IMPLEMENTATION OF CLASSWIDE PEER TUTORING STRATEGIES TO FACILITATE IDIOM COMPREHENSION

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INTRODUCTION

Idioms are phrases such as a dime a dozen and let sleeping dogs lie that have fixed figurative meanings (Ackerman, 1982; Nippold & Martin, 1989) but may also have a literal interpretation. The research literature is sparse regarding interventions to improve comprehension of idiomatic expressions in either a therapeutic or classroom setting. Idioms should be an integral part of vocabulary and reading instruction in the classroom; however, idioms are often neglected perhaps due to emphasis placed on other instructional goals (e.g., decoding, fluency, comprehension), uncertainty regarding how to teach idioms, or a lack of instructional time. Only a single study by Ezell and Golstein (1992) pertained to the treatment of idiom comprehension.

On the contrary, a multitude of studies has demonstrated the effectiveness of classwide peer tutoring (CWPT). Classwide peer tutoring, in which students are taught by peers who are trained and supervised by classroom teachers, presents a promising set of instructional strategies to teach idiom comprehension in the general education classroom. Since CWPT methods are flexible, they can be used across a variety of ages, grades, and subject areas. Given the complexities of figurative language, students require explicit instruction and repeated exposure to figurative language as can be gained through the novel implementation of classwide peer tutoring procedures to teach idiomatic expressions in the classroom.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does a positive change in the students’ comprehension of idioms occur following implementation of classwide peer tutoring?
2. Do the students and teacher implement the CWPT protocol for idioms with fidelity?

METHOD

Design

A multiple baseline design (A=baseline, B=treatment, A=maintenance) across three sets of idioms was used to determine the effects of the CWPT intervention on idiom comprehension.

Participants

Four seventh grade female students (mean age: 12 years, 6 months old). The students were identified for inclusion per:• Reading scores obtained from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) from their sixth grade year. Each scored a level 2. • The students scored at or below the 16th percentile on the “Idioms” subtest of The Fullerton Language Test for Adolescents-2nd Edition (Thorton, 1986).

Setting

All classwide peer tutoring (CWPT) sessions were conducted in the students’ regular education classroom.

MEASURES

CWPT stimuli

A set of 30 idioms were selected for classwide peer tutoring (CWPT) training. The 30 idiomatic phrases were randomly assigned to one of three training sets. The idiom phrases averaged 3.9 words in length.

The idiom phrases were positioned at the end of a short story context.

The three sets of idiomatic phrases (30 idioms) were assessed during baseline, CWPT implementation, and maintenance conditions at the conclusion each CWPT session. The figurative meaning of the idiom was presented, and the participant selected the corresponding idiom from four choices including the correct idiom and three randomly selected idioms.

RESULTS

Question 1: CWPT and idiom comprehension

Overall, a positive change in idiom comprehension was demonstrated following implementation of classwide peer tutoring (CWPT) for the four seventh grade female students across idioms sets.

As evidenced by the overall analysis of Figures 1 to 4 only after implementation of CWPT the students’ comprehension of idiomatic phrases increased and remained largely stable.

Question 2: Treatment fidelity

The PI attended 50% of CWPT sessions. Items on a treatment fidelity checklist (developed for this study) were scored as present or absent following procedures similar to Greenwood et al. (1987).

A total score for each section and a total composite percentage was obtained. Procedural reliability was determined through an interval agreement formula (e.g. A/A + D X 100%) where A=agreements, D=disagreements. Procedural reliability for program materials and occurrence of teacher behaviors ranged from 86% to 100% with a mean of 96%, whereas, procedural reliability for peer tutoring behaviors ranged from 67% to 100% with a mean of 95%. The composite mean score for procedural reliability was 96%.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

The current study adds to the research supporting CWPT procedures, while extending that literature to the area of idiom instruction. These results add to the literature regarding interventions to facilitate idiom comprehension. Because idioms are pervasive in popular culture (e.g., magazines, newspaper, movies, television), as well as, classroom language (Lauret et al., 1989) including core American reading programs (Nippold, 1991), the failure to comprehend idiomatic phrases can impact language and reading comprehension in academic settings.

Teachers and speech-language pathologists can successfully implement CWPT procedures to teach students idiom phrases as part of vocabulary and reading instruction to meet the individualized needs of students and classrooms. CWPT procedures for teaching idioms are flexible, effective, and time efficient.

Future research should explore the utilization of CWPT for teaching idiomatic phrases to diverse samples of students such as language impaired adolescents and the use of a specific reading comprehension or vocabulary strategy (e.g. context clues, contextual redefinition) to examine not only comprehension of idiomatic phrases but generalization of strategy use.

SELECTED REFERENCES


