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without walls

Language, Learning and Literacy- Session 2

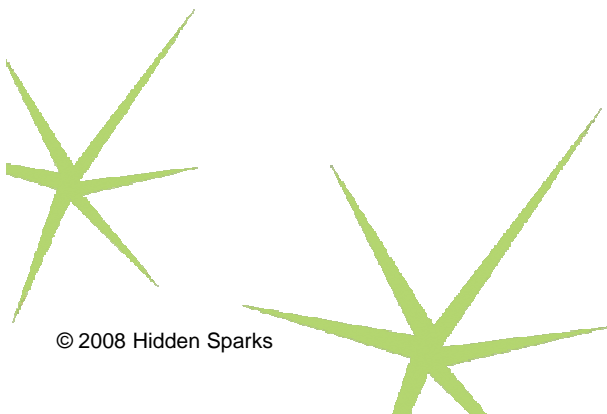**with Claire Wurtzel**
December 10, 2008

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helping children reach their potential™

Conference Call Etiquette

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Our Guest: Claire Wurtzel

Claire Wurtzel is the Director of Faculty Development for the Churchill School and Center in New York, working within and beyond the school to develop the Churchill Center for professional development. Prior to this position, Ms. Wurtzel was the Director of Faculty Development for the New York City *Schools Attuned* initiative for *All Kinds of Minds*, an institute co-founded in by Dr. Mel Levine and Charles Schwab to help educators work effectively with struggling learners. In her capacity as Director, Ms. Wurtzel oversaw Schools Attuned courses, mentor training and facilitator training for over 400 New York City schools.

Ms. Wurtzel is also one of two educational directors for Hidden Sparks, providing training, supervision and ongoing mentoring to the Hidden Sparks teams of coaches, principals and Internal Coaches in twenty-eight *yeshivot*. A long-standing interest of Ms. Wurtzel has been to provide professional development workshops for Jewish Day School educators and has worked to adapt the Schools Attuned professional development program for Jewish day schools.

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Goals of this session:

- To analyze the language demands across subject areas.

- To identify and support students who are having difficulty with language-learning.

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Components of Language

Components of Language — Claire Wurtzel

	RECEPTIVE		EXPRESSIVE	
	Oral	Written	Oral	Written
Phonology				
Morphology				
Semantics				
Syntax				
Discourse				
Pragmatics				

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Review Homework

1. Select a student who you suspect may be having difficulty with some aspect of language.

2. Circle the area or areas in which you have a hunch that the student is struggling.
    a) Receptive language and/or Expressive language
    b) Component: phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, discourse,   pragmatics

3. List some observable behaviors you have observed in this student that makes you think this:

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Young Children's Language Development

- Many participants in last week's session work with very young children, I will touch on early language development.

- Babbling is a precursor to talking. Infants from different countries and language communities babble using the sounds of the language of their caregivers. This is early phonology and pragmatics.

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The adults in a child's life facilitate language by modeling and prompting.

Following is a language sample from a conversation between my granddaughter (20 months) and her grandfather.

- Daniela and her grandfather look at a mask on the wall.
- Daniela says "man" and points to the mask.
- Her grandfather says," Yes that's a man." He senses that Daniela is a little frightened of the mask.
- He asks, "Should I take it away?"
- Daniela: Nods and says, "No like it."
- Grandfather removes the mask.
- Daniela: Happily, "No more man."
- The next time Daniela visits she passes the wall where the mask was hanging. She points and says with great joy, "no man."

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The adults in a child's life facilitate language by modeling and prompting.

In this exchange, although Daniela used only a few words, she was able to get her needs met and learned the power of words to control events. Her semantic understanding (receptive language) is far more developed than her expressive semantics. She understands many more words than she uses. Her syntax is very minimal, yet, Daniela able to talk about an event that has occurred in the past.

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Home Language
vs.
School Language

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Home Language

Home language is very different from school language. The language used at home often involves the use of gestures and body expressions and topics tend to be routine and familiar: to explain things, praise, scold, answer questions or describe things. These are all examples of language in contexts which provide clues to the meanings they convey. The conversations are about shared experiences and it is about the "here and now."

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School Language

- What is being discussed in school is not always visible or in the "here and now." For example, the class may be discussing the Fertile Crescent or the history of Purim. Even when the teacher creates a hands-on activity, students with language struggles may not recognize the connection between the activity and the topic unless the teacher stresses the relevance and helps build a schema for the concept.

- In school, the teacher decides what will be discussed, who will speak, when they will speak and what language is appropriate. For many children with language –learning difficulties, acquiring and learning in a structured manner may be very challenging.

- In normal conversation there is a give and take, a spontaneous dialogue. In school, there is a different format. The teacher controls the conversation and the students respond when designated to do so. Teachers ask questions not to learn new information. They already know the answers.

- The student is expected to give a one word, or one sentence response. For some youngsters narrowing the language down to the on word or one sentence is very difficult. If a student has trouble retrieving the one word, it feels catastrophic.

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Home Language vs. School Language

- For some students the sounds and the words of the classroom are like a background or sea of sounds. The words of the teacher never make it to the foreground.
- At home the parent speaks directly to the child and it's usually easier to get the child's attention.
- In school, with whole-class lessons the teacher is not always able to address each student individually.

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When teaching we must get the students' attention.

What are some techniques you use to get students' attention?

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Why might a parent not understand that
their child has a language-learning problem?

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Home and school are two different linguistic systems.

- When the teacher describes the challenges the student has in negotiating instructional language the parents may not understand.

- They may not see the problem at home.

- The teacher may think the parent is being defensive or denying the problem.

- However, sometimes the parents don't realize that their child is having difficulty understanding the language demands in school.

- The teacher who suspects that a child has language comprehension difficulties in school needs to explain the language demands of the classroom.

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Implicit Language in the Classroom

- Often students are not directly taught how to respond to "attention getting cues." Most children pick it up by osmosis. When the lights are turned off they stop what they're doing and look at the teacher.

- Some teaches use specific language to signal a transition such as "OK, now."

- The OK stands for the completion of the activity and "now" is used to alert students that a new topic is coming.

- Some students miss the cues and continue in the last activity and the teacher gets angry and the student gets confused.

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Much of Class Time is Spent Listening

- The students are spectators in the class for long periods of time. As members of the audience they listen.
- What happens when you are expected to listen for long periods of time?
- How cool is it to admit you don't understand or you've lost focus and don't know where the class is?

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Speaking, Reading, Writing

Speaking:

- In our last session we talked about speaking as an expressive language function and listening as receptive language functions.

- A student may have a strength or weakness in one or of the functions and not in the other. Students acquire a rapid increase in their vocabulary, both receptively and expressively as they move up the grades.

- The more they are read to and spoken to, the more "typically" developing students gather new words.

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Speaking, cont.

- An aspect of speaking is pronunciation. Some children say "pisgetti" instead of "spaghetti" or "aminal" instead of "animal"

- Children who make these errors are having trouble with phonology.

- Some children are able to bypass phonological coding and still learn to read, but for most children a lack of phonological awareness is a predictor of poor decoding.

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Speaking, cont.

- Receptively students take in and make meaning of language. If the meaning doesn't make sense a strong language learner makes adjustments to the original meaning. A student with a fragile hold on language will stick to the first meaning even when it doesn't make sense.

- For example, what does "It's too hot to eat" mean?

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Reading

- Reading consists of both decoding and comprehension.

- Decoding is the process of making sense of the phonemes on the page.

- In order to decode the words on a page the student must understand the relationship between the sounds and the symbols that represent the sounds.

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Clues to Possible Decoding Problems

- If the student is mixing up the sounds when speaking she/he may be at risk for having the same problems when decoding.

- Other signs of phonological difficulty may include a lack of sensitivity to rhymes-hearing rhymes and producing rhymes. It is important to read nursery rhymes to young children.

- Another sign is if the child struggles to find the right word when speaking. He/she might use the word "stuff" or "thing" frequently instead of using the accurate word.

- Word finding difficulties might show up in the child's use of a description of the word, instead of the word. She may say "grass cutter" instead of "lawn mower," or "water holder" instead of "pitcher."

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Clues to Possible Decoding Problems, cont.

- Students who have trouble retrieving words can not respond quickly with the targeted word when asked.
- Some students who struggle reading orally are able to read silently and correctly identify the meaning of a passage.
- They pick up the meaning of a passage from context clues, prior knowledge and illustrations. These students can correctly answer comprehension questions especially when offered multiple choice questions. The answer is on the page. This is much easier for students who have a hard time retrieving the answer using total recall.

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Spelling

- Good spellers use morphological clues. They also internalize spelling rules.

- Some students spell well in isolation, but not while writing. These students are probably having active working memory difficulties.

- Some students can't hold on to which letter combinations go together- such as "ight" and "ought." They don't internalize the rules of the English language such as: there is no letter combination "shun" at the end of a word.

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Language and Memory

- By 4th grade students are supposed to be reading to acquire new knowledge. Memory begins to have an important role in helping students remember what they read.

- Sometimes it's hard to tell if the student understood a chapter but couldn't remember it, or if the student did not comprehend it.

- We'll see language and memory intersect when examining writing.

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Writing

- Writing is a complex form of language production where students put their thoughts on paper in a way that others will understand what they are trying to say.

- It entails vocabulary, building a sentences, verbal fluency, using descriptive language elaboration and creating coherence and cohesion.

- Some students may produce very little because of: handwriting problems; poor spelling that inhibit their production; trouble elaborating on their ideas and producing rich detail; communicating ideas in cohesive passages; lacking transitional ties such as therefore, most importantly, for instance, on the other hand.

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Writing, cont.

- Talking is pre-wired in human beings reading and writing are not.

- Very young children pretend to write-which is a stage in the process. In the early years when children first learn to write they are focused on the visual appearance of their words.

- Over time there is a growing capacity to express ideas and elaborate which becomes much more complex than spoken everyday speech.

- Students with attention issues have a hard time with writing. They may rush through and skip ideas. Some students with attention issues have a hard time dividing their attention between details, the big ideas and remembering the rules. Many students get overwhelmed by all the demands, handwriting, organization, rules, spelling demanded of them almost simultaneously.

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Math

- In math, complex verbal explanations put a strain on students who have a fragile hold on language.
- The vocabulary in math expands rapidly. It is like a foreign language for children. Parallelogram, numerator and denominator are just a few of the vocabulary words that students really never use outside of math..
- Some words used in math have a different meaning in other contexts. "Point" means only one thing in math but has multiple meanings in other subjects.
- Students expect to perform operations in a problem in the order in which the words are listed in the problem. This can be misleading.
- To do well in math students must extract key words in the problem such as sum, all, what's left.

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Language and Behavior

- Language helps mediate feelings and helps us slow down and think through the options before acting.

- Without language to both facilitate and mediate communication and social interactions students are quick to get frustrated and act inappropriately.

- They may become behavior problems and act out or become invisible in the classroom.

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Language and Behavior, cont.

- The ability to make and keep friends depends on the ability to communicate feelings and solve conflicts using words.

- Linguistic proficiency is very important in social contexts. Receptively, a strong linguist is better able to detect subtle feedback clues. It may be hard for them to form social inferences. They often misinterpret what was said.

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Language and Behavior, cont.

- Expressively, if your command of the language is strong it is easier to control the social situation.
- It can be used to praise a friend, to share an interest and get your desires across. It's harder to be popular if your language abilities are compromised.
- Another problem, especially as students move up in grades is the speed of word finding and formulating sentences that is needed in social and classroom situations.
- Teenagers talk fast and switch topics rapidly.

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Strategies For Parents:

- Explain the language of the classroom and the difference between child-parent conversation and teacher-student conversation with 25 students in the class.

- Teachers might hand out the vocabulary of the unit and suggest books or places for the family to expand on the topic.

- Suggest pleasure books that parents might read to their children even if they can read on their own. Everyone enjoys being read to.

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Strategies For Teachers:

- It would be helpful if teachers on a grade level would share how they signal transitions, or attention getting strategies. Discuss which techniques have been most successful.

- For classes of young children, make transitions explicit by playing statues in which children march around until the teacher signals some attention getting signal and then all the children must freeze.

- For older students the teacher might make explicit the verbal and non-verbal cues he/she uses by asking students to identify what they have noticed about how he/she signals transitions. The teacher might ask, "What gestures or words do I use to emphasize important information?"

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Strategies For Teachers, cont.:

A good technique for students who have expressive language challenges, the teacher might preview the next day's lesson and ask a student to be prepared to answer the quest ion the next day. This allows a child to focus on the question and rehearse the language needed to respond fully. In class the next day that student will be especially attentive, anticipating that he will be called soon to answer his question.

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Strategies For Teachers, cont.:

- Use charts and other ways to summarize what you have said. Students with language learning challenges need to **see** it as well as **hear** it.

- Use structured study guides that highlight the topic and offer guiding questions so that students are encouraged to expand on their ideas and learn to read for a purpose.

- Create pictures and schematic organizers to support comprehension.

- Be careful never to humiliate the student who has expressive language problems.

- If a student has difficulty reading, don't make them read in public, unless they have had a chance to rehearse the passage.

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Strategies For Teachers, cont.:

- Stage the work so that students don't get overwhelmed. Have them write a draft and not worry about spelling. Just have them work on the big ideas. Next, they might work on forming paragraphs and creating the cohesive ties etc.

- Speak more slowly. Students benefit greatly when the rate of language coming at them is slowed down.

- Speak less and show more. Whenever possible demonstrate an example of something rather than just explaining it in words.

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Language is the primary tool for academic and social learning. We have just touched on a few of the linguistic deficits that affect all areas of student learning from oral to written to nonverbal communication.

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Contacting Hidden Sparks

Hidden Sparks is a non-profit fund whose purpose is to help children with learning differences reach their full potential in school and life. Hidden Sparks develops and supports professional development programs for Jewish day schools to help increase understanding and support for teaching to diverse learners.

Guided by a philosophy that by helping schools meet the needs of children with learning and behavioral differences, ultimately all students will benefit. Hidden Sparks' programs combine professional development in learning and positive behavioral support, guided classroom observation and one on one coaching. The Hidden Sparks model and program is currently in 21 Jewish Day Schools/Yeshivot in New York and 7 in Boston, through a partnership with Gateways: Access to Jewish Education.

www.hiddensparks.org

rebecca@hiddensparks.org

(212) 767-7707/ (646) 688-5252

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