Teaching Conversation Skills from Single Words:
a Hierarchy of Twelve Objectives

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Relevant Core Standards at Every Grade

Speaking & Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

Kdg-2nd: *Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about [grade-level} topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.*

3rd-5th: *Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade level] topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.*

5th-8th:: *Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade level] topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.*

9th-10th: *Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues,*

building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

11-12th: *Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.*

Suggested Prerequisite Skills

Using any mode of communication, the student:

- Labels at least 5 objects within 10 categories, including colors, shapes, numbers and letters

- Selects objects by category (e.g. *Give me a vehicle*.)

- Note: As long as the student has a good variety of single-word labels, you can teach vocabulary simultaneously, but it helps them progress faster if you teach a base vocabulary first.

Suggested Objectives: Year 1

Objective #1: **TLW make single-word parallel statements about paired objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** [e.g. SLP (holding car): *Car*. Student (holding train): *Train*. SLP: *Vroom-vroom*. Student: *Choo-choo*. SLP: *Road*. Student: *Tracks*].

Objective #2: **TLW respond to two-word, single-feature questions about objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute sessions with the SLP** (e.g. *What color* vs. *What shape* vs. *What sound*).

Objective #3: **TLW make two-word parallel statements about paired objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** [e.g. SLP: *My Car*. Student: *My Train*. SLP: *Car, Vroom-vroom*. Student: *Train, Choo-choo*. SLP: *It(s) orange*. Student: *It(s) red*.]

Objective #4: **TLW repeat two-word questions about paired objects after responding to them with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. SLP: *What's that?* Student: *Car. What's that*? SLP: *I have a train*.)

Objective #5: **TLW demonstrate all two-word skills during mixed practice with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. SLP: *My car*. Student: *My train*. SLP: *What sound*? Student: *Choo-choo*. *What sound*? SLP: *Vroom-vroom*.).

Suggested Objectives: Year 2

Objective #6: **TLW make three-word parallel statements about paired objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. SLP: *This my car*. Student: *This my train*. SLP: *Car go vroom-vroom*. Student: *Train go choo-choo*.)

Objective #7: **TLW repeat a three-word question after responding to it with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. SLP: *What you have?*. Student: *Train. What you have?* SLP: I have car. SLP: *What sound train*? Student: *Choo-choo. What sound car*? SLP*: Car go Vroom-vroom.)*

Objective #8: **TLW respond to and repeat who, what, how many and where questions about objects with 80% accuracy during 20-minute small group activities led by the SLP (***e.g. SLP: What you have? Student #1: I have train. What you have?   Student #2: I have airplane. What you have? SLP: I have a car. Who flies an airplane? Student #2: Pilot fly airplane. Who drive train? Student #3: Engineer drive train. Who drive car? SLP: A driver drives a car.***)**

Suggested Objectives: Year 3

Objective #9: **During a 25-30 minute small-group Speech session, TLW respond to 6/6 SLP- or peer-generated *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* questions related to a given topic.**

Objective #10: **During a 25-30 minute small-group Speech session, TLW repeat each question to a peer.**

Objective #11: **During a 25-30 minute small-group Speech session, TLW recall peer-generated details following the activity.**

Objective #12: **During a 25-30 minute small-group Speech session, TLW generate 6 different wh-questions related to a given topic.**

Single-Word Parallel Statements

Objective #1: **TLW make single-word parallel statements about paired objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** [e.g. SLP (holding car): *Car*. Student (holding train): *Train*. SLP: *Vroom-vroom*. Student: *Choo-choo*. SLP: *Road*. Student: *Tracks*].

SUGGESTIONS:

--Use objects within the same category with multiple contrasting features.

--Use "preemptive prompting" to prevent echoing with gradual release.

--Intelligibility can be addressed simultaneously.

--Reward completion of each pair of items, or each correct response (or even correct prompted response) for learners with very low frustration tolerance.

--For students with advanced syntax whose echolalia impacts listening, start here.

Two-Word, Single-Feature Questions

Objective #2: **TLW respond to two-word, single-feature questions about objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. *What color* vs. *What shape* vs. *What sound*).

SUGGESTIONS:

--Continue to use preemptive prompting and reinforcement as needed.

--Use materials with many contrasting features.

--Expand variety of features as the student becomes more capable (e.g. *What place, What taste, What feelin*g).

--Ideas for questions will come to you over time as you work with the students.

Two-Word Parallel Statements

- Objective #3: **TLW make two-word parallel statements about paired objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** [e.g. SLP: *My Car*. Student: *My Train*. SLP: *Car, Vroom-vroom*. Student: *Train, Choo-choo*. SLP: *It(s) orange*. Student: *It(s) red*.]

Two-Word Respond-Repeat

Objective #4: **TLW repeat two-word questions about paired objects after responding to them** (e.g. SLP: *What's that?* Student: *Car. What's that*? SLP: *I have a train*.)

COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS:

--Typically most challenging skill to teach and learn--be persistent and creative.

--You may want to increase reinforcement again for correct (or prompted correct) responses.

--Preemptive prompting is always necessary initially (in my experience).

--Can also use written stimuli (e.g. Core Vocabulary) as supports.

--Begin modeling more appropriate syntax in your responses at this level but keep the questions at 2 words.

Two-Word Mixed Practice

Objective #5: **TLW demonstrate all skills during mixed practice with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. SLP: *My car*. Student: *My train*. SLP: *What sound*? Student: *Choo-choo. What sound*? SLP: *Vroom-vroom.*).

COMMENT: Pre-pandemic, I'd begun working with this skill with a small group of three students. It was going well!

Three-Word Parallel Statements

Objective #6: **TLW make three-word parallel statements about paired objects with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. SLP: *This my car*. Student: *This my train*. SLP: *Car go vroom-vroom*. Student: *Train go choo-choo*.)

SUGGESTION: Core Vocabulary can be especially helpful to support developing syntax at this stage.

Three-Word Respond-Repeat

- Objective #7: **TLW repeat a three-word question after responding to it with 80% accuracy during 15-minute individual sessions with the SLP** (e.g. SLP: *What you have?.* Student: *Train. What you have?* SLP: I have car. SLP: *What sound train*? Student: *Choo-choo. What sound car*? SLP*: Car go Vroom-vroom.).*

Three-Word Mixed Practice (Small Group)

Objective #8: **TLW respond to and repeat who, what, and where questions about objects with 80% accuracy during 20-minute small group activities led by the SLP (***e.g. SLP: What you have? Student #1: I have train. What you have? Student #2: I have airplane. What you have? SLP: I have a car. Who flies an airplane? Student #2: Pilot fly airplane. Who drive train? Student #3: Engineer drive train. Who drive car? SLP: A driver drives a car.***)**

SUGGESTIONS:

--Expand question forms to include "who," "where," and "how many" questions about the objects.

--Begin to expand your own utterances to approach conventional English.

--Expand the number of objects used as stimuli.

--Rotate students' position in the group.

--I have begun using pennies as reinforcers that the students can use to "purchase" sound effects on my device. They love it!

Small Group Conversation Skills

During a 25-30 minute Speech session, TLW:

Objective #9: **respond to 6/6 SLP- or peer-generated *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* questions related to a given topic.**

Objective #10: **repeat each question to a different peer.**

Objective #11: **recall peer-generated details following the activity.**

Objective #12: **generate 6 different wh-questions related to a given topic.**

COMMENTS:

--I begin teaching this skill by generating the questions myself.

--As the students become able, I rotate them through this position.

--I generally choose the topics, but sometimes they're suggested by the students.

--Student reference Core Vocabulary to prompt question types and sentence structure.

--We work on non-verbal communication skills at the same time, but I typically don't write them as objectives.

Applications to Virtual Learning

1. You can share a screen with slides of the stimuli or send your learners packets with picture cards (necessary for group work).
2. Intersperse slides with stimuli with slides containing preferred subject matter as reinforcement. You can also use light-up toys or other fun stimuli as a reward. If you're not sure what motivates a particular student, you can always ask their caregiver(s).
3. When peers are not available, enlist caregivers to serve as peers.
4. If you're not able to group your learners, just continue to move forward with skills in one-to-one. They'll be that much more capable when they can return to in-person learning!

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION