

Video Transcript: Using Storybooks to Build Language Skills

Mary Ann Schouten: The LITES program, which is language intervention through engaging stories, that program was first created following a 2007 conference that was attended by myself and a colleague. So the program is delivered in small [00:00:30] groups, typically dyads, but it could be three children in a group. A communicated disorders assistant facilitates the group, so the SLP has provided the language goals and identifies which stage of the program is appropriate for the student. The goal is to have a block of about eight to 10 weekly sessions. Each session is 45 minutes and children receive one to two blocks in a school [00:01:00] year. There are four stages of the program. So I had mentioned earlier that, after an assessment and evaluation, we identify at which stage would be appropriate for the student. So the first stage is language foundations. The second stage is narrative foundations. The third is advanced narratives. And the fourth is language for higher order thinking.

In each stage, there's a variety of activities [00:01:30] that are used to target skills with increasing levels of difficulty. So regardless of what stage the child is in, we have the goals of vocabulary, oral narration, language structure, so grammar and syntax, verbal reasoning, comprehension, and phonological awareness. In stage one, language foundation, we're supporting children who are to develop early communication skills. We'd be using picture books [00:02:00] in this stage, what's referred to as tier one vocabulary, so those everyday words that would be familiar to most students. We're also working with temporal sequences. So we're not really in narratives like the stories with a problem and a solution, it's more temporal sequences. So Eric Carle books are a perfect example, and we're including those in our language foundations, as well as Dear Zoo. So there's the repeated [00:02:30] pattern and language, and there's a temporal sequence of first, then, next, last.

When we look at stage two, now we're looking at introducing basic story structure, and the beginnings of a little more complex language. So the books that we're choosing have a simple plot, some complex sentences, and they have tier two vocabulary. So tier two vocabulary refers to those [00:03:00] high frequency words that are found across many subjects, and they're also likely to be learned in an academic setting. And the books that we choose for this one, many of the stories that we're using in this phase come from the Farm Tale series by Heather Amory.

In stage three, advanced narratives. The goal is for children to develop a more thorough understanding of story structure and more complex communication skills. So the books that we're choosing will [00:03:30] have more complexity to them in terms of obstacles to solving a problem. So think of the books like *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson or *Russell The Sheep* by Rob Scotton. These have more advanced plots, and so that helps extend the narrative skills that we're building and looking to build with our students. And there's also more complex sentences.

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In stage four, the language [00:04:00] for higher order thinking. Now we're moving to simple chapter books with complex plots and vocabulary that includes not just tier two vocabulary, so those words that would be found across many subjects like a word like gigantic or enormous rather than a tier one word like big. But we're also introducing tier three vocabulary. So these are low frequency words that are domain specific [00:04:30] and higher level thinking. We're looking at developing the child's ability to draw inferences and make connections with characters. What shows us that this character is a risk taker? Or what shows us that this character is a little hesitant and not want to take risks? So we're moving towards that more academic task in that the children will be introduced to in junior.

[00:05:00] Within the LITES sessions, we have our lesson plans that the CDA, the communicative disorders assistant, is implementing and embedded within our lesson plans are specific strategies. So the first one is we use repeated interactive read alouds. One book that we'll use within a session is actually carried over two sessions. So in the first [00:05:30] session, the CDA, the communicative disorders assistant who facilitates the language intervention, she is introducing a book the first way, the first session, and she's using a very conversational style, engaging the children in predictions and her own comments about what she sees happening in the story. She uses open-ended questions while she's reading to engage the students.

Patti Elloway: I wonder [00:06:00] what you think might happen in this story about Good Night Gorilla. Use the title, use the picture. Can you make a prediction? What do you think we might see when we open our book?

Mary Ann Schouten: In a second reading of the book, however, she may decide that she may be instead focusing on the story elements. So as she's reading the story and the children are familiar with it, she'll start to identify aspects of the story which are, this is the setting, [00:06:30] oh, we see. This story takes place on Apple Tree Farm, and that's the setting. And then she'll continue reading and she'll refer to the characters and comment on, oh, the characters are the people in the story. In that way, the children get a deeper level of understanding of the story and they also have different aspects that are being highlighted that are going to later be worked [00:07:00] into specific activities. The second technique that I'd like to highlight is vocabulary. At the Upper Grand, we refer to it as the super six, and it refers to the six steps that you take to help develop vocabulary knowledge in students.

The six steps are say, explain, give an example, repeat, personalize, and interact. So when we come across the word magical [00:07:30] in this story, we're going to say the word and then we'll give a quick explanation of its meaning. At the end of the story, we'll come back to that word, magical, that we came across, and the CDA will give an example of when they experienced something magical in their life. Then to give the children a chance to help them sort of develop that phonological memory [00:08:00] of the word, they say magical. I want you to

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say the word magical after me. So, magical. Now think of a time, they'll ask the childhood personalize. Talk to your elbow partner about a time when you experienced something that was magical or you saw something that was magical. The last part, which is interact, it may be that the CDA will say, "Okay, I'm going to say something and you need to tell me if it's magical. [00:08:30] And if it's magical, you'll say magical."

And so, in that way, we're building vocabulary knowledge. The context is the story, and then we're highlighted in the story, and then we give a very prescribed process of how we're going to engage the child in deepening their understanding of that word. One of the more important strategies that we use within our LITES program, [00:09:00] which could be implemented by a classroom teacher, is highlighting story elements as we are reading a story, and then building on that knowledge within the small group tasks after the story is read.

Patti Elloway: Pig gets stuck. This is Apple Tree Farm. That's talking about the setting. This is Mrs. Boot, the farmer. She has two children named Poppy and Sam, [00:09:30] and a dog called Rusty. They're telling us who the characters are in our story. On the farm, there are six pigs. The pigs live in a pen with a little house, and the smallest pig is called Curly. There is another character. Remember, characters are the people and places in our story.

Mary Ann Schouten: And so it's really making a very explicit connection between the stories and the elements that make up all stories. The next [00:10:00] area that I'd like to talk about is pictographs. Because we know that many children with learning disabilities, children with developmental language disorder, there's many often have working memory issues as well. And one of the ways that we can support children is to develop strategies around comprehension and oral formulations, planning in advance of speaking or writing. When [00:10:30] we have taught the child the elements of a story, so character, setting, problem, response to the problems or emotional response, actions to solve the problem, obstacle that may have entered, plan to resolve to get around the obstacle and solve the problem, and then finally the resolution. As we're teaching them that and we're making the connections to the story, we develop a graphic [00:11:00] organizer with the story elements and we have the child do a quick representation, so it's got to be a line drawing.

Patti Elloway: Okay. So we just read our story book. It's time to do our pictures. And we're going to talk about the elements that we talked about in our story. So we're always going to start here with the setting. That means where were they in our story, or when does our story take place? Do you remember where they were in our story? You've got it. They were at [00:11:30] the farm. Okay, so these are going to be really quick drawings. Stick people only, not artwork, and we're going to make sure it stays right in this column. So we have 20 seconds to draw something to remind us about the farm. I think I'm going to draw a barn. Here's my barn, big door for the animals to go in, some hay up top. And our farm was

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called, do you remember? Apple Tree Farm. So I'm drawing apple tree beside my farm, [00:12:00] my barn here, so that I remember that's what the farm was called. Here's my apple tree.

Mary Ann Schouten: We also are working on developing phonological awareness.

Sherry Fergus: So to start with, we're going to look at word awareness. A student can demonstrate word awareness by counting spoken words or words in print. So using a book, you could pick a short sentence or a phrase, the cover or the title of the book is ideal because it's always very clear, very big, [00:12:30] very bold. So to start with, you would read the title of the story, The Very Hungry Caterpillar. Then see if the student can count how many words are there.

Mary Ann Schouten: So we're engaging it. We're connecting those, develop those phonological awareness tasks to our book reading, but we're also addressing phonological awareness as specific skills that are targeted in [00:13:00] activities after the book is read.