

CONNECTING LANGUAGE TO LITERACY for TEACHERS: IT WORKS!

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Introduction:

Communicatively challenged students are at risk for development of literacy. Today, many of these children are included in the regular classroom with teachers who may not have a background in connections between content, form and use of oral language to print. Statistics indicate that a child who is not a fluent reader by fourth grade is likely to struggle with reading as an adult (International Dyslexia Association, 2001). In addition, 73% of second graders who were poor readers had a history of spoken – language deficits or phonemic awareness challenges in kindergarten (ASHA, 2001). Oral language, reading and writing are reciprocal; therefore, these children are likely to struggle with literacy development. Language challenged children who struggle to decode and comprehend print lose out on the development of general knowledge and vocabulary to understand other content areas, eventually being at risk for academic failure.

Why do these children struggle with print?

- ✚ Limited knowledge of print
- ✚ Challenges with processing
- ✚ Vocabulary may be reduced
- ✚ Emergent literacy skills are weak
- ✚ Reasoning skills may not be well developed
- ✚ Phonological Awareness skills may be reduced
- ✚ May not have adequate core oral language foundation
- ✚ May not have strategies/or know how to apply strategies for literacy
- ✚ Incidental learning in the classroom is not always happening; they need direct instruction

Classroom instruction that includes an emphasis on content, form and use of language as it is connected to literacy would be a major benefit for the language challenged students.

Purpose:

Teacher preparation varies widely and may not include knowledge in the areas of content, form and use of language in relationship to literacy. Teacher knowledge base and experience with this facet of literacy development is paramount to the student's success in learning to read and write. This factor becomes even more important when students with language challenges are included in the teacher's regular classroom. Speech - Language Pathologists (SLP's) have knowledge/skills to assist teachers in this area, providing opportunities for change in classroom teaching for language challenged children. This includes knowledge and working collaboratively with classroom teachers to emphasize information from six main areas that connect language to literacy: Phonological Awareness, Phonological Memory, Information Processing System, Morphology, Vocabulary Learning and Written Language.

What's Important?

Essential aspects of teacher knowledge when instructing language challenged learners include: language development as it relates to literacy, including emergent literacy skills; information about phonology and morphology as it relates to spelling; comprehension and its dependence upon foundational language skills; information regarding the dependence of critical literacy mastery upon abstract reasoning; procedures for accommodations and ongoing assessment; and strategies for assisting these diverse learners in the development of clinical and critical literacy skills. Expanded skill areas in terms of comprehension would include: teaching prediction, imagery, what students don't understand in the text, integration of new information with prior knowledge, clarifying and summarizing. The SLP's training and background experience can support and expand teacher knowledge in all of these areas. This is not a list of things the SLP hasn't been trained to do; rather most likely, it is a list of skills being used everyday in clinical/therapy settings.

Phonological Awareness:

Phonological awareness and phonics are critical to reading acquisition (NRP, 2000). These skills include rhyming, initial phoneme segmentation, final phoneme segmentation, word segmentation, syllable segmentation, and sound blending. Letter - sound - symbol relationship is built on these foundational skills.

Phonological Memory:

Phonological memory is the process in which the visual print stimuli are converted to the representations of the sounds which were learned earlier in oral sound production development and then stored in memory. Deficits in this system may result in poor vocabulary learning, limited rote phonological learning (days of the week, etc.), difficulty with nonsense words, and understanding of the sound/symbol relationship necessary for decoding.

Information Processing System:

Sensory input from both the auditory and visual pathways must be accurately received, filtered for reduction of non important input, stored in short term memory, associated for meaning, stored in long term memory and retrieved. Ultimately, the information received from both auditory and visual systems must be integrated to make the appropriate connections to previously learned oral language in order to decode and comprehend print. Naming speed, rapid automatic naming (RAN), poor auditory or visual processing, and reduced attending skills can affect the decoding process and comprehension of material. Deficits at any level of information processing will interfere with learning literacy skills.

Morphology:

Understanding of morphological markers (-ed, -ing, -s, -er, -est, etc.) and how they change the meaning of words are basic skills in the learning of oral language. These markers present in print also represent meaning within the text and must be understood in order to make meaning of what is being read. These visual representations provide the important form of language also needed for accurate spelling.

Vocabulary:

Vocabulary is the content or semantics of language and before the age of nine is developed primarily through oral language. Reading becomes the primary modality for learning vocabulary after nine years of age. Typical learners add about five new words per day and rely heavily on prior knowledge to associate and build vocabulary. Vocabulary is the pathway to higher level comprehension of text. Language challenged students who have not developed adequate decoding skills will be limited in their intake and learning of new vocabulary; thereby, content learning begins to become quite difficult. Specific strategies to enhance vocabulary learning for these children may include: visual cueing, graphic organizers to demonstrate parts of words and word associations, analogies to connect prior knowledge, context skills, key words, and categorization of words.

Written Language:

Written language is far more than making a complete simple sentence with punctuation and capitalization. For many language challenged students, written language content and spelling are the issues and need to be systematically taught. The components of vocabulary, main ideas, supporting details, genres of writing, and types of narratives are but a few of the areas these students need assistance with. There is a *process of writing* in terms of planning, organizing, story writing/drafting, revising and editing, peer and partner conferencing along with various scaffolding approaches to assist the language challenged student (Nelson, Bahr, Van Meter, 2004).

Research-Based Best Practices:

Research – Based Best Practices (Morrow, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2003) on teaching literacy, whether a classroom teacher or as an SLP supporting literacy for language challenged children in the classroom, include the following:

1. Teaching meaningful experiential literacy for information, to perform a task and for pleasure...motivation to learn.
2. Using high quality literature.
3. Teaching phonics in both reading and writing.
4. Using multiple texts that link and expand the contexts of the content.
5. Teacher and student led discussions.
6. Use a whole class community that builds concepts and background knowledge.
7. Small groups for reading skills while others are instructed on written language skills.
8. Every student should have ample time to read in class.
9. Direct instruction in decoding and comprehension strategies, with a balance of direct and guided instruction with independent learning.
10. Multiple assessment formats to inform instruction.

Summary:

SLP's can provide direct input to teacher knowledge base via inservices, meetings, collaborative learning, and informational newsletters to their colleagues about six areas of language and literacy learning: Phonological Awareness, Phonological Memory, Information Processing System, Morphology, Vocabulary Learning and Written Language.

This level of specific input from the SLP to teachers, regular or special education, on literacy learning for the language challenged child can make a difference in the day to day literacy learning instruction for these children. This in turn should allow every child to learn literacy skills at the level of their potential.

Reference and related reading provided on handout.

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