



8. Mostly Mother Goose: Jumpstarting Lexical Development

Hello. It's Amy McConkey Robbins here. I've mentioned before that in children with typical hearing, spoken language is acquired by being immersed in an environment where they have access to the rich linguistic and cultural milieu of their family. Music is similar, in that the first songs babies learn are the songs they hear over and over and are sung to them by caregivers of their own heritage.

Spoken language and music play a large part in learning to read. Deaf educator and researcher Connie Mayer writes, "Without a full face-to-face language in place, deaf children often do not have the requisite basis necessary for age-appropriate cognitive and literacy development." This is a strong justification for the listening and spoken language approach.

We know that reading is an activity that occurs in the auditory centers of the brain. And we know that children with typical hearing have an almost fully-developed language system at the time they learn to read – around age 5 or 6. Whereas with children who are D/HH, we sometimes have to telescope these stages, as children are still developing foundational language at the time they learning to read.

Based on the work of linguist Steven Pinker, we can highlight some rules:

First - We learn to read through the **process** of reading *and* being read to.

Second - Readers make sense of what they read based on what they already know. They have a prior "context."

Third- New meaning is brought to the written word through prediction and is based on conventions defined by the culture within which one lives.

Let's see how applicable these same rules are to music:

First - One learns to sing through the process of singing and being sung to.

Second - One makes sense of what they hear based on what they already know. (We understand the music that is part of our culture, but may struggle to attach meaning to music of other cultures.)

Third - Meaning is brought to music through prediction. (We know what the last word or pitch of a phrase will be, based on our having heard the song or others like it before.)

In order to prepare for literacy, a child needs to have phonological awareness, or the ability to recognize and manipulate the various sounds required for speech including, rhyming, alliteration, word awareness and syllable awareness.

Chris Barton and I have co-authored an article that goes into more depth about the value of music as a learning enhancer and developmental jumpstarter. You can find a link for it in the resources section of AudiTunes.

The accompanying clips will provide examples of some of these early literacy elements. And until next time, remember:

Do Music. REAL Music. Every day!