



The Secret of Success

What is the great secret of ensuring your child's success in school? It is so simple that every parent can do it regardless of socioeconomic status, skin color, level of education, or marital status.

If you read my message from last week, you will recall that I talked about correlation research and causal research, and that causal research is considered the gold standard. What I am about to tell you is based on causal research, the results of which have been supported in various other studies.

And the secret is.....TALKING TO YOUR CHILD! That's it. It's not listening to Mozart or buying brain stimulating games or watching educational television shows or even playing interactive video games that are purported to promote learning. It is talking to your child.

However, there is a window of opportunity that, once it closes, is very difficult to make up for. The optimal time for cognitive development to occur is from birth to age 3 or 4. Of course, it certainly helps to talk with children after that point, but you will never entirely make up for what was missed during those formative years.

In the 1980s, Betty Hart and Todd Risley discovered that there are two types of talk when it comes to children. One type is called *business talk*. *Business talk* is made up of statements such as: *Finish your food. It's time for dinner. Let's get in the car. It's time for bed.* The other type is *extra talk*. It is sometimes called *language dancing*. These are statements that often begin with words such as: *What if.... Do you remember..... Wouldn't it be better if.....* It isn't baby talk. If someone were to eavesdrop they would think you were talking to another adult, albeit one that can't necessarily speak back! *Language dancing* entails chattiness, thinking aloud, and commenting on all kinds of things throughout the day. It is for all practical purposes an ongoing monologue.

In the study, researchers found a 30 million word gap in the amount of *extra talk* directed to the children in one group versus the children in a separate group by the age of 3. The IQs of the children exposed to the greater amount of *extra talk* was significantly higher than the other children by age 3. When they gave both groups of children achievement tests at age 9, the gap had not closed at all. Even more interesting is the fact that parents who talked more to their child in the first year saw even greater cognitive and language development than those who waited until the child was one year of age before they immersed them with oral language. In fact, researchers describe the results as astonishing.

So yes, I'm fairly confident that my grandson, William, will do well in school. If you knew his mother I think you would agree with me.

Yours in Christ
Jim Makey, Principal