

Myth:

Literacy and communication do not impact each other

Introduction

For many years, the development of literacy skills and the emergence of communication through speech and/or augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) were treated as separate entities. The belief underlying this approach was that one did not impact the other. In some cases, this resulted in:

- Delaying literacy intervention until communication skills were improved through speech and/or AAC.
- Delaying provision of AAC until literacy was improved.

This approach, however, is not based on developmental evidence and it may cost an individual valuable time for learning. Before we look at what we know from research, let's define these words:

- **Language:** A system that is used to represent meaning. Language is made up of sounds, words, word endings and sentence structure.
- **Communication:** Expressing and understanding information or ideas through various methods, including speech, reading/writing, signs, facial expression, body language.
- **Literacy:** The ability to read and write.

Research tells us that language development is the foundation for both literacy and communication skills (Sturm & Clendon, 2003). The sounds, words, word endings, and sentence structures that make up language allow us to express ourselves through a variety of methods of communication, including writing and understanding what others have written. Here are some practical examples:



- As babies hear speech, they begin to understand that not every sound is the same, and to realize that sounds can be combined in different ways. This is the beginning of phonological awareness, which plays a critical role in understanding speech, talking, reading, and writing.
- Learning that that different combinations of sounds represent various people, objects, actions, concepts, and pictures facilitates understanding and allows us to use words to communicate, read, and write.
- A child is exposed to new words when she interacts with her family. When she encounters these words in books, she understands them because she is able to connect her learning at home with the contents of the book. In this way, she is able to develop increasing knowledge of the world around her.
- A parent reads a book with rhyming words to a child. The child begins to play with rhyming himself, making up his own words. As he does so, his parent tells him that some of the words he is making up are actually real words. He then learns what they mean and connects them to other related words he knows. As his vocabulary grows, he is developing both knowledge of individual words and knowledge of how all of these words relate to each other. This process will be critical to his eventual ability to read and write independently.
- A teacher supports a student in developing phonological knowledge that enhances her ability to write. The teacher also supports the student's writing efforts, which then support her phonological knowledge.



Core First Learning gives you the opportunity to deliver lessons targeting both literacy and communication. This one-stop solution bridges these skills in an accessible format. Research and real-life examples show us that literacy and communication do impact one another; they share a foundation of language as well as a cooperative relationship in development. We can sum up the relationship with this expression: "A rising tide lifts all boats."

References

Clendon, S.A., Erickson, K., van Rensburg, R.J., & Amm, J. (2014). Shared Storybook Reading – An Authentic Context for Developing Literacy, Language and Communication Skills. *Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 23, 182-191.

Sturm, J.M., & Clendon, S.A., (2003). Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Language and Literacy. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 24 (1), 76-91.