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EHDI Annual Conference

Linking Listening, Language, Literacy for Life

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>> Just a reminder, the bathrooms are outside if you need to go. We have five minutes, this goes so quick and there is so much information. So just wanted to let you know. Also afterwards if anybody is interested in questions or more detail, you are welcome to stay and hear. This is open after today.

Good day everybody, I'm Jamie, again I am the room moderator. If you have any questions on logistics for the conference, let me know.

It looks like it is going to be a crowded house. There is some water in the back if you want to grab some water. There is also some pens and paper in case you need some.

We will be starting in just about three minutes. Thank you for coming.

>> UMA SOMAN: Good morning everyone. It's still morning, right? Yes, still morning. Let's get started. We have a couple of minutes but I am going to use it to get to know my audience just a little bit. I am not going to go by what is your role. I just want to very quickly know what is the age group that is your primary focus right now. People working zero to three. Good, that is what I hoped. Three to five. Lovely. Five to eight. Great. Older than eight. Amazing. Okay, you are my people.

This is what made this presentation for, this kind of audience. So good morning, my name is Uma Soman, I am a teacher of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing children and a listening and spoken language specialist, certified auditory verbal educator. I'm wearing two hats today. I am an assistant professor at Fontbonne University in St. Louis where I teach in the graduate program in the communication disorders and Deaf education department. I teach a course called language and literacy, and that is 16 weeks long. So I talk about this for 16 weeks generally. And thus putting all of this in 25 minutes was a little bit challenging.

And the other hat I wear is I am director of Listening Together, cofounder and Director of Listening Together, a nonprofit organization that works with families, professionals, in India and on the Indian subcontinent working with children who are Deaf and hard of hearing.

I want to share with you how I got here. You might feel at the end of this presentation that oh, this is in the textbooks. And it is. And even though it has been in the textbooks, and I got my Masters and my PhD and I read a lot of textbooks and a lot of research, these are the four events that have led me to this moment.

I taught in option schools with very young, all the way to preschool children getting ready to mainstream, and so what the reading development was like. And then I consulted for a while in the general education setting looking at the challenges that children were facing because of the reading development not being very well. Sorry, I am looking at the captioning and it is catching up. Okay, good.

During the pandemic I have the most amazing opportunity to work with a 13-year-old with a neurodivergent profile, language of a seven and eight-year-old. And during my PhD program, I had read all of these studies. We want to look at auditory deprivation and the impacts that it had on baby owls and we kept them blind for the first three weeks so that -- right, we are never going to do that to children.

But this young man buys a very complicated medical circumstances as a procedure insignificant and language auditory deprivation for the first five years of life. Amazing family. It's just how this young man's path was. He was the greatest teacher of what it means to link listening, language, and literacy, and how it changes lives. Thus the title of this presentation.

Through Listening Together I have been working with families in India and working towards bilingualism and biliteracy, so learning to read two different scripts, understand you are reading two different scripts in writing in two different scripts. And that has completely pushed me to the edge of what the textbooks have taught me.

And finally my own sister who is now 36 decided to get a cochlear implant nine months ago, and I am doing her post-CI rehab. And it has been fascinating to see how listening, language, and literacy are really linked for life.

Like I said, I can do this for 16 weeks which is not a lot we want to be here. So my goal today is to -- I think I made a slide for this. My goal today, and I'm totally going back and forth, is to do sure, some knowledge sharing. And I hope you will learn some things. But I hope at the end of the 25 minutes together you will feel curious, and you will feel comfortable with this. I am breaking all rules of smart objectives and actionable -- all the things, right.

But I did not know this at a name, but this is called a head heart hands check in check out. You can do it at the beginning or ending of any of your engagements and interactions. I was just coming from what Rush and Sheldon have taught us, that parents are capable and competent. And I was struggling with making them feel capable, competent, and confident. So for my sessions, I still see five families a week because why else am I doing this? I make goals for how I want them to feel at the end of the session.

And it has really changed some session planning for me. So a preview tip, when planning a session it is not just about the goals and objectives, but how a person feels at the end. So today I want you to learn some things about skilled reading, feel curious at the end, and feel comfortable exploring more. And if you do that, and you are going to take the action of learning more, coming in talking to me, and figuring out how you will apply this when we are back at work on Wednesday.

I think most people are aware that reading is challenging for most children. It is not something that is naturally and automatically acquired. There are parts of the world that are illiterate. They are living their lives without needing to read or write anything. So literacy is something that has evolved as a need of society, as a way to encode and decode language that is not spoken or signed.

The language proficiency numbers for fourth-graders in the US post-pandemic continue to be sad. And if they are sad for all children, it is not surprising that we are seeing some sad numbers for children. The category is children with disabilities, but research on children who are Deaf or hard of hearing shows that reading is a challenge. Our keynote speaker mentioned that this morning as well.

But here is what is changing. Within the last research from 2020 and onward, and some of these authors are in the room so go bug them after to tell you more about the research. Children can develop age-appropriate vocabulary. Children can develop age-appropriate syntax. It's challenging and they are vulnerable regarding that, but it is possible. [can't understand] perception impacts reading outcomes. This is one of my favorite studies to date.

Then receiving, listening, and spoken language intervention from a young age can help develop age-appropriate skills.

I want to say this right here, right now. The title of this presentation is listening language literacy only because the science of reading connects language and literacy with listening. If listening is not an option, all we have to do is find an alternative.

So if you have children who are not learning to listen or learning through listening, think about what are you going to do with these skills that are dependent on listening and make them visual.

Irrespective of the modality and the language a child is using, I think everybody in this room can agree that most parents, at least in the US, are saying that they want their children to be competent readers and writers. I don't think anybody is arguing and saying no, it's fine if my child doesn't learn to read. Right? I think we can all agree on that.

So with that message of this is what unites us rather than divides us, let's jump into this. Now we are going to do some math. In 1986, Golf and [can't understand] proposed the simple view of reading. Raise your hand if this is something you know. Some. Great. Reading comprehension, the ability to read and understand something is dependent on and a product of multiplication. Okay, we are going to do some multiplication. Decoding and language comprehension.

So let's do a quick review of our math facts. 1×1 equals? 0.5 times 1 is? 0.5. 0.5×0.5 equals? 0.25. 1 multiplied by zero equals? Zero. Okay. You have the basic math. And can you tell I am a teacher? I am making sure there is background knowledge.

All right, we are going to do some reading. Can you read and understand? On decoding, do you have a 1 or a zero? Language comprehension. Yeah. So zero time zero equals?

Let's do this. I know there are some in the room who probably can read and understand this. I think many in the room can read this. So I'm going to read this to you. And anybody who speaks Spanish, I apologize in advance. I speak other languages. This is not one of mine.

[Spanish phrases]

Decoding. One. I get 100 percent on this. Language comprehension. I am going to give myself a zero. So one time zero equals? Can you think of children who can read and answer no questions? About that, that was me all through my systems [can't understand] science class even as a PhD student.

Okay, maybe now we are on some familiar ground here. [can't understand] goes to the usual meeting place on the beach and calls out are you here? She can sit here for hours watching [can't understand] fly in and out of the water. Which means a flying fish loves to show off his tricks.

Decoding. Can I read? Yes. Did I understand? I did, I think I can answer some questions. How about you all? Right? 1×1 equals? And thus the simple view of reading is foundational and fundamental to what we think of literacy.

There are hours long videos about this, and if you connect with me I will send you my now that you are curious here is some homework for you links.

But guess what, I have done this long enough that I can give you a podcast, I can give you a video, I can give you some to read, I can give you a book, I can give you an article. You tell me what you need, that is what you will get.

Holding these two -- there is a word for this, the product of blank, decoding and language comprehension, holding these two factors in mind, let's look into that a little bit.

Scarborough's reading group to the rescue. Raise your hand if this is something you are familiar with? Okay. As I expected. Look at this, learn this, love this, live this. There is beautiful images -- oh, I have not written the citation here, but this work is by Hollis Scarborough who developed this visual for a parent meeting that she was going to have to explain to parents what it takes to learn to read.

If you type in Scarborough's role model there are many, many, many images that will pop up, and this is one of them from learning A to Z. Notice that these are strands. Word recognition, the parallel movement of decoding. And language comprehension is made up of many different things.

So together when they are strong we get skilled reading. All right, right on time.

We are going to play again. We are going to look at this strand of word recognition, decoding, phonological awareness, and sight recognition. I am going to say this to you and ask you a question, and then I need you to be thinking about in order to answer my question, what did you need to hear? What did you need to say, the sound you had to make? And what did you need to know in terms of language cognition. This is the game.

Oh, here's a quick tip which I love. Phonological awareness, I learned this from Katherine Wilson so credit goes to her. She said a quick way to teach parents what phonological awareness is, is to tell them that this is something you should be able to do with your eyes closed. Phono, phone. Sound, phoneme, phonics, phon. There is a great paper called the five phons of reading, listening. No, I don't want this device to change anything. Lovely.

Okay, here we go. 10 minute warning has been received. Tell me which ones rhyme. Cat, hat. Do they rhyme? What did you need to hear? The whole sound but definitely the last sound.

One more. Cat, cap. Do they rhyme? No, they don't.

What is the last sound in ship? Good job to everybody who said pa and not P. If I had candy, I would be throwing candy at you right now.

Okay, here is a fun one. Say stop. Take away S. What word do you have? Top. Can you tell me five words that begin with the sound ga.

Okay, good. What did you need to hear, say, and know language-wise. The argument I get into -- not argument, the conversation I get into when a parent -- and this is my common scenario these days. In India this child has been diagnosed that two and a half, mom says preschool starts at age 3 and I need to send my child to preschool, they need to learn how to read. And I'm like yes. But when the teacher says we are going to think about all the words that begin with the letter B that makes the sound ba, your child doesn't know anywhere that begin with the letter or the sound ba, B. So, sure they are hearing ba. Maybe, I hope, because we don't know if they can hear the difference between ba and pa and ba and da. And they are definitely not saying all four of those clearly just yet.

So until we have listening, speech, language, getting to literacy is really, really challenging.

That is the message, okay? And you can play this game with other aspects. Decoding is what sound does this letter make? Can you send out this word that I have in front of you? Sight recognition, do you know this high-frequency sound. And so on.

Decoding, I say this to my LS mentees all the time. Do not tell me that you don't have time for literacy. I said in kinder words because you know, we coach from a place of strength. Do not tell me you don't have time, because if you did anything with fine discrimination today, and if you did anything the speech today, you had time for literacy.

I see some head nods. That's great.

I just want to spend a couple of minutes on this. Vocabulary knowledge, also known as word knowledge, background knowledge, also known as world knowledge, is fundamental to reading comprehension. It does not matter if you can decode everything if it makes no sense. That is me reading the story of [can't understand] in Spanish and just reading with much confidence.

Vocabulary knowledge is have you encounter this word. Do you have the lexical semantic mapping to learn more words like this. My husband and I are learning Italian because the older your brain gets, the more you have to keep it strong. And we recently learned the word rovario [phonetic] which means to try. And being the word nerds like we are, we are like oh, is that my professional licensure as the word, does it come from this root word about trying, like you have a provisional license when you are trying to be whoever you are. That kind of root word knowledge, that kind of lexical semantic mapping, knowing that electron, electricity, electrician are all sort of together by root words, adventure, expedition, excursion, voyage, Safari are all together because of their semantic underlying meaning is crucial.

And guess what? This does not happen when the child comes to preschool because now they are in preschool. It comes because they have been given this exposure.

I'm going to skip ahead just a little bit.

What does this mean for 0 to three-year-old children and their families? One of the things that I do is have a conversation with families about desired outcomes. I think this is old news now, we have a conversation about desired outcomes, where you see your child in five years, 10, 15, 20. If they say I want to see my kid in a mainstream classroom talking just like everybody else and understanding everybody else, if that is the desired outcome, I know how to move forward with that.

Then if I run into a barrier of device use or wear time or too much screen time or not enough. Learning, I say this is what you desired and this is what it will take to get there. Our current path does not get there on the timeline you have plan, so either we change our current path before we change the timeline. What would you like to do?

And I have had both answers, right. Sometimes parents will say this is the best I can do right now, so I think we need to think through our timeline a little bit. And other times parents have said no, we are keeping the timeline, what needs to change right now.

And then I'm not the bad guys and you are not wearing your devices, you are not talking to your kid. And convert this conversation in your head for a family who has chosen sign. You are not exposing the child to sign enough, you are not taking sign classes. Whatever that means it looks like.

So I want to encourage you all today, and our wonderful room moderator is going to pass around some posters we have made, they will come around and take a look at them very quickly just to know and see. And I have a few more if we run out of time to look at those.

What needs to be happening in listening and language to be ready to learn to read. I think you all know quality and quantity of language input in the first three years of life matters. You all know sharing books early on matters.

I hope what you are hearing today gives you the why for some of this and why we really need to push. Because time and time again when I say to a family, and this is a change I made a few years ago and it was pretty cool, pretty effective which is why it was pretty cool. I would say to a family we are working on remembering -- following two step directions because right now it is get your backpack, come sit at the table. Okay, sure, I can say get your backpack and come sit at the table, big deal, the child is going to see everybody else and then do it.

But what happens when this child has to then be in third grade in a noisy classroom and the teacher says everybody get your math book, turn to page 57, look at the first 10 problems not only do every other one. We will discuss them in class.

To get there today I have to practice related two step directions. And I think this perspective of having worked with K-12 children are very developmental and very remedial paths as shown to me the enormous importance of starting at the beginning. I myself as a new early interventionist many decades ago used to skip over music because we didn't have time for it. How dumb was I. I thought okay, the kid is so many years old, we need to do whatever for school. You can't skip over music. You have to sing the songs and you have to build the relationship. And so on.

So what I hope this presentation did was say to you oh, reading, important, two key concepts. A simple view of reading, Scarborough's reading role. In order to be able to do that, we have to start in the early years to be ready to do that. This is the learning to learn piece of zero to three.

Did I do that, are you feeling that? Yes? Okay, good. So like I said, one action I would like you to take is just come talk to me if you want more information about this. If you think this is something your EI team needs, wants, would like, send me an email and I will send you how you can develop your own module. Or if you want me to come talk, I am happy to do that. This sounds like self-promotion, but it is not.

You know how people feel called to share information with the world? This is mine. This is my calling. Because without strong reading and writing skills, we cannot guarantee that our children can really access the world equally. Hearing technology can sometimes fail for the five minutes you are switching out your batteries. Your something which interpreter might be running late. Your captions might conk out.

But reading visual print, maybe through Braille, maybe through text to speech is going to be there if we have strong decoding and language comprehension skills.

So I hope this is something we can all agree on and that this is something that unites all of us. And we have to start working on getting children ready to read in the first three years of early intervention.

Come talk to me. I have some bookmarks, I have some business cards, and thank you so much for your attention.