Language Development Studies With Connections to Literacy Issues

Catherine Snow's Connections Between Language and Literacy

Structure for thinking about the connections between language and literacy using a model developed by Catherine Snow, language development professor, Harvard University

Common belief: If print specific skills are strong, then kids will just progress as readers

Snow's 1st hypothesis: Print awareness and ability to manipulate sounds (phonemic awareness) and the develop of word recognition affects reading achievement K-1

Snow's 2nd hypothesis: Proficiency in extended discourse strengthens aspects of decontextualized language which will support the demands of reading beyond the initial stage (i.e. comprehending a variety of text). The foundation is laid in home and early school language interactions.

Snow: 3 aspects of language that would support literacy development beyond initial stages:
   a. extended discourse and more opportunities for "rare" words use (semantics, expand a child’s “lexicon”)
   b. adaptation to a distant audience (syntactics and pragmatics)
   c. sophisticated vocabulary and world knowledge (syntactics, semantics, pragmatics)

Home and School Study - Harvard University (1988-present)

1. Overview of the study

2. Terms:
   Contextualized talk (talk in the context of the moment, "here and now")

   Decontextualized talk (talk out of the "here and now" or out of the context of the moment - past, future, the "printed word")

Percentage of talk that is devoted to decontextualized talk in the form of narratives (telling an event) or explanatory talk is a good predictor of literacy. Some families use mostly contextualized talk tied to daily routines e.g. "eat your peas" (procedural talk), which does not support literacy.

3. Literacy and Language Tasks Used in the study:
   Literacy
   letter id, concepts of print, etc.
   Language Tasks
   a. Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)
   b. decontextualized tasks:
      create a story about a picture
      tell about a recent event
      definitions task

Diane C. Nielsen, Ph.D.

©2004 Kansas Reading Academy