a history of ear infections or kids who have had PE tubes put in these would be children whose hearing system probably works okay, but they're not the sound Learning them are coming in muffled or they're coming in distorted. And so it might look like auditory discrimination problems later where the child's not able to discriminate the sound as they get is they're learning to read because they didn't discriminate the sound when they were learning those sounds as a young child.

Veronica Fiedler 08:19

Right. And so that sound... the awareness of the sound of the language is really important for that decoding piece. So let's like, look at the language comprehension piece of the Simple View of Reading. So Tammy, what are we talking about when we are talking about language comprehension specifically?

Tami Cassel 08:38

So with language comprehension, we're talking about basically the ability to understand the message. And with young children, most of those messages are spoken to them and so their ability to understand the spoken message or the signed message, as they get older, language comprehension, plays in with reading comprehension and their ability to understand the message as they read it. And so we're not talking about, can they sound out the word, but when they do read the word do they attach meaning to that word as it applies to that sentence, because you know, so many of our words are, have multi meanings to it. And if a child only has a simple understanding of the vocabulary, they don't really have a deep understanding of the different meanings a word can take on that it's going to confuse them when they're reading a sentence or reading a story.

Veronica Fiedler 09:29

And so this goes beyond just like not knowing what the words mean, right? I mean, there's, there's something deeper going on with a child who has a language comprehension, like deficit.

Tami Cassel 09:39

Tell me more what you mean by that.

Veronica Fiedler 09:41

So you know, like, if a child just doesn't have a whole lot of background knowledge and doesn't have a lot of like a large vocabulary, obviously, their language comprehension is affected, but that's not necessarily a disability, that's something that can be, you know, remedied through just exposure to language and words, right? And so there is a whole other piece where language comprehension could be a disability or a deficit.

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Tami Cassel 10:07

Absolutely, like language comprehension is can be a standalone disability because it's how it's how all those words connect in order for the child to make meaning out of the sentence. So it could be, they might know the meanings of the words. But maybe it's the order in which they appear that they're not understanding the meaning. If you think of our grammatical structures of passive voice versus active voice, if a child doesn't understand that syntactic difference, then they're going to be confused with the message as far as who's doing what to whom in the story. Typically, we don't talk like that. Kids will see those more complex syntactic structures when they're reading. And that's where they get started to become confused because they don't understand how those words interact with each other. In the sentence. a classroom teacher might see this child's ability to follow directions or they might see in the child's comment or how they participate in a group discussion, and so their words might, the classroom teacher might be confused by why the child made the comment that the child made, because they're not able, the teacher doesn't see how that child's comment links back to the topic of conversation that they're having. And so that could be kind of a little bit of a red flag for a classroom teacher might say, "Hmm. Interesting comment, I'm not sure. You know, I'm not sure how that relates". And so that would be just like a little red flag that they could have a conversation with the SLP to say, so this is, these are some of the things I'm seeing the child do in the classroom, or they might have an inability to understand jokes like the knock-knock jokes, they don't get that humor because that's a higher level understanding of language, and syntactical meanings as well as multiple meanings to the word because often that's where our humor comes from. It comes from the nuances of language, and how one word can have different meanings. And so in this context, it means something else, versus when you say it in a joke, it has this level of implication.

Veronica Fiedler 12:08

Yeah. And that. So those are like some of the early risk factors that we would notice, you know, like in a classroom or at home. What I think is interesting about that is, to me that seems really challenging to see and to notice, right? I mean, if a kid isn't really getting jokes, and is a really young child, as a teacher, I might just say, "Oh, well, he just doesn't understand, just doesn't understand. And he's not old enough", or something like that. But like with decoding, you can hear it right in their language, if they're having an issue with that, I think that red flag is so much easier to notice. But these early risk factors with language comprehension seem a little bit more challenging to notice for somebody who is not trained.

Tami Cassel 12:53

It's more of a teacher listening to their gut. I think if you were to pin them down and really have a conversation with them, they'd be like Yeah, I did notice that Oh, yeah, I noticed that too. And so it's kind of in comparison to the other kids in their classroom, or all the other kids getting the age appropriate job, and it has to be an age appropriate joke, right? I mean, you would be expecting them to be getting all the jokes that are, you know, their older kids would be getting. But if the other kids, the majority of the kids in their classroom are getting those jokes, and they're understanding it, or the majority of the kids in the classroom are able to participate on topic with the conversation of the discussion, then that's where the child who is not making relevant comments would kind of pop to the level of, "Well, that was an odd comment," but the teacher, yeah, if they're not aware of that, that they need to be looking for those kinds of behaviors, then

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they might just kind of smooth over it and not really realize that that has more of an implication in this child's language development, which would later impact their literacy development.

Veronica Fiedler 13:57

Interesting. Yes,

Tami Cassel 13:58

They might also see these kids using really simple sentences as opposed to complex sentences, they might see the kids using the same, you know, maybe they have immature vocabulary, like, they're always using the same word to, you know, I'm glad I'm about it, or it's a great thing to do, it's a great thing to do, it's a great thing to do, you know, they don't have another way of expressing the same concept.

Veronica Fiedler 14:21

Okay, or using maybe like simple descriptors like "that" for not naming an object but using "that" for everything or using his or her rather than a name because, okay, that's, that's really interesting. And so what I liked, what you said was, you talked about how teachers really kind of need to tap into their gut, because, you know, we talk a lot about, about data and gathering data. But sometimes that gathering data process starts with this sort of gut feeling or what we're noticing. And so trusting that and perhaps just like going to the SLP and having a conversation with them about what you're observing might be helpful.

Tami Cassel 14:59

Absolutely. And I liked what you said about using those referential pronouns. Because as adults, when we're talking to children, we are wonderful communication partners in the sense that we don't let children fail and have that breakdown. Other kids don't know how to repair the communication. And so you'll see that their peers will have some of that communication breakdown. But as an adult, we're going to constantly ask the question, "So who are you talking about?" "Who did this?" "Well, where did they go?" Because if a child's telling you a story about something that they did over the weekend, where as an adult or a listener, you don't have the reference to really be able to fill in the gaps. You have to do that with your questioning. And so the child comes in and says, "Yeah, we did all we have a great party this weekend. I went to my friend's house and he got this and then my other friend came over and we were doing this", and nobody really knows what they were doing or who their friends were. But as the adult will ask them the questions. So as a teacher, if you find that you're always needing to ask a lot of questions that a kid cannot tell a logically sequenced understandable story, then that might be another kind of red flag that says, Okay, we're we've got some word finding difficulties, we've got some, you know, lower weaker vocabulary, or they're not understanding the importance of using a character's name or being specific with a noun, as opposed to using the referential pronoun. So this and that and stuff, or maybe they can't remember they can't call it to, to their mind at the time that they're trying to tell you the story. Once again, that could be indicative of weak phonological system. Because if I can't remember what the word is, if I can't remember all the sounds in the word and the sequences of it, I'm not gonna be able to tell you what it is. Perfect example of when as an adult, we're learning a foreign language. It's not something we've heard a lot. And so it's like, you've heard the word, and now I'm trying to remember what

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the word is, but I can't remember the sequence of the phonemes because it's not something I can pull from my background. It's not something that I've been exposed to numerous times. And so as an adult, you're going to struggle in the beginning. And some obviously get it better than others, in learning a second language, children are going to have some of that same, the same behaviors, but it's going to be with their primary language that indicates a weak phonological system in children. Um, and then there could be the one the kids who couldn't, who couldn't remember what the word is that they're trying to, you know, to use, because they don't they don't know the name of that item. And so they're going to use the word "this" and "that".

Veronica Fiedler 17:37

Okay. Yeah, stuff. Yeah, that's helpful information. And so, so I'm a teacher and I have this like, sort of gut feeling that something's not right. So how do we assess for or to identify root cause of a language comprehension deficit?

Tami Cassel 17:56

Well, so I mean, obviously, if you're referring to the IEP team, the speech language pathologist has assessments that look at the five areas of the language. If they're just trying to get some ideas from SLP, they can certainly have a conversation with the speech language pathologist to say, this is what I'm noticing what are some things strategies I can do to help support the child if the child is having difficulty following directions. So one, it could be they don't understand the words the teachers using or it could be their memory that they're not able to retain as much information. So if you give them a two-step direction, and they're not able to follow that, then reduce it down to a one step direction, and then just give them one step at a time. And if it's like I said vocabulary words, then it would be the typical child would need exposure to a new vocabulary word 25 times and that could be exposure by speaking it, reading it, seeing it manipulating it, you know, having it in the classroom as an item that can be played with or used. But for a child who's struggling with vocabulary, then they're going to need twice that amount of time of exposure to the words. And so the teacher needs to be very careful and not use "this" and "that" and use a lot of referential pronouns, even though they might, in the beginning have identified what the, the primary noun is. And then they jump to the, you know, if they say something like, you know, "we're going to, we're going to use the paints today in our, whatever rotation and so make sure you get that when you get the right color of it. When you go over there. in that section", they [teachers] need to be using the word "use the paints, get the right color for your paint". So the child is hearing that word "paint, paint, paint paint" over and over again, because they do in general, when we're talking, we will set the stage of what we're talking about. And then we will use the referential pronoun of "it" or "that" or "them", you know, he or she, and so that's why I think children use those pronouns over and over. Because those are the words that they're hearing more frequently, but they're not able to remember, what does that pronoun refer back to? or What does that noun or that the pronoun refer back to whether it's a he or you know this that. So it's really important use children's names, use the names of the items, especially for the younger developing kids.

Veronica Fiedler 20:23

Okay, so the importance of the language that you use in the classroom on a daily basis, I hear in that answer. And so and that kind of brings us to the next question like how do we treat

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language comprehension deficit? And what like, what can general educators in the classroom just do to help support that?

Tami Cassel 20:42

Yeah, so you know, basically, you know, they're going to be getting assessment data from both formal and then if they're going down the path of an IEP referral, the speech language for the educational team will be doing comprehensive assessments so you'll have some formal assessment data. The formal assessment data should also be looked at in an informal setting to determine how does the child functionally use their language to communicate. And so based on that assessment data that comes from the entire educational team, which will include the classroom teacher, and their input on what is the child doing in the classroom, that's a cause for concern. Most of the time, that's why they're going to be referring to that even the teacher, or the parent is going to be the first line of defense to say I'm concerned about and typically it's the child speech intelligibility. But sometimes it can be the child's not talking at all. And that could be indicative of a language disorder or speech disorder. And so they're going to need that assessment data to be used to determine and develop a treatment plan for the child. And then the explicit instruction would actually be provided in that area, that deficit area with support from the classroom teacher. And so the teacher in the educational team, whether it's a speech language pathologist, or the classroom teacher or the special ed teacher, rather they would be working collaboratively to be supporting the issue so that the child might be getting services from the speech and language pathologist, as well as when the speech language pathologist is not in the classroom, then the classroom teacher kind of knows what the strategies and those interventions are. So they can continue to reinforce them.

Veronica Fiedler 22:22

Great. And so how can we leverage our SLPs in the early years to prevent reading issues later on?

Tami Cassel 22:32

Well, often, like I said, the first line of contact with families is through the speech language pathologist, because that's going to be the speaking is going to be the first area that we expect kids to be able to do. We don't expect three year olds to be reading. We don't expect them, some of them even five year olds not to be reading, but we do by the time they hit preschool kindergarten, we do expect a kid to be pretty functional communicator. And so that's going to be the first area that parents are going to be concerned with you know, "I can't understand him", or the teachers gonna say the same thing, "I don't know what he's saying". And so that conversation will start with the SLP coming in and doing the assessment and the referrals. The focus would then be around the child speech production. But it's important to remember or it could be around their understanding of language sentences, sentence structure, vocabulary, depending on what the area that's been. That's been brought forward for the, in the, in the problem solving team that discussion, say, "what are we concerned about?" So it's important for the assessment to be a really comprehensive assessment on all areas that could impact literacy, and not just focus on the articulation skills, because we know that's a piece of the child's phonological system. And it's being exhibited through the way they say the sound, but we also want to make sure of how they're receiving the information and so doing you know, phonological awareness assessments or for logical awareness skill sets to save, you know, is

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he learning the sounds? Can you manipulate the sounds in the sentence? How is the child at rhyming words? Some of those pre literacy skills that kindergarten preschool teachers are doing that would be important information to bring to the spring to a conversation or a discussion around what's going on with the child and not just limiting it to what the articulation skills are of this kid.

Veronica Fiedler 24:29

Ah ha, very good. Well, that is very useful information. I want to thank you very much for joining us on the Gray Area today and lending us your expertise.

Tami Cassel 24:40

Your bet. Thank you.

Veronica Fiedler 24:43

That concludes our episode. Thank you for joining us. Be sure to check the SLD webpage for more episodes of the Gray Area. I am your host, Veronica Fiedler signing off until next time.