

Language and Literacy

The Magic Of Motivation

Prevalent theories about how children acquire language are grounded in the concept that language emerges from the interactions occurring in different parts of the brain. (Evans, 2008; McWinney, 1999). The specific brain areas include the linguistic, cognitive, sensory and motor areas. Children's brains start "seeing" regularities in neural input across and between these brain areas and a language system forms. These regularities include grammar and vocabulary, how language is used, what different intonations mean, the social contexts in which language is used, how language represents abstraction such as feelings, etc. Literacy emerges in a similar way, connected to the language system.

The factors that contribute to the emergence of both language and literacy are so intricately intertwined that they are difficult to tease apart. To make matters even more complicated, the combination of contributing factors appear to be different for each child. The same influencing factor may cause different children to act differently.

In order to improve language and literacy learning, we must first identify the way the components influence each other for each individual child and then increase the child's involvement with those interactive factors in his or her uniquely significant way. Some researchers, (i.e. Nelson and Arkenberg, 2008), coined the term, "a dynamic and tricky mix" to describe the importance and uniqueness of these intricately intertwined influential factors of language and literacy development.

These researchers suggest that we can dramatically accelerate the acquisition of these two critical skills by making sure that each child's critical set of factors is embedded in the instructional lesson. When this happens, magic results: children become engaged in the activity. This leads to increased motivation to participate and overall involvement, which in turn makes the lesson more meaningful leading to improved retention. Paula: there's nothing wrong with this sentence, but I would prefer a more colloquial form, such as: Children

become engaged in the activity. They want to participate. Involvement makes the lesson meaningful, and they remember it. For the younger child, lessons that are playful allowing interaction between peers and incorporating the senses while providing opportunities for movement, draw the child in. In a classroom of 25 students, seat-based, drill type worksheets are easier to implement. At CLASS, Inc., however, we have the luxury of grouping children with like needs into small groups led by highly trained staff who present these playful, engaging, meaningful lessons. The links of language and literacy start connecting in the children's brains.

We work on improving emotional regulation because we understand that both language and literacy are socially based and that positive social interactions accelerate learning. It is well documented that new knowledge is best remembered when it is attached to established knowledge. Meaningful interactions link emotional sensations with past experiences, thus increasing retention, recall and the generalization of the lesson to other situations.

At CLASS, Inc., our Language and Literacy Groups focus on providing meaningful learning experiences. We imbed playfulness throughout each session in different forms, such as re-telling stories with fun props, writing group narratives, viewing the world through lenses of different colors, creating silly poetry, making sticky goop into letters, singing songs, and stomping like Sendack's "Wild Things". The integration of these playful, sensory experiences provides those complex, intricately entwined factors critical to each child's learning success.

To learn more about Language and Literacy development, talk to one of our CLASS, Inc. experts; we are available for playful instruction with you, too!

References:

Evans, J.L. (2008). Emergentism and Language Impairment in Children: It's All About Change. In M. Moody & E. R. Silliman (Eds.),

Brain, Behavior and Learning in Language and Reading Disorders. (pp 41-71). New York: Guilford.

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