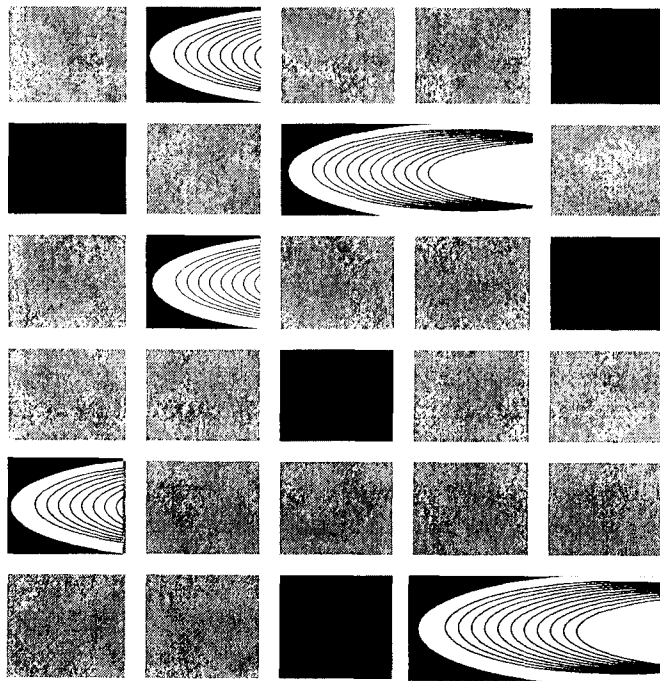
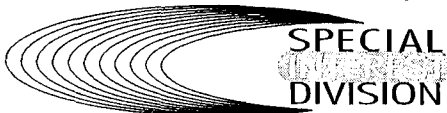


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A Field Assignment for a Graduate Course in Language Disorders: How to Teach Academically At-Risk Children to Retell and Summarize Text

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Course Title:

Advanced Language Disorders, SPH 562

Description of the Approach

Graduate students in speech-language pathology who are enrolled in SPH 562, Advanced Language Disorders, a required course in the Department of Speech and Hearing, Cleveland State University, visit a grade one to four school once a week for 10 weeks to work with groups of five to seven academically at-risk students on text retelling and summarizing skills. About 45 elementary students in total are taught by class members through this school-university partnership.

My students provide language-based academic intervention (Ehren, 2000). Each week the teams prepare a one-hour, grade-level lesson. They work in teams of two and are graded on whether they help the children succeed on text retelling and summarizing tasks. Graduate students must implement a careful choice of objectives, activities, modifications, and interventions. I look for how well they develop the children's capacities and respond to learners' needs. Every lesson starts with a fictional or factual story (found in quality children's literature) read aloud by the graduate students. To retell or summarize the text, the children must utilize vocabulary, memory, sequencing and abstraction of details. Intervention strategies involve helping the children (a) understand the material; (b) use one's "own voice" to retell or summarize; (c) choose proper vocabulary; (d) identify features of the genre of the story ("Once upon a time" in a fairy tale; first, second, third, in a factual piece, etc.); (e) abstract and reassemble the key points; and (f) listen and interact with others to clarify the organization of the narrative.

Procedures that facilitate these skills include, for example, predicting how a text will proceed and confirming predictions; getting the retelling or summary into print, where the group dictates to the adult who writes the retold or abridged story on the chalkboard; having the children create a product each session, such as a chart that shows the beginning, middle, and ending of the book; webbing text vocabulary; comparing two characters within a story; or wearing costumes and acting out the text.

I assess my students by evaluating how well they use a variety of documentation and analysis procedures, which are described below as Assessment Procedures. The students' job is to assess how well the children participate in group discussion, sustain attention, share ideas, compare ideas, recall details in sequence, use topical vocabulary, and use semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic skills (e.g., word usage, sentence structure, keep to the topic and intent of the story, etc.).

The children served, who are all African-American, receive no special services, but their teachers have identified them as struggling with the reading and oral and written language demands of their classrooms. Their school district has been identified as being in "academic emergency," (Ohio Department of Education, 2000) the state of Ohio's designation for districts where pupils are, as a whole, performing poorly on the state-mandated test of curriculum mastery, the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT) (Ohio Department of Education, 1995; Ohio Student Testing Requirements, 1991).

Goal

The goal of the experience is for speech-language pathology graduate students to gain practical experience that will help them learn more about providing curriculum-relevant services for children with language and learning deficiencies, in order to foster better performance on state-mandated testing. Students learn to carefully document interventions and reflect on children's performance as learners as well as on their own performance as speech-language pathologists (SLPs). I hope to offer them a chance to cultivate the habit of continually reflecting on what they are learning from their own practice—what can be learned about practice itself, about children and their environments, and about the study of language and literacy development.

I designed this short-term intervention to focus on two of the language skills targeted by the OPT. Retelling and summarizing text are key to successful test performance in grade four. I also selected these skills because my students learn about providing services that integrate reading and oral and written language, a premise for intervention that is among the top priorities identified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA; 1999; 2000). I wanted this initial

field experience to offer my graduate students the chance to learn about helping children use their developing oral language capabilities to grasp the meaning of text.

My priorities also stem from the fact that I have collected extensive data that showed that 263 mainstream children in this setting were, on average, two years behind age and grade expectations in oral language, reading, and writing (Pershey, 2002a). In working with academically at-risk children in this setting for 3 years, I have realized that many students experience a cycle of multiple failures. School, for some, is a series of diminishing returns. Their academic progress is slow and/or sporadic, they are not served by any formal or consistent mechanisms of intervention, and demands for performance are getting tougher and more immediate.

Benefits to Students

Graduate programs in speech-language pathology need to prepare future SLPs to work with students whose language and learning deficiencies place them at risk for diminished performance on mandated tests of curriculum mastery (ASHA, 2000; The National Center for Educational Outcomes [NCEO], 2001). ASHA (2000) has stipulated that not all children served will be on SLPs' caseloads—some may be children from the mainstream who are at risk for academic failure. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1997) charges school personnel with preparing students to meet contextual demands, which may include mandated tests. To participate, SLPs need to be familiar with the expectations of the tests (Pershey, 2002b). I have designed my course to allow my students to become familiar with test demands and provide intervention that targets behaviors that are necessary for successful test performance. School SLPs are also particularly well able to gather ongoing clinical data on students' task performance that may help explain why students obtain certain test scores. To this end, my students also document where children may have insufficient capabilities and skills to approach test-taking without modifications or accommodations (NCEO, 2001), so that appropriate individualized test-taking measures can potentially be provided.

A second benefit is that use of this method of assessment will help our department begin to realign courses to meet guidelines imposed by ASHA's Council on Professional Standards in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology (Standards Council). The Standards Council acts to guide university programs in speech-language pathology in designing the academic and clinical experiences that pre-professional SLPs should encounter during their graduate education. The method of evaluation that is used in this course reflects the Standards Council's emphasis on process stan-

dards and formative procedures that allow students to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and competencies that SLPs need to possess. I hope that lessons learned from the assessment process used in this course can assist us in improving assessment procedures in other courses in our department.

Assessment Procedures

Each graduate student must hand in a field portfolio at the end of the term. The team of two students prepares all lessons together, but I grade them on several additional items besides their lessons, some of which are prepared together and some alone. The parts done in pairs are

1. Their lesson plans and outcomes,
2. A narrative chronology that tells what each lesson was about, how it went, what the children accomplished, what went wrong, and how it led to the next lesson,
3. Copies of all activities (e.g., worksheets, charts),
4. Student work samples from each week,
5. Weekly Kid Journals (at the end of the lesson, each child must write or dictate the completion of this sentence stem: "Today I learned how to ____" and is cued to describe something about retelling or summarization as a process),
6. Photobios: affixed to a picture of each child is an observation log documenting his/her behaviors, gains, and potential for success on state-mandated testing, and
7. Lesson Share Sheets: handouts used when presenting portfolios to the class that give classmates intervention ideas for the future.

Solo requirements include several short papers:

1. A Double Entry Journal (a weekly entry on what they observed and how it relates to something they read in any sort of source—books, journals, Internet; entries are turned in four times per semester for grading, rather than weekly) plus a response to each of these questions: What did my children learn today? What do they need to learn next? What do I need to learn about to teach my children?
2. A final reflection on the experience,
3. A technical piece on teaching retelling and/or summarization skills using at least three professional quality references, and
4. A description of how this experience brought classroom textbooks (Merritt & Culatta, 1998; Vinson, 1999) to life.

The points earned on the portfolio assignment are worth half the course grade, 200 of 400 points. As indicated on the students' Grade Sheets (Appendices A and B, which are used as open-ended scoring rubrics where I write comments on students' work), group work accounts for 80 points and solo work accounts for 120 points. Three tests (at 65 points per test) comprise 195 more points that students may earn in the course. Five points are given for completion of a final self-assessment.

Recommendations for Faculty

School-university partnerships present exciting opportunities for course redevelopment. Rather than recommend that other faculty address retelling and summarizing text, I recommend that faculty and school personnel work together to define a problem that school children are experiencing that will also relate to a clinical services issue for future SLPs (which in this case was preparation for high-stakes testing). Assessment of graduate students' work in the field should include assignments that afford them extensive opportunities to revisit important concepts, collaborate with classmates, observe children in-depth, and analyze their own progress as clinicians.

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Appendix A

Advanced Language Disorders Group Grade Sheet

Names _____

Group Grade: _____/80 Points

5 Points:

Binder, Neat, Held Together _____

12 Point Type, Double Spaced, Neatness, Print Quality _____

Punctuation, Spelling, Proofreading _____

10 Points:

Lesson Plans and Outcomes _____

10 Points:

Overview of What You Taught _____

10 Points:

Activities Used With Kids Labeled for Lesson Date _____

10 Points:

Student Work Samples From Each Week _____

10 Points:

Kid Journals _____

10 Points:

Photobios _____

Protects Confidentiality _____

10 Points:

Lesson Share Sheet(s) _____

5 Points:

Oral Presentation _____

Organized _____

Interesting _____

All Team Members Speak _____

Appendix B

Advanced Language Disorders Solo Grade Sheet

Name _____

Solo Grade: _____/120 Points

Field Visits: Lose 20 Points per Absence _____

5 Points:

Neatness, Print Quality _____

Punctuation, Spelling, Proofreading _____

50 Points:

4 Double Entry Journals _____

Varied Readings _____

Observant, Reflective, Insightful _____

Answers the Questions _____

10 Points:

Reflection

Paper Is Well Organized _____

Observant, Reflective, Insightful _____

35 Points:

Technical Piece

Choice Of Articles:

Theoretically Sound, Current _____

Relevant to Topic _____

Copy Complete and Clear _____

Full Citations _____

Paper Is Well Organized _____

Highlighted Main Points of Articles _____

Related Main Points of Article to Field _____

Language Bases to Retell/Summarize _____

Constructed Personal Knowledge _____

Scope and Depth _____

20 Points:

Tie To Vinson And Merritt & Cullatta

Full Citations _____

Paper Is Well Organized _____

Highlighted Main Points _____

Related Main Points to Field _____

Constructed Personal Knowledge _____

Scope and Depth _____

Observant, Reflective, Insightful _____