Myths about English Learning

As parents, what should we do to better prepare our children in establishing a good foundation for the development of English language skills? How can we provide an English-rich environment to support our children in learning English? Below are some common myths about the key to success in English learning and some suggestions for supporting our children in learning English more effectively.

1. Learning English Vocabulary made Easy through Flash Cards

Flash cards are handy educational tools that parents can easily come across in bookstores or toy shops. It is often claimed on the packaging of these flash cards that children’s vocabulary bank can be well expanded with the use of flash cards. However, can flash cards alone do this magic?

Vocabulary introduced through the use of flash cards is often learnt in isolation, we might need to take one step further in order to help our children to retain the vocabulary learnt. Helping learners make meaningful associations with other words already acquired will promote retention of vocabulary. The stronger and more stable the associations, the more firmly the word will be anchored (McNEIL, 2009). When introducing a new word, e.g. ‘strawberry’, to our children, we can help them to make meaningful associations with words or concepts that they are familiar with:

Examples
i) Making associations with words of the same category: Fruit: strawberry, orange, apple, banana
ii) Making associations with its nature / characteristics: Strawberry: fruit, red (colour), sweet (smell & taste), rough (its surface)

2. English Tutorial Classes can Provide our Children with Good Exposure to the English Language

A wide variety of English classes are available for preschoolers’ participation in the market. Should parents arrange these extra-curricular activities / tutorials for their children outside class time? A suitable amount of extra-curricular activities can help children develop their multiple intelligences including linguistic intelligence. However, it is counter-productive to impose too many on them as children may become resistant (EDB, 2010).

Language learning, including both mother tongue and English, should be
facilitated naturally & based on real-life experience (EDB, 2007). Parents are powerful role models of children (Stephens, 2007). If parents can take the lead to use English with their children in everyday life, this can definitely boost their children’s confidence in using the language and facilitate their understanding of how English is used in real-life situations. Other meaningful English learning experience include:

i) visiting libraries and bookstores rich in English resources and making good use of the story books as contexts for sharing thoughts and feelings with our children in English;

ii) going to age-appropriate English plays / musicals together with our children - a meaningful activity to engage our children in developing the skills in understanding the language and appreciating culture related to the language

3. **English e-Books are More Stimulating than English Print Books**

The availability of e-books, including those written in English, and the devices that support the reading of digital texts has made the use of e-books more accessible to the public. The popularity of e-books has surged due to the convenience brought about by the malleable features of the e-books.

Both print books and e-books play a significant role at different developmental stages of the learners. Children in their early childhood learn through different sensory experiences in their surroundings, e.g. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching (Gardner, 1981). Three-dimensional print books like touch-and-feel books are good resources that facilitate children’s sensory development and hand-eye coordination. E-Books, however, with their malleable e-features, e.g. hyperlinks to related topics of the e-book, serve as a good resource in supporting older children in project learning and self-directed learning at primary and secondary levels (CDC, 2014 & EDB, 2014).

To support our children in developing a good foundation for the development of English language skills, with the right strategies, we can definitely help integrate the fun elements of English learning into our children’s everyday life and make their learning journey meaningful and enjoyable.

**Writer:** Iris Hung

*Jake So (P Koala)*