

Verbal Behavior: Strategies for Struggling Communicators

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What about behavior?

- Communication is behavior too!!
- If there are communication deficits, you are more likely to see “excesses”
- Important to focus on teaching and reinforcement if you want to reduce problem behaviors.

Views on Language

- Biological
- Cognitive
- Environmental
- Interactionist



How do we talk about talk?

- Form vs. Function
 - Traditional linguistic analysis
 - Morphemes
 - MLU
 - Parts of speech
 - Why?
 - To label?
 - To request?

Verbal Behavior

- Behavior that is reinforced through the actions of another person.
- Based in the science of human learning and behavior
- Theoretical & Empirical evidence
 - Verbal Behavior (1957)
 - Analysis of Verbal Behavior (journal)
 - Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis
 - Research with MANY children and adults, but most has focused on those with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Modes of Communication

- Vocal (speech)
- Sign language
- Gestures/Leading
- Picture pointing and exchange systems (i.e. PECS)
- Spelling, writing, or typing
- Voice output AAC devices/apps (Dynavox, Proloquo, etc.)

Pros and Cons

- Vocal (speech)
- Sign language
- Gestures/Leading
- Picture pointing and exchange systems (i.e. PECS)
- Spelling, writing, or typing
- Voice output AAC devices (Dynavox, Proloquo, etc.)

Selecting a response

- Consider the following:
 - Child's age
 - Child's developmental level
 - Child's strengths and areas of concern
 - Child's "audience"

Verbal operants

- Imitation

- Copying someone's motor movements

- Mand

- Requesting, asking questions, demanding

- Echoic

- Repeating what is heard

- Receptive

- Following directions, identifying

- Tact

- Naming/labeling

- Intraverbal

- Answering questions, filling in the blank

Imitation

- Important foundational skill
- Easy to prompt
- Different types
 - Gross motor imitation – GMI
 - Fine motor imitation – FMI
 - Oral motor imitation – OMI
 - Imitation with objects
 - Grapho-motor imitation



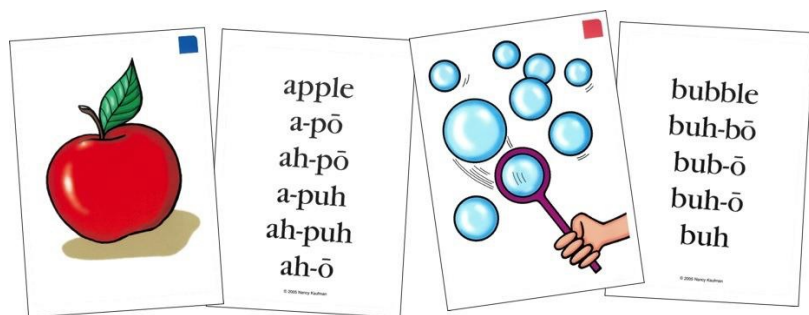
Echoics

- Choose sounds that your child is familiar with and comfortable making.
- Start by waiting for a sound and repeating it back
- Try 5 times before moving on
- Start with single sounds, then move onto words, sentences, etc.



Kaufman Approach

- Very systematic, behavioral approach to teaching
- Vocal Shaping
- Works well with a variety of learners (not just those with apraxia)



Receptives

- Choose specific instructions to target
- Use simple, consistent wording
- Prompt compliance if necessary
- Start with 1 step instructions and move to 2 step instructions once your child can perform at least 25.
- Identifying objects, actions, adjectives, preps, etc.
 - Use multiple exemplars to promote generalization

RFFC

- Receptive by feature, function, class
 - Features – what does the object have
 - Functions – what does it do
 - Class – what category is it from

Tacts

- Nouns
- Verbs
- Adjectives
- Prepositions
- Functions, Features, Classes



Intraverbals

- Start with filling in sounds/words to familiar songs.
- Familiar routines
- Transfer tacts to intraverbals
 - IFFCs
- Teach social information
- Use visuals to help improve performance

Mand

- Most important response to teach.
- Only operant that benefits the speaker.
 - Helps reduce problem behaviors
- Choose a response form.
- Consistency is key.
- Motivation is essential!

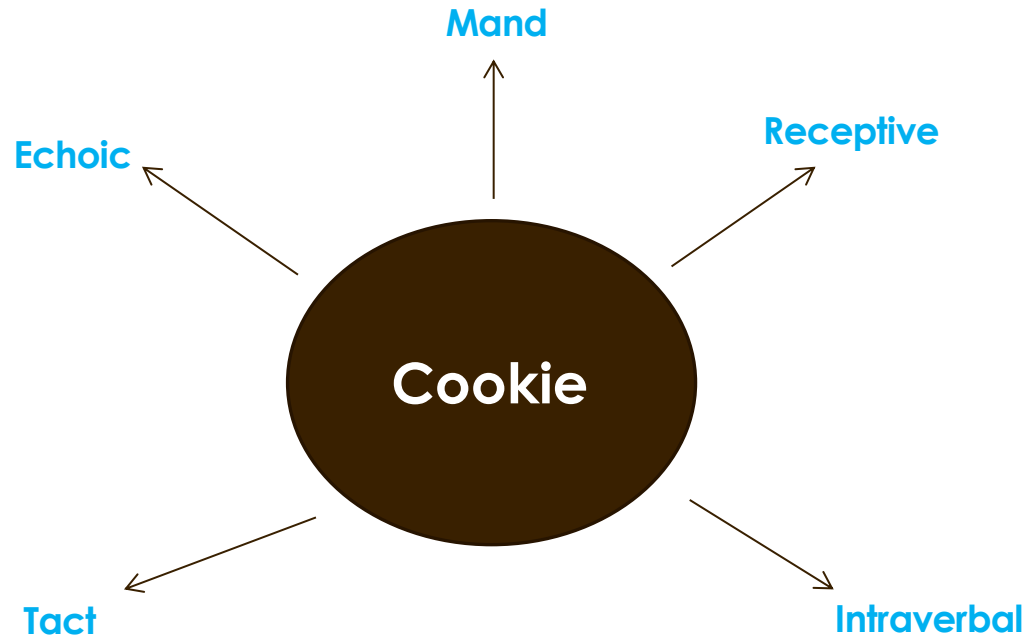
Mand

- Choose strong reinforcers that are easily “controlled”.
- Teach when motivation is high.
- Select words that are familiar and easy to say/sign.
- Avoid words that are not specific.
- Provide LOTS of opportunities to practice the mand.

“Knowing”

- What words do they know? How many words do they know?
- How does ABA define “knowing”?
- Varies somewhat based on child
- Goal is for the child to independently use a word in a variety of ways.
 - Be careful of prompt dependency
 - Try to use visual cues instead of verbal (may be easier to fade!)

Let me count the ways.....



Generalization

- Encourage use of words/sounds with new people, in new settings, and with new items
- Expand "understanding" by having your child use the word in a new way (function)

Social Communication

- Start with basics as soon as possible
 - Responding to greetings from peers
 - Following directions with named peer/adult
 - Getting attention appropriately

Social Communication

- Target nonverbal communication skills too!
 - Following basic gestures/cues
 - Using basic gestures/cues with others
- Include advanced skills to challenge your child as they improve.
 - Directing the behavior of others
 - Following directions given by peers
 - Addresses peers by name

Sentence Stems

- Helps build confidence
- Start with visuals, familiar vocabulary and short sentences
 - Use same stem to build fluency
- Increase complexity by adding new stems and teaching discrimination

Reciprocation

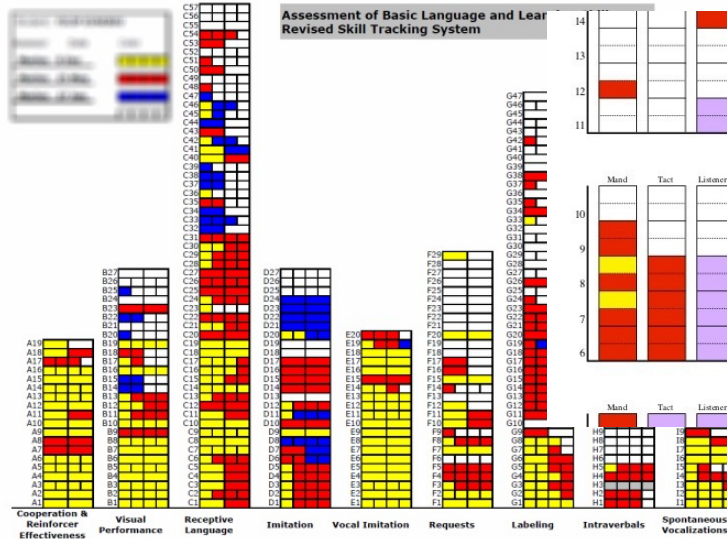
- Helps children learn to use new sentence structures and add their own information
 - Has echoic elements
- Start with visuals and familiar sentence stems
- Increase complexity by adding length and grammar elements

Growing Language

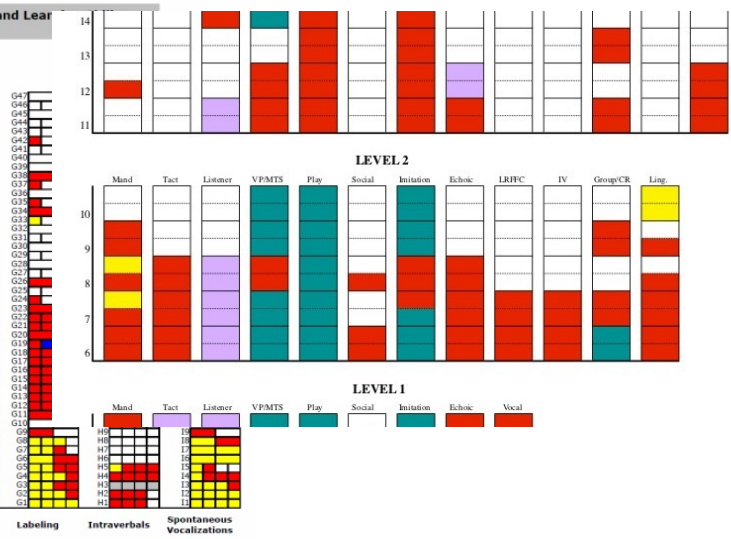
- Grow out and then up
- Maintain language to prevent loss
- Model the language you want to hear
- Use good prompting and fading
- Reinforce!

Tracking

○ ABLLS-R



○ VBMAPP





Thank you!

Enjoy the conference.

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