Chelsea McShane

Differences in Mental State Talk Between Mothers and their Typically developing children vs. Mothers and their children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Abstract

Previous research suggests that mothers adjust their interaction strategies in response to their children’s developmental level. This study examined how mothers of typically developing children and mothers of children with ASD used mental state language. A total of 19 mothers of children with ASD and 24 mothers of typically developing children participated in a story-telling task using wordless pictures specifically designed to elicit mental state talk. Interactions were coded reliably for mothers’ and children’s frequency (absolute amount of talk) of mental state term types and functions, relevant and irrelevant utterances, as well as mothers’ causal talk and causal questioning. Results indicated that children with ASD produced significantly more irrelevant utterances than did typically developing children and typically developing children produced significantly more desire terms than did children with ASD. Mothers of typically developing children produced significantly more desire terms, true mental state terms, and more causal talk than did mothers of children with ASD.

The group differences in this study suggest the need for more research. Specifically, intervention studies (perhaps using social stories or training mothers to use more causal language related to mental states) aimed at identifying the causal links in narratives are needed. Mothers seem to adjust to the skill level of their children, but whether specific adjustments each mother makes hinders or enhances her child’s ToM development is unknown. Mother-child interaction strategies and child outcomes develop from complex and bidirectional relationships between the mother and child. A related question involves the degree to which mothers of children with ASD are adept at assessing their children’s skill levels. Perhaps these mothers are accurate in their assessments or perhaps they underestimate their children’s capacity to learn from more developmentally advanced discourse, and this represents another important direction for understanding the nature of the mother-child interaction and its developmental consequences.

Shaun Stephens

Influence of Story Schema on Narrative Discourse Processing

Abstract

(pending)
Lauren Vivian

Allocation Of Visual Attention To Photographic, Boardmaker™, and Line Drawn Facial Representations: An Eye Tracking Study of Typically Developing Children and Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Abstract

This study examined visual allocation strategies and emotion identification (happy, sad, mad, scared) abilities of children with ASD and typically developing children when looking at stimuli commonly used in story-based interventions (i.e., line drawings, stick figures, BoardMaker™ images and photographs). Participants were 10 typically developing children and 10 children diagnosed with ASD age 6 - 12 years. Number of fixations to eye, mouth, and other regions of face stimuli were assessed and compared across groups and emotion and stimulus type. Patterns of visual allocation indicated a greater number of fixations to the eyes over the mouth for both groups, although children with ASD tended to look less at the eye region compared to the typically developing group. The ASD group generally underperformed on the emotion-labeling task relative to the typical group. Negative emotions, especially expressions of anger, were more challenging for children with ASD to identify, and photograph and Boardmaker™ faces appeared to increase this difficulty. For the ASD group, the number of fixations to ‘other’ areas correlated with autism severity and were inversely related to scores on the Theory of Mind Inventory. Number of fixations to the eye region correlated with performance on the perceptual reasoning index of the WASI-2 and scores on the Theory of Mind Task Battery. Results are interpreted in light of some popular theories of ASD. Limitations, suggestions for future research, and clinical implications are discussed.

2011-2012

Colby Kervick

Constructing A Seat At The Table:
Parents’ Perceptions Of Collaboration With Schools

Abstract

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), PL-94142, mandated parent participation as a required component of the provision of special education services to children with disabilities. The law acknowledged that educational outcomes for children with disabilities are strengthened through ensuring that parents meaningfully participate in processes associated with special education (IDEIA, 2004). Although the law obliged schools to include parents in educational decision-making, facilitating parental participation continues to challenge school teams. It is widely recognized that a collaborative teaming approach is the most effective strategy to foster parent participation (Friend & Cook, 2010; A. Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011; R. Turnbull, Turnbull, & Wehmeyer, 2010). However, fostering effective parent and school partnerships remains a concern as suggested in the literature identifying barriers to collaboration (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2010).
Although laws governing special education practices have been in effect for over 30 years, scholars continue to explore strategies to improve collaboration between families and school professionals (Cheatham, Hart, Malian, & McDonald, 2012; Edwards & Da Fonte, 2012; Lo, 2012; Staples & Diliberto, 2010). This qualitative research study explored the perspective of twelve Vermont parents about their experiences with collaboration on special education teams and with professional service providers in order to understand: 1) how they acquired and shared knowledge about their child’s disability, 2) how they navigated and negotiated special education processes and 3) how they defined and conceptualized collaboration.

Utilizing a case study approach, the study recruited 12 parents of children with disabilities from twelve different school districts in the state of Vermont. Participants included both mothers and fathers of children with a range of disabilities. Data were collected through individual interviews and one focus forum. Cross-case analysis techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used to identify five themes that focused on: 1) the process of diagnosis, 2) descriptions and conceptualizations of parent and professional knowledge, 3) parent definitions of collaboration and strategies parents use to foster collaboration with professionals, 4) systemic roadblocks and 5) new visions for collaborative practice. Additional analytic approaches included the use of visual representation (Kearney & Hyle, 2004) and poetic transcription (Glesne, 2006). These findings suggest deeper understandings about the role of parents on special education teams and the strategies parents use to achieve equitable and collaborative partnerships with professionals. In particular the study’s findings illuminate the role of emotion in the collaborative process and the ways in which parents acquire and use their knowledge about their child’s disability with school professionals. By exploring the issue of collaborative teaming through the lens of parents of children with disabilities, this study offers insight to professionals about the experiences of parents, the dynamics of collaborative teaming and the multi-faceted nature of the “parental role.”

Danielle Geno

Knowledge, attitudes, training, and practice patterns involving theory of mind: A survey of school-based speech-language pathologists providing services to children with autism spectrum disorder

Abstract

Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have a range of social, play, and communicative challenges that often require the intervention of a speech-language pathologist (SLP). With increased responsibility for meeting the needs of students with ASD, SLPs require a high level of awareness of assessment and intervention techniques that target the core challenges typically associated with the autism spectrum. Challenges associated with Theory of Mind (ToM) are thought to be core characteristics affecting many children with ASD. ToM is the ability to reason about the thoughts of others, or understand the perspectives of others. This study examined the attitudes, perceptions, and practice patterns of SLPs using ToM in practice with children with ASD. A mixed-methods design
employed. Two focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 10 SLPs who were employed in two school districts in the state of Vermont. Participants also completed a paper-based survey designed to assess their training in ASD/ToM and their feelings of competency with ToM in practice. Results indicated that participants generally lacked confidence in their ability to assess and develop appropriate interventions to address ToM challenges with the majority of participants indicating a need for further training in ToM. In addition, participant responses indicated a number of misconceptions about both ToM and ASD. Common perspectives emerged from the focus group data, including a primary concern surrounding the static/inflexible nature of current ToM assessment and intervention options. Information gained from this study underscores the need for dynamic ToM assessment and intervention options. In addition, there is a need for development and support of effective service delivery models within and across schools and families. This includes educating professionals on the importance of examining ToM in students with ASD along with addressing intervention needs.

Holly Buckland Parker

Learning Starts with Design: Higher Education Faculty Explore the Use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to Address the Needs of All Students

Abstract

Today’s college students, who are often referred to as "Mi11ennials", are entering college with different expectations for learning than students born before 1982 (Howe & Strauss, 2000). They expect to be able to access information instantly with their smart phones or laptop computers. At the same time, increasing numbers of students entering higher education have a disability of some kind. Some of these are observable disabilities that require specific accommodations to learning materials and the learning environment, such as ramps for students using wheelchairs and interpreters for students with hearing impairment. Students with learning disabilities represent a kind of "invisible" disability in that their challenges may not be readily observable by faculty members, but must be accommodated through changes to curriculum materials and instructional approaches. One of the greatest challenges to meeting the needs of all students is the perception of negative faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities, and the subsequent choice made by many students not to disclose a hidden disability (Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Madaus, Scott, & McGuire, 2003; National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPES), 2000). Within the last 10 years, a new way of designing learning for K-12 students has emerged to address the needs of all the learners in the classroom. This framework for design is called Universal Design for Learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002). More recently, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has begun to be introduced to faculty in higher education as a framework for course design that meets the needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

This mixed methods study explored the promise of the UDL at a small New England research university where a faculty professional development model was implemented to
enhance the use of UDL practices among faculty members. A baseline study of faculty attitudes was conducted in the fall of 2010. One hundred ninety-two faculty members responded to the survey, yielding a 30% return. In addition, four faculty who had participated in the UDL grant consultation team model and who taught classes of 65 students or more were interviewed for the purpose of gathering information on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the model.

Results of the volunteer faculty survey revealed positive attitudes from the majority of respondents, with at least 60% indicating that they "strongly agreed" with four of the five questions related to the provision of learning accommodations for students with disabilities. In contrast, less than 30% of respondents indicated they "strongly agreed" with statements demonstrating their general knowledge of disabilities and/or knowledge of disability policy and law. Four main themes emerged from the data analysis of the faculty interviews. These themes addressed faculty members' descriptions of general course modifications made as a result of the UDL consultation team work, description of their course, reflections about the UDL consultation team model, and the processes through which faculty members chose to refer themselves for course design assistance from the UDL consultation team. Overall, results of the study suggest promising practices for professional development designed to increase use of UDL approaches in higher education. Further research is needed to determine the transferability of this model among a larger range of faculty and higher education institutions.