Webwords 7: An internet ABC of child language

Caroline Bowen

"Land of hoe-ope and Glor-ree,
MOTHER o-of the free,
How can wee-hee extol thee,
Who are bor-horn of … "
Ooh, sorry. Was that me singing?

Blame it on the phenomenal 2000 Olympics Opening Ceremony! Ever since the British team strode into the stadium I've had a bad case of wider sti-hill and wider, shall thy bow-hounds be set – drat, there I go again.

Don't you just hate getting a song on the brain? Cycling relentlessly. Looping unstoppably. And which is worse? To have the only two bars you know of *"I am the very model of a modern major general"* dominating your synapses, or being forced to dum-dum-de-DAR down the endless aisle of the *Wedding March* over and over and over again? Or *Achey Breaky Heart?* Or *Feelings?* Or … well anyway, be warned. While The Internet ABC of Child Language (http://members.tripod.com/Caroline_Bowen/webwords7abc.htm) provides a link for every letter of the alphabet, and suggests enough ways to say "good talking" for you never to need to utter those uninspiring words again … it may also infect you with one very catching song-on-the-brain! Among the 26 hyperlinks are three outstanding child language resources: the First Words Project, the Word Finding Web Site and the Symposium on Research in Child Language Disorders site.

First Words Project

Lured by the prospect of family-friendly handouts to use in day-to-day clinical practice with infants, toddlers, and their families, I nearly sprained my mouse finger so energetically did I point to the First Words Project site (**http://firstwords.fsu.edu/**). Believe me! Never has Adobe Acrobat Reader worked so hard, nor printers run so hot!

I knew it was going to be good when I realised that the project director was Amy Wetherby, PhD, CCC-SLP of Florida State University, famous, in speech pathology circles particularly, for her work in social and communicative profiles of children with autism/PDD and in the early identification of communication disorders in infants and toddlers.

The information on the First Words site reflects the two main purposes of the study: to evaluate an interdisciplinary and interagency collaborative early referral and evaluation process, and to provide a family-guided menu of service options for children in the 6 to 24 months age range.

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I was keen to know why part of the budget for this important project had been allocated to developing a web presence. "We have established the web site to disseminate information about the project, our findings, and our training materials," Wetherby responded. "We hope that the web site will be a resource for healthcare and childcare service providers and families to improve early identification of children with communication problems". And the site itself? Well, it is great, though still very much in its own infancy. A bit like Sydney, really: full of good things to do, and bound to be very special when it is finished.

Word finding web site

I put the same question to Dr Diane German, a professor in the Special Education Department at National-Louis University, Chicago, who has posted a site devoted to her research passion of word finding. She too has plenty of confidence in the Internet as an educational tool. "The site (**http://www.wordfinding.com/**) was developed to provide introductory information to professionals, parents and learners concerned about word finding difficulties. It directs visitors to the work of many authors who have contributed to the area of child word finding." The site includes the definition, characteristics and assessment of, and intervention for, word retrieval problems, and an eclectic links page. German, the author of the Test of Word Finding, second edition (TWF-2) among other publications detailed on the site, believes that teachers and language clinicians will find the assessment and the intervention sections invaluable, noting especially the help page (**http://www.wordfinding.com/help.html**) where professionals can seek advice relating to particular children.

SRCLD

The Symposium on Research in Child Language Disorders (SRCLD) site (**http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/srcld/index.htm**) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, home of the SALT (**http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/salt/index.htm**) and the Phonology Project (**http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/phonology/index.htm**) is one of those bits of the web that keeps drawing you back, whether to dream about participating in a symposium one day, to relive the experience of having done so, or to devour the abstracts archived there from 1955 through 1999.

The SRCLD was initiated in 1980 to provide a forum for the presentation of recent research and the discussion of current issues among established scholars and students in child language disorders. It is organised by a committee of doctoral students from several departments at the University of Wisconsin. Participants hear detailed presentations on significant advances, and can visit more than 60 poster presentations of contributed research papers over a two-and-a-half day period. Those who want to stretch their legs can walk or run in the annual Mildred Berry Distance Classic, inspired by a pioneer in the field of child language disorders. The Classic, as far as I know, and unlike the Olympic opening ceremony, has no musical accompaniment. "Land of hoe-ope and Glor-ree …" Aaaarhgh!