

Connections

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LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

Incidental Learning



What is incidental learning?

Incidental learning is a result of information that is not directly taught and comes from external sources and surrounding interactions. Incidental learning opportunities often occur for only seconds and can be visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. Information from these stimuli is either tuned out, stored consciously, stored subconsciously, and may be comprehended in the moment, or later. The learning takes place when these stimuli are understood by associating them with prior knowledge. Approximately 80-90% of the learning needed for proficient language and literacy development is gained through incidental information.

Impact

For deaf and hard of hearing children, access to language — direct and incidental — will impact overall language and literacy development. Deaf and hard of hearing children often receive therapy and educational programming that directly teaches incidental information. In addition, these children need full access to all language. See our documents on [Least Restrictive Environment](#) and [Language Rich Environment](#) as educational placement for a DHH student is considered. Annual tracking of language skills (especially academic language) helps monitor language growth and consider changes/enhancements to a child's educational plan.

80-90%

of language is learned incidentally.

Most of social language is learned incidentally as is much of the crucial ability to use language for thinking. Children build world and cultural knowledge that allows them to make connections and envision lessons for successful learning and proficient literacy through information learned incidentally. When Mom said, "Wow! It's raining cats and dogs!" while looking out the window, we figured out what that meant by using our ability to recognize joint attention, understand context, problem solve, and make conclusions. Early incidental learning helps develop theory of mind and ability to use thinking skills to develop tacit and implicit learning skills for formal teaching. When considering if your child has access to incidental language, consider if your child can access what peers are discussing in group projects, understand side conversations in class, and socialize in a lunchroom or hallway, etc.

Take action

- Model thinking skills by narrating your day
- Incorporate jokes, humor, and slang in discussions
- Make up stories and tell family stories to model complex language and narratives
- Openly discuss opinions and perspectives
- Model mental verbs (e.g., think, wonder, feel, etc.)
- Engage in fun and experiential activities and talk about what is happening
- Replace common vocabulary with complex vocabulary when communicating, such as saying vehicle instead of car.

Find Out More

Center Resources:

Extraordinarily Committed to Enrichment in Language & Literacy (EXCEL2):

- [Language Access Series](#)
- [Learning through Play](#)
- [Narrating Your Day](#)

Indiana Deaf Education and Assessment of Language (IDEAL):

- [Parent Document](#)
- [List of Tools & Assessments](#)
- [ASL & English Milestones Checklist](#)

Other Resources to Check Out:

- Strassman, B. K., Marashian, K., & Memon, Z. (2019). [Teaching Academic Language to d/Deaf Students: Does Research Offer Evidence for Practice?](#) American Annals of the Deaf, 163(5), 501-533.
- Training & Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC) Online: [Instructional Strategies for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss: [Keys to Incidental Learning](#)