Word Finding: Why Work on Naming?

Excerpts from the “It’s a... Safari” Manual by Marna Scarry-Larkin, MA, CCC-SLP

The treatment of naming difficulties is usually undertaken because an inability to name items affects fluency in conversational speech. It is true however, that adults are infrequently asked, “What is it?” In most of the LocuTour software, we provide several types of cueing strategies and you can implement the same cueing strategies when we don’t provide them. Different people respond differently to cueing strategies. Keep records to determine which combinations of strategies teach self-cueing behaviors. Use these strategies to establish carryover activities.

How Do You Work on Naming?

There are at least two processes involved. Getting the information in, i.e., “storage” and getting the information out, “retrieval.” Naming tasks are usually of two types, visual confrontation and responsive naming. In visual confrontation the client is shown a picture of an object and is expected to name the object. If the visual stimulus does not elicit a response, an auditory or gestural stimulus can be provided to help with recall. It is presumed that the name of the item is logged into long term storage and the problem is one of retrieval. In responsive naming, the client responds to a characteristic of the object, “What do you eat with?” I prefer to use the structure words (color, size, shape, etc.) from the program Visualizing and Verbalizing for Language Comprehension and Thinking (Bell 1991) or describe functional characteristics for cueing. “I use a hammer to pound a ....”

How Do You Develop Naming Strategies?

Several types of cueing strategies to facilitate word recall are: phonetic cues, associative-semantic class cues, sentence completion, melodic stress cueing and multiple choice cueing (Wiig and Semel 1984).
The strategies of modeling, sentence completion, and initial sound cue are the ones I have chosen for inclusion in the language-based CDs and included on the language component on the other CDs. Hedge (1994) describes the following cueing hierarchies:

Modeling
What is this? It’s a ...

Sentence Completion
“You write with a ...”

Phonetic cues
“.... starts with a p....”

Syllabic cues
tap out syllables “ta-ble-cloth”

Silent Phonetic cues
Clinician begins to make the initial sound with articulators but without sound.

Functional description
“It is something you read...”

Description and demonstration of action
Client describes the stimuli for naming and cues self.
“I use it to write with. It’s a pen.”

Client demonstrates the function of the item.
Gesture to cue the word.

Written cue
Client matches word to the item.

Spelled cue
Client spells word, then says the word.

Writing cue
Client writes the word, then says it.

Presentation of a sound to evoke a name
"meow"

Repeated trials
Client evokes the correct response through drill.

How do you work on auditory memory?

There is a built-in hierarchy for auditory memory work on LocuTour CDs. You can begin at the syllable level, and ask your student to repeat the syllables one at a time, forward, or backward. A word of caution: repeating backward is a difficult task. It is an intense working memory exercise and should not be used if the student cannot do forward repetition. For example:

Computer: "hot • air • bal • loon"
Student: "hot, air, bal, loon, -- loon, bal, air, hot"

Usually I only do forward/backward repetition on short sentences or syllables. Keep in mind it is a working memory task and may get some people off track when you switch back to working on comprehension. If this is the case, I will have a section of the therapy session just for memory, then clearly end that section and move to comprehension. I never do backward memory when I am doing comprehension and I rarely do it with Autistic individuals. Be especially careful if the student is currently in the stage of echolalia when you are practicing the sentence repetition. You don't want them to get stuck at a backward echolalia stage.

After working at the syllable level, individually move through the word and sentence levels using one, two, then all three sentences. To handle errors, say to the student, "I heard you say, 'The arid desert is harsh.' Notice what comes after harsh when I say, 'The arid desert is a harsh habitat.'" ? Go ahead and exaggerate the part of the sentence that you want the student to notice. When the student has repeated the sentence correctly, begin comprehension work on that sentence. If you have one of the LocuTour Comprehension CD's there are multiple sentences available for imaging. In that case, listen to the next sentence and work on comprehension for that sentence, etc. Be sure to connect the ideas from one sentence with the others in order to teach the "gestalt" or the whole meaning of the paragraph.

How do you work on auditory comprehension?

In auditory comprehension work, your students learn to create visual images to match words they hear. Those with poor comprehension will not be making good pictures in their heads. You may have to teach visualization. When the students are asked to remember what they've heard, they will first recall the image, or picture, then they will recall the words. In the beginning stages of this process, ask your students to look at one of the pictures and describe it for you, using concepts like color, number, shape, size, and location to structure their descriptions. For example:

Computer: zebra
Student: "I see an animal that looks like a horse, but it has stripes."
Instructor: "What makes you think it looks like a horse?"
Student: "It has a body like a horse, pointed ears, long tail, a mane, four legs and hooves."
Instructor: "I agree, It makes me think of a horse too. The color is certainly different."

Instructor: “What color is the animal?”
Student: “It’s black and white.”
Instructor: “Where do you think this zebra is?”
Student: “On a field in Africa”
Instructor: “What makes you think that? Is there something in the background that gives you clues?”
Student: “Yes, there is a big grassy area and funny trees.”
Instructor: “You know what that ‘big grassy area’ is called?
It’s called the plains, or the grasslands.”
“Those funny trees are acacia.”
“Close your eyes and think about the trees, What do you see?”

Student and instructor continue in this manner of turn taking to share and receive information. The student knows that they will always get a chance to talk. The instructor acknowledged that they have heard the student’s response. (“I can imagine that too, I see.....”) This not only sets up an excellent environment for learning to comprehend language, it teaches the important skill of listening and turn taking. Respect for the students thoughts and perceptions of the picture and story establish a long-term respectful relationship for discussing topics. Even disagreements can be modeled. Sometimes a student will infer something different than the teacher.

Student: “I think the wild dog shouldn’t be allowed to kill.”
Instructor: “Really, Tell me more.”
Student: “I think the gazelles are too helpless and that rangers should shoot other animals that kill.”
Instructor: “So you’re thinking that the gazelles should be protected from the wild dogs.”
Student: “Yes, they’re mean.”
Instructor: “Do you think there might be a reason that wild dogs kill?”
Student: “Yes, to be mean.”
Instructor: “That’s interesting. You’re thinking that the wild dogs kill just to be mean.
Do they kill for any other reasons?
What do they do once they kill the gazelle?”
Student: “They eat it.”
Instructor: “Hmm. They kill something, then they eat it. Anything else?”
Student: “Nope, that’s it. They kill it and eat it.”
Instructor: Why do you think they eat it?”
Student: “They’re hungry.”
Instructor: “I agree, I think they are hungry too.”
Student: “Well, maybe they aren’t mean. Maybe they are just hungry.”
Instructor: “Maybe. Where else would they get food if they didn’t kill the gazelles?”
Student: “I guess they don’t have grocery stores. I guess if they aren’t plant eaters, then they do have to kill other animals.”
Instructor: “You’re doing some good thinking. I’m going to ask a few more questions. ....”

What has happened during this interaction is very important. The student heard the words, “I agree..., Tell me more..., You’re thinking...” Even though the instructor and student had different opinions, both were able to express themselves peacefully and thoughtfully. In this instance the student was brought across the bridge to understand the instructors “perspective” but just as often the student will learn to use words to bring the

instructor to their side of the bridge to hear their words. I am fond of the bridge analogy. I picture teaching and learning like two sides of one bridge. It is not very effective to stand on one side of the bridge and yell the answer to the student on the other side. They are too far away, can't hear it, can't see it, can't understand what it is that you are trying to say. I see learning happening when the instructor walks across the bridge, asks questions of the student to find out what they are thinking. The instructor must try very hard to look from the student's perspective before giving any answers. If the answer cannot be understood, it will not be heard. Direct the questions to where the student is at that moment. Don't tell them they are wrong for thinking a certain way, try to figure out how they got to a certain conclusion. You will often find that miscommunication is a misunderstanding of one or two words. Once that is clarified, communication resumes. When you establish a non-confrontational question/answer dialogue you prepare the student for responding to direct questions. If you think about it, when was the last time they were asked a question that they had a 99% chance of getting the answer right? When you ask questions like:

"What color is it?"
"What size is it,? Show me with your hands."
"What shape is it's nose? Show me what that would look like on your face."
"How many zebra do you see?"
"What do you think the waterhole smells like?"
"Where do you think the animals prefer to sit, in the sun or shade?"
"How do you think they reach those branches?"
"If you were an animal would you be one on the ground or fly?"
"What do you see in the background?"
"How do you think bananas and guavas taste, sweet or bitter?"
"Tell me about the stealthy movement of a cheetah."
"Close your eyes and picture yourself under the shade tree. What do you feel?"

Learning to see pictures in the mind's eye is a powerful memory and comprehension tool. Learning to put words to what you see and think, will bring joy, and communication to those that speak their ideas and those that get to listen.

Since the words on the Safari CD are unfamiliar to most people, an image has been provided in order to develop a greater fund of knowledge. The two processes of describing images in detail and developing their fund of knowledge will enable your students to benefit fully from the program. The skill of visualizing will transfer to all academic and life skills. The goal is to help them learn to visualize without a picture in front of them. Read the sentences one, two, or three at a time and ask your students to describe what they imagine when they hear the words. Use felt squares to "anchor" each sentence.

How do you work on reading comprehension?

The process for reading comprehension work is the same as for auditory comprehension, except you will ask your students to read the sentences, either aloud or to themselves, before creating the visual images to match. When working on reading comprehension, turn off the volume so that the student gets the information by reading, not by listening. Proceed slowly through the process of imaging each sentence. Taking time to understand each new word or concept is important. It is possible to spend one-half hour on one picture and one story. This is not inefficient. You are teaching a process that will become faster and more reliable. Speed is not the primary objective when first learning to have efficient comprehension. The sequence should be: understand individual words, understand the sentence, understand how the sentence relates to the one before it, understand how the sentence relates to something you already know, understand how the sentence relates to yourself or the world, make a judgment on the new information.

How do you work on syllabification?

Using the Syllabification button, let your students listen to each word as it is broken into syllables. Tap the table once for each syllable and/or ask your students to put out colored felt squares to represent each syllable. As stated in the above paragraph, understanding the one-to-one correspondence of this segmentation of the word allows the listener to correctly process the information. This is a meta-linguistic skill that is important for good speech as well as reading and spelling. A syllabification exercise would sound like this:

Instructor: "Listen"
Computer: "de • sert"
Instructor: "How many taps?"
Student: "Two"
Instructor: "Good, show me with felts"
Student: "de • sert" (says and places two different colored felts out on table)

How do you work on phonemic awareness?

Using the Sounds button, let your students listen to each word as it is broken into its separate sounds. Represent each sound with a colored block or piece of felt. For example the word, desert, has five sounds and can be represented by five different colored blocks laid out in a row d e s er t. Touch each block and say the sound it represents. Then ask your students to do the same. Recent research indicates that phonemic processing is critical to auditory processing of connected speech. This slower speech and segmentation of the word allows the listener to process the phonemic units that make up the word, imitate the units, record their productions, and play back their speech to self-monitor. Self-correction and self-monitoring are the first steps in automatic integrated auditory processing and accurate verbal expression. A phonemic awareness activity might sound like this:

Instructor: "Listen"
Computer: "d e • s er t"
Instructor: "What does the first syllable say?"
Student: "de"
Instructor: "How many sounds in the first syllable?"
Student: "d -- e two sounds,"
Instructor: "Good, show me with the blocks"
Student: "d -- e" (say and places two different colored blocks out on table)
Instructor: "What does the second syllable say?"
Student: "sert"
Instructor: "How many sounds in the second syllable?"
Student: "s er t" (places three more blocks)
Instructor: "That's right, we're counting the er as one sound."

How do you work on visual memory and dictation?

Using the Dictation button, lets your students see each word and listen as it is spelled. Type Option H (Alt H on Windows) to hide the word, then ask your students to write it. Type Option H again to show the word so that your students can proof their work. Ask them to touch each letter on the screen, then touch it on their paper to see if they match. It is best to say each letter, sound or syllable aloud to help the ear match what the eye sees and both match the brain's processing. This exercise can also be done at the syllable and sentence levels. For example the self-checking exercise would sound like this, with touch and say employed: "d, d, e, e, s, s, er, er, t, t".

Spelling to dictation can be practiced using any of the buttons. For some students, it is difficult to process the "Capital K a, l, a, h, a, r, i, Space, Capital D, e, s, e r t". Other students may be able to translate the "alphabet

names" into text fairly quickly, but can't write down the letters when just given sounds. These students need to practice writing to the Sounds button. Other students have developed their auditory processing skill to be able to write to dictation for letters and sounds, but don't spell accurately when they need to sound out the word themselves. Practicing spelling using the Syllabification button should improve this skill. Don't underestimate the importance of visual memory for both spelling and especially proofing of spelling. Usually the first clue a good speller gets is the feeling that, "It just doesn't "look right." The highlights on the letters in Sounds will help the student notice which words "play fair" and which don't.

Marna Scarry-Larkin, MA, CCC-SLP