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On Behalf Of: Myself
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB948

As a Reading Specialist with over 32 years of teaching experience, I fully support Senate Bill 948, which supports “Play-based Learning,” a pedagogy based on an understanding of how our brains develop over time. After retiring from full-time teaching, I could reflect on my teaching practices and consider how I might have done better. SB 948 encourages teachers to do that now!

I would like to share some approaches I learned from others that advanced my understanding of how language works and suggest how these might be improved, using the principles of play-based learning. I hope this allows you to visualize how these tap into students’ levels of cognitive development, adding to their appreciation of oral language as it connects to and advances their understanding of how language works.

George Lakoff in “The Embodied Mind,” claims that all action begins with intention. But, consider this: Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee, in “The Body Has a Mind of Its Own”, tell us that a baby in the crib cannot see the mobile dangling in front of them until it reaches out for it. “Unconscious intention,” Lakoff would claim, leads to paying “attention” that leads to “conscious intention” that stimulates the cerebellum to start mapping the location of the mobile in relation to this individual child which is essential to mapping out its relationship to the world around it. Intention is personal, which is the essential argument supporting a playful approach to learning.

Consider that the child in its mother’s arm is being programmed by the movements of her mouth to map these with the sounds coming to its brain. That is the “mother’s tongue” teaching her child how to form sounds that make up language.

When teachers tell students how sounds relate to letters, they are putting the cart before the horse, which is the image that underlies the claim that this method is preposterous. The children should be telling the teacher what sounds they make when speaking. By having children stand opposite a partner doing mirror exercises, where one moves arms and legs that the other mimics in tandem, they are stimulating the “mirror neurons” that the body employs in learning from one another. As one stops these grand movements and starts moving the muscles in the face and then the mouth, the other learns to mimic those movements. At that point, teachers can ask what they see when the other makes the sound of the letter “t” how that differs from making the sound associated with the letter “b.” This is a playful approach to learning. It is how human beings learn.

Because of time limits for submitting testimony, this may be the only submission I can make that will be posted. If that is the case, I will send out further testimony in terms of how teacher-mentors of mine have presented lessons that reveal how language is designed for us to engage in word-play.