

Expansion

Definition: To *expand*, an adult repeats back what the child has said and either adds something new, or corrects syntax or grammatical structure.

How is this strategy done?

Expansions from adults incorporate part or all of the child's previous utterance in a syntactically and/or semantically improved sentence (Cole, 2011). Adults should respond to the child's spoken language in ways that encourage the child to continue to talk and not in a way that shuts down the conversation. Adults provide a language model when they expand upon and extend the child's utterances (McLean, 1999).

Why is this strategy important?

Expansions can be used in the naturally occurring context of conversation, which enables this strategy to be used effectively by parents at home as well as teachers in the classroom and therapists in auditory verbal sessions.

A simple *expansion* adds or modifies grammatical details of a single target. More complex *expansions* can modify more than one target, or add or embed new clauses into the child's core utterance. *Expansions* are based directly on the child's utterance and improve or correct what the child said and therefore hold deep and inherent interest to the child (Proctor-Williams, Fey & Loeb, 2001). When some previous information is used to deliver the new information and capture the child's attention, *expansions* can lead to increases in utterance length and grammatical development (Cole & Flexer, 2007).

This Auditory Verbal strategy helps build the following Listening and Spoken Language skills:

- ✓ length of utterances (Cole & Flexer, 2007)
- ✓ degree of syntactic or semantic correctness
- ✓ complexity of responses from child
- ✓ auditory feedback loop

Discussion

An *expanded utterance* can provide an improved or corrected alternative and amplify the conversational topic in some way. It can also request or provide new information about the same topic or apply some previous information to a new topic.

Expanded utterances contrast the child's current form with the target form of the sound, word, or phrase. Fey, Long and Finestack (2003) discussed the effectiveness of the *expansion* depends on four assumptions:

1. The expansion is based on the child's own utterances, so the utterance is highly focused on the objects and topics to which the child is attending
2. The expansion is similar to the child's original utterance, therefore the utterance is easy for the child to analyze and comprehend.
3. The expansion poses few sentence-processing challenges, therefore the child is more likely to notice the target features that distinguish the new form from the original sentence.
4. Under conditions of joint attention, the subtle relationship between target features and semantic/pragmatic/grammatical functions are enhanced.

Example

Child: doggy brown

Adult: Yes, the doggy is brown and dirty! (use acoustic highlighting on the omitted word "is" and expand by adding 'dirty')

Child: Tommy go to lunch now

Adult: Yes. You are right. Tommy is going to lunch now. He will be back soon. (expand 'Tommy go' with 'Tommy is going' while using acoustic highlighting)

References

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