

2019 Member to Member

Speech, Language, and Literacy Disorders: Are They All Pieces of the Same Puzzle?

January 19, 2019

This year's Member to Member Workshop brought in a new perspective on literacy intervention for our membership. The Canadian Academy of Therapeutic Tutors invited Speech-Language Pathologist Kate Dixon to the Jericho Hill Centre in Vancouver to speak about the link between our language abilities and literacy development. Her PowerPoint presentation included videos, case studies, and time for group discussion, which kept attendees engaged throughout.

Her presentation began with a detailed discussion about oral language. She went over the developmental benchmarks for producing phonemes, the prevalence and terminology surrounding language disorders, signs of speech and language difficulties, and risk factors for speech and language delays. A significant point for the audience to consider was that children that start school with limited language are very likely to have language deficits through the school years.

"There are many strands that are woven into skilled reading," according to *Scarborough's Reading Rope*, a popular infographic that describes the complexities involved in learning to read. Kate highlighted that word recognition (phonological awareness, decoding, sight word reading) alone does not cultivate a skilled reader. Skilled reading is the product of word recognition, along with language comprehension. Language comprehension involves components of oral language, which include vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, background knowledge, and literacy knowledge. Learning to read then is dependent on oral language skills.

Kate next focused on written expression. Just like reading, written expression is initially dependent on oral language. If oral language skills are not sound, then there is a faulty base to build written language upon. While this is typically the case, Kate reminded our members that if we observe a discrepancy between oral language and written output in our students, then we may assume our students are demonstrating language-based dysgraphia.

She closed her presentation with recommendations to support children with language delays:

- Use play
- Observe, wait, and listen
- Comment more than ask questions
- Sing songs
- Be explicit and direct
- Breakdown instructions
- Encourage self-monitoring
- Support social development

This informative presentation gave the audience a deeper understanding about the complexities of reading development. It prompted lots of participation during the question and answer period at the very end. Our membership certainly has a tremendous thirst for more knowledge about reading development. We look forward to future presentations that will continue to support our curiosities.