spark*/spark*EL Backgrounder

What is the Language of spark* and spark*EL?

The Language of spark* and spark*EL is a set of words and phrases chosen specifically to promote self-regulation. The words and phrases seek to activate the children's thinking and problem-solving. They also engage the children and help guide their thinking and actions. In the process, the Language of spark*/spark*EL advances their sense of self-efficacy (the belief that they have the ability to do whatever is asked of them).

The Language of spark*/spark*EL captures features that are more likely to encourage independence in the children. We know from Schunk's work on self-efficacy that children are more likely to try an activity or task when:

- they believe it might be useful – it has purpose

- the task isn't too difficult

- they get to try things out and don't get too much help

- the adults around them tell them they know they can do the task well and will enjoy it

All of these are reflected in and supported by the Language of spark*/spark*EL.

Goals of the Language of spark*/spark*EL

In order to activate thinking and promote self-efficacy, there are both cognitive and social-emotional goals in the Language of spark*/spark*EL. The three cognitive and three social-emotional goals are depicted in the diagram on the next page.

The first cognitive goal makes sure the children understand the meaning and purpose of skills and strategies we teach them. This way, they see that the skills have application to real life. In both spark* and spark*EL, words are carefully crafted to explain the purpose of all skills and strategies.

The second cognitive goal focuses on encouraging them to think on their own. The children's

spark, Self-regulation Program of Awareness and Resilience in Kids., is an innovative evidence-based program that teaches children how to manage and regulate their behavior, thinking and emotions. spark*EL is spark* for Elementary-school-aged children.*

Both programs are based on well-researched theory, current neurology, extensive clinical practice and spark-specific research.*

spark and spark*EL are comprehensive, practical and systematic and provides all information and resources needed to implement the program successfully.*

Find out more at http://spark-kids.ca

Cognitive goals
The child ...
- Understands meaning & purpose
- Thinks on his own
- Demonstrates his knowledge

Social-emotional goals
The child ...
- Feels competent
- Has a sense of control
- Shares participation

Goals of the Language of spark*/spark*EL (cont'd)

thinking and problem solving must be actively engaged when they work on self-regulation. In spark*/spark*EL, we encourage those implementing the program to ask the children open-ended questions about their work and then to take the time to allow them to respond.

The third cognitive goal is to make sure the children show or tell what they know and what they've learned. It's both an indication of how well we've taught and how well they've learned. In spark*/spark*EL, we ask questions like, "Wow, how did you do that?" and "What did you do to help yourself?"

The first of the three social-emotional goal is making sure the children feel competent. In spark*/spark*EL, we emphasize what the children do well and give them positive feedback about their responses and abilities.

The second goal is for the children to have a sense of control, a feeling that they can have some say in what happens. Children are asked for their suggestions and ideas and encouraged to express their opinions.

The third component is shared participation. In spark*/spark*EL, we help each child understand he's in a shared quest with the adult by using words such as "we" and "let's".

How do we use the Language of spark/spark*EL in our program?*

When a skill or strategy is introduced, its **meaning and purpose** are explained to the child. For example, we explain "We're going to organize our work. That way we make sure we've got everything we need."

Children are encouraged to **think on their own** and **demonstrate their knowledge** by asking them questions like, "What can you do to help yourself?"

Feelings of competence are reinforced whenever possible with statements like, "Look at how you … You really know how to help your brain." Another important distinction in the Language of spark*/spark*EL is talking about how the child's brain, hands, voice, body, etc. (and not the child himself) did something. It's subtle but important in that it preserves the child's sense of self while helping him understand he's in control of his body, brain, etc..

We engage the child in **shared participation** by saying, "We're going to …" so he understands it's a joint quest.