

## The Missing Link: Language Processing Disorder by Dr. Kirstina Ordetx



Language processing describes the automatic process of transferring sounds into meaning and meaning into sounds. Language is a set of codes and rules that must be used simultaneously and interdependently. It is a very complicated process that we often take for granted because of the unconscious way in which we use language on a daily basis. Our pathways that are dedicated to language analysis are developed from infancy through practice and repetition. Because language processing is so complex, it is no wonder that it is prone to interference and breakdown. So, what exactly happens for children who have language processing problems?

Cindy Gaulin, author of *Language Processing Problems*, describes the breakdown in this way...“If one link in the language processing chain (such as word recognition or grammatical computation) moves too slowly, it causes a bottleneck in the flow of incoming information. Information is lost from the working memory before it can be analyzed. (In essence), the child has forgotten information before it was properly received.”

In addition, interference from multiple messages coming in at one time can use up working memory capacity and further complicate the processing of language. If the child is anxious or preoccupied by his thoughts, there may be further misunderstandings in what is heard. Messages may be muddled or as author Karen Foli described her own son’s experience with perceiving auditory information “like sound through water”.

Children who have a language processing disorder may experience difficulty with reading, spelling, writing, word retrieval, and expressing themselves (both oral and written). Other areas that may be affected include memory, attention, following directions, and general

learning. If students are expected to perform in a traditional, auditory learning environment, they may be at risk for growing frustration.

Students who have language processing disorder thrive in a learning environment that uses a *multi-sensory approach*. Understanding their strengths and personal learning style (visual, auditory, tactile-kinesthetic) is a first step in building confidence as a learner. Opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge through *project-based learning* are necessary to foster motivation and attention. Teachers who recognize and understand the student's processing challenges will incorporate strategies and modifications to help with compensation and grade-level maintenance. These modifications will include the use of visual strategies, summarizing techniques, graphic organizers, content preview/review, comprehension checks, cooperative learning with specific partner pairing, executive function training, and opportunities for rubric-driven assessment.

Suggested Reading:

*Language Processing Problems* by Cindy Gaulin

*Like Sound through Water* by Karen Foli