How does students’ language development affect their learning?

In conducting my research for my Point of Tension: Self Study, I was struck by all the small situations in my life that affected my understanding and use of language. From spoken language that taught me that words hold great power and meaning, to the amazing connection a thirty year-old can feel to dusty and ratty picture book with few words. Reading through those old books felt like snuggling up next to my past, dreaming of different rooms in my old house and the memories locked inside. Yet there is a fundamentally disproportionate difference between myself now and myself then besides age and size. I read through several of the books, front to back, in under 3 minutes. At one point, it was impossible for me to read at all and soon after it took me a year to accomplish such a feat. What, then, had more of an influence on my use of language, my experiences and spoken language or my ability to read? My point of tension study was based on the effects of words spoken to me, not words I've read or words I've said. If we are to discuss how language development affects learning, I think we must consider what type of language we are considering.

I believe that as a child growing up, what we hear has a greater affect than what we see. We learn to speak through listening to the sounds created by those around us and eventually affirm meaning to those sounds. Later we take those sounds and relate them to written texts, a process that is neither simple nor swift. But our relation to the written text is directly connected to our auditory experiences with language, as we have to hear the words on the page before we can begin to understand them. This made me question how children who are hearing impaired learn to read when I realized their auditory language is spoken with their hands, so there is practically no difference in the way they learn to read, just a different in the way they speak.

So the issue is that most of our early language development is achieved orally, like the majority of most civilizations hundreds of years ago. We are born illiterate because human survival is not dependent upon written words. However, attaining a life blessed with some luxuries (by which I mean eating whole foods and sleeping under a roof) is dependant upon a person’s ability to read and write. A student’s language development affects his or her learning because we now live in a text-rich environment where one needs to be able to read in order to be “educated”. A student’s language development does not have to be in the dominant language of their society, but eventually, code-switching needs to occur in order for him or her to survive. Simple tasks like going to store to buy supplies at some point will have to be switched to the dominant language of a society. Getting an education is much more intense than buying groceries, and will encompass a larger switch. This appears to be a process that needs to be addressed to the class immediately in the year and subsequently differentiated throughout the course work. Code-switching and contrastive analysis also need to be utilized in student’s writings with their grammar. Too often in my school this past semester, I have been inundated with an uber-dependence on Microsoft Word to correct students’ written language. Students’ lack of training in grammar affects their learning by limiting their potential to write only what Word can
correct. I believe this creates a feeling of the program being in charge rather
then the students using the program for assistance.

Language development is the foundation upon which learning is built,
offering the mind an outlet for its computations, thoughts and creations.

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