Figurative Language and Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Michael Vergara

Florida International University

Abstract

Teaching figurative language to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in ninth grade language arts. Students with ASD due to their disability have a tendency to idioms, hyperboles, metaphors, similes, and other figurative language in the literal sense. Figurative language is not meant to be take in the literal sense but in a symbolic meaning.

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Statement of Purpose:

The state of Florida has moved away from its long-standing state evaluation test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), and began following our state contemporaries in implementing a state assessment based on the Common Core initiative. The newly founded state assessment is called the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA). Student entering high school have been taught certain skills to navigate the FCAT test. These skills have been taught to students throughout their K-12 academic career. As of 2015, the state of Florida has restructured their test, the FSA, to emphasize synthesis of text, figurative language, and rhetorical analysis. The FSA is a new challenge for educators and students, and may be more rigorous than the requirements of the FCAT. The FSA requires additional literary skills that most students in the State of Florida have never been exposed.

Educating students with ASD can be a challenge. According to Health Central, students with ASD often have difficulties understanding sarcasm, and they have a tendency take things in a literal meaning when it comes to language, communication, and literature. The basis of figurative language is not to take the component of figurative language literal, As such, it can be a daunting task for educators to help students with ASD to process and comprehend those figurative terms. According to the website Super Duper, Educators are being called challenged to help students with ASD overcome one of the major weaknesses associated with their disability.

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to get a better understanding on why individuals with ASD have difficulty with figurative language, and how can a teacher facilitate their students with ASD to get a better understanding of figurative language.

Literature Review:

Understanding figurative language is a concept that is essential for typically developing (TD) students. It is a vital skill to acquire in order to demonstrate adequate skills in social interactions as well as classroom success in language arts and reading. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who have difficulties understanding figurative terms may struggle with information presented in language arts and daily verbal interactions with their peers and educators. Additionally, these students may struggle with reading various materials that contain these figurative devices. Students with ASD may have a difficult time acquiring academic independence in language arts they are missing the understanding of these important social and literature skills. Students with ASD are characterized by difficulties in communication with people. These difficulties in communication may be made even difficult because figurative language is usually present in social communication and interactions. This entails an individual with ASD to completely understand figurative phrases being delivered to them verbally, and then interpreting the meaning behind the figurative term(s).

According to Penny Pexman, many individuals with ASD may be working with a deficiency in abstract thinking. Pexman's article states that these students interact with figurative language in a verbal sense, physical sense (body language), or in interpretation of literature, this may create feelings of isolation in their academic and social interests. This may lead educators to question whether students with ASD are able to think outside of the box and understand that figurative language is not supposed to be taken in the literal sense. It is estimated that over

360,000 students are receiving services in the United Sates who fall under the ASD umbrella (El Zein, Solis, Vaughn, & McCulley, 2014). As such, it important that educators seek effective methods for supporting the needs of students with ASD in language arts and reading classrooms.

Research Methodology:

The intervention taking place for my Action Research Project is using direct and explicit instructional strategies to teach figurative language. My action research will start with teaching figurative language and devices to the two students with ASD in my resource setting. I will create a PowerPoint that includes all the terms needed for students' development. The Power Point presentation will provide in-depth information on each figurative language term. In addition to the definition of the term, the PowerPoint will provide students an example using each term and visual that represents each term. Each class period, students will copy down the slide that has terms with the definition and an example. Students' homework will supplement this activity. For homework, students will create their own example of that specific figurative language term that they copied down earlier that day. Students will also need to draw a picture that represents their example. I will create a log for the homework assignment on figurative language assignment and grade the student accordingly to the completion of 10 tasks. The 10 tasks will consist of imagery, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, pun, personification, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, allusion, and idiom. The students will have quizzes testing their knowledge of figurative language. They will have a test for their baseline and for their return to baseline to test their knowledge. They will also analyze and synthesize a piece of literature and find the figurative language. They will also understand how the figurative language impacts the piece of literature and how figurative language is not meant to be taken literally.

Findings or Results:

The students will be assessed using a baseline exam on figurative terms. This will give me the foundation on what my student's know from prior knowledge. There will be a Power Point (PPT) presentation that goes in depth into each and every figurative language term. PPT defines the term and gives an example to each term. After each class, the student will go home and create their own simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and so on, then draw a picture to their example to their figurative term. I will be able to understand if my students got a complete understanding of the terms that they learned that day, due to their homework samples. If parents do help their child with the homework, then it will just help the student in reinforcing what I have been covering in class. The parents will understand that through the letter that I will send home. We will also use several closed reads that the students will have to locate the figurative language in the poem, short story, or lyrics to a song. They will high light the figurative language, and give a brief explanation in how that figurative language impacted the piece. I will be able to assess the handout to see if the student was able to locate the figurative language, understand it, and explain how it impacted the piece.

Implications:

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If the research is found to have a successful outcome, then future educators will be able to use and study the research to help raise students with ASD knowledge of figurative language. Figurative language is used in all of the common core practices nationwide, and our students with ASD need a method in being able to prepare for these state assessments.

Figurative language is also in commercials, literature, conversations, and in all of our daily lives. It is imperative that individuals with ASD understand the difference of figurative and literal meaning of things in literature and daily life.

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