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REVIEW ARTICLE

USING PLAY AS STRATEGY FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS

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ABSTRACT

Infants learn new words by listening to the speeches they hear from parents and other adults. Even though not much is known about the degree to which these words are meaningful for young infants, the words still play a role in early language development. Words guide the infants to their first synaptic intuitions and in the development of the lexicon and it may help infants learn phonetic categories. The focus here is to glorify the intervention between cognition and language development through play during the first two years of the child's existence. The three major questions on the list of findings is: 1. How do babies learn? 2. How do babies develop a language through play? 3. How do the variables interact? Studying how infants learn and what they already know requires an understanding of the manner in which babies generalize information from one situation to another, develop abstract concepts and form categories which provide coherence to a baby's world. Studying how infants develop a language needs an understanding of how babies develop words for objects and actions. In understanding how language and learning interact in every day circumstance as it relates to infants, one needs to understand how babies learn words and how learning language helps to solidify what babies already know. Perhaps also how it leads babies to learn what they may not have learned otherwise.

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INTRODUCTION

Intellectual and cognitive development correlates with language development and is an important medium of thought. Language is commonly defined as an organized way of combining symbols in order to communicate. It may consist of words i.e. spoken words or gestures. Language development comes naturally but cannot grow without care and guide from adults. Parents and teachers have important roles to give care and guide that are valid for language development to thrive. Language development begins before birth from the 25th week of gestation. A growing baby's reflex in the womb is equivalent to the talking of an adult person. Efrat (2012) opined that a song sang by a mother when the child was still in the womb is later preferred by the child over an unfamiliar one in later life. The new born begins to recognize important sounds in the environment such as the voice of their mother or primary caretaker. The first sign of communication occurs when an infant learns that a cry will bring food, comfort and companionship. Play is where children invent and explain their language development. Dramatic play is ideally suited for language development. It is typical for children in the process of language development to mix languages. At a given time they might focus more on one language than another, but they decide the one to emphasize. It is also likely for children to use a variety of strategies for navigating a dual-language

environment. Baby language development becomes more obvious after birth to ascertain viability of the child. Parent as the first teachers of a child have the responsibility of helping the baby to develop a social language skill through talking, singing and playing (Tabers, 2008).

Language is such an important part of an infant's life during the first 18 months of life. Language development is critical during this time in the life of the baby. The ability to listen, understand and speak begins to develop by becoming aware of the developmental stages and providing a supportive environment for the child. The development of language will during this time affect the child's entire life as he/she begins to listen and try to imitate by communicating. At one month, babies can differentiate sounds like P and D. At six to eight months, infants begin to make cooing sounds which comprises vowel sounds and after eight months babbling begins which signifies consonants adding to the cooing sound earlier. From eight to ten months, the babbling begins to sound like conversation with accents and inflections of mimicking begins at this time. From the beginning of ten to twelve months, a receptive language begins. The baby begins to understand but cannot articulate the speech due to inability to manipulate their mouths yet. The baby has the ability to tell you what she needs through different cries. When you speak to the baby, she may smile, become quiet or make sound and may become startled if the sound she hears is louder than the familiar one. A reassurance comes when you explain yourself.

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The newborn begins to recognize important sounds in the environment such as the voice of their mother or primary caretaker. The first sign of communication occur when an infant learns that a cry will bring food, comfort and companionship. A child's vocabulary is the repository of his/her knowledge, whether in the form of concepts or words that refers to things in the child's world. If you want to nurture your child's mental growth, you should learn more about their language development.

Stages of Language Development

Children go through a number of different stages as language develops from the earliest stage of producing sound through being able to produce complex multi-word sentences.

1. Babbling

The first stage of language development is known as the pre-linguistic babbling or cooing stage. During this period which typically lasts from the age of three to nine months, babies begin to make vowel sounds such as ooooo and aaaaa. By five months infants begin to babble and add consonants sounds to their sounds such as ba-ba, ma-ma or da-da-da. Babies learn to say dadada before ma ma. Fathers like this because it gives the impression that the baby is acknowledging the father's unique presence as opposed to the mother's. However, the reality is that infants tend to say "dada" before "Mama" for the simple reason that "dada" is easier to learn. The most significant thing about repetitive babbling is that it consists of infants practicing making deliberate and precise sounds. They gain control of their lips, lungs and vocal chords and learning how to make them work together to produce distinctive sounds at will. As the infant engages in babbling, they make progress in the pragmatic aspects of verbal communication.

Social/Play in Babbling Stage

The child at this stage socializes through play by:

- Smiling and recognizing familiar people
- Responds to environmental sounds like phone, doorbell and speech
- Begins to show anger
- Responds to "look"
- Looks when name is called
- Begins to show fear or fright
- Begins to search for items that have been moved out of sight

2. Single Word

This stage is known as one-word or holophrase stage of language development. Around the age of 10 to 13 months, children would begin to produce the first real words. While children are only capable of producing a few single words at this point, it is important to realize that they are able to understand considerably more (Declose, Adassor and Extasor, 2007). Infants begin to comprehend language about twice as fast as they are able to produce it. From the age of 8 – 12 months exclamation such as "ooh" and early single consonants and vowel sounds appear. For example, ba, bee, da, ma, go etc. Non-repetitive babbling begins. Sentences like pitch changes while babbling and protowords are used while consistent

sound patterns are used to mean certain things. Example, ga, da, do, go, bee; example, a child may say "ba wa" every time he or she wants attention, not a real word by the child uses it consistently.

Social/Play: Children identify objects existence when not in sight and attempt to search for them. They are used in a semi-appropriate way. The objects are used in a fleeting way and sometimes they place and stuff random objects in a container.

3. Two Words

This stage begins around the 18th month when children begin to use two words sentences. These sentences usually consist of just nouns and verbs such as "where daddy"? and "puppy big". At this age, children speak a dozen of words or more. Toddlers can link two words together to form rudimentary sentences like "want ball" or "me up". Babbling could still be used to imitate adults conversation they may have been preview to. Since her vocabulary is still limited, a combination of simple words inflection and body language is used to get points across.

Social/Play: the child at this stage:

- Plays alone and talk to self
- Explores toys but no longer mouths them
- When offered toys the child makes a choice
- Episodes when they show different emotions e.g. happy, sad, fear.
- The child tries to get adults' attention on what they are interest in

4. Multi-words Sentences

Around the age of two, children begin to produce short multi-word sentences that have a subject and predicate. For example, a child may say "I love mummy" or "want more sweet". They begin to respond selectively to words. Children learn more new words as they grow. By now the child understands two-stages commands like get your socks and put them in the basket. The child notices sounds like doorbell or telephone ringing and may point or become excited and get you to answer or attempt to answer themselves. The baby has the ability to follow some directions and gestures, recognize names of people and objects, and points at them.

Social/Play: The child attempts to greet and wave goodbye, calling for someone to something and showing off as well.

Strategies to Nurture an Infants' Language Development

One of the most important ways to nurture and stimulate a child's language development is to speak with the child. The more parents and adults speak with children, the greater the opportunities for the children to learn vocabulary. At this stage, it is better to applaud what your toddler can say rather than try to correct mistakes. Berger (2000) posits that if your child says "want cacka" do not correct with no rather say "cracker" by saying here is cracker that is modeling the correct use of a word yourself helps kids learn faster than when a correction is done outright. This would help boost your toddler's self-confidence and eagerness to learn and try out new words. The following strategies increase the language vocabulary:

1. Engage the baby in a variety of activities; show her around the house by playing with different objects to introduce her to different shapes, textures and colours and make sure they are safe and would not choke the baby.
2. Read children's books to the child by introducing different concepts and do not worry if the child is not quite interested for your voice is a treat and the earlier you introduce the child to reading the better.
3. Introduce your baby to other children by joining a playgroup, go out to the park at regular time or just get together with family members, friends and neighbours who have kids. Let your child play with the kids, it helps develop language and social skills.
4. Talk to your baby whenever you can. Example when you feed or change him, explain what you are doing by talking about the process and responding to his reactions in full sentences as much as possible. This encourages communication.
5. Encourage your baby to imitate your actions through clapping your hands, throwing kisses and playing finger games like pat-a-cake.
6. Encourage babies to make vowel sounds like "ma" "da" "ba".
7. Reinforce attempts by maintaining eye contact, responding with speeches, imitating vocalization using different patterns and re-emphasize by raising the pitch of your voice.
8. Imitate the baby's laughter and facial expressions.
9. Talk to the baby as you bath, feed and dress the baby, talk about what you are doing and what you are up to.
10. Use gestures like waving goodbye to convey message.
11. Acknowledge the attempt by the baby to communicate
12. Explain in single words – joined in clusters of meaningful utterances - here is your mama. She loves you. Sweet baby.
13. Listen to children's music tapes or CDs together; it is a great way to have your child's listening skills and you may be surprised by how many words she picks up from the songs.
14. Your toddler has begun to realize that every toy, animal, person, thing has a name by 18 months. He or she relies on you for labels. She constantly points at pictures in books and asks "what's that?" or she just point repeatedly at the picture until you name it for her. She comprehends many more words than she can say easily and is filling the information away for later.

Motherese is used to nurture verbal communication in infants when high pitched tone of voice and short clear easy to understand sentences are required. Babies are especially attracted to these voices resulting in effective way to get their attention (Poll, 2011). Echoing amount to repetition of what a child says leading to feedback for the child and provoke mutual contagion and prepares them to produce the same sound when they need arises later on.

Conclusion

Children vary in their development of speech and language skills. However, they follow a natural progression or time table for mastering of the skills of language. Children who have trouble understanding what others say or difficulty in sharing their thought may have language disorder or impairment. The infant caregiver or mothers must understand that all the important guidelines for infants revolve around the domains of language, cognition, social, emotional and motor development. These researches provide across the domains emergent learning for children from birth to 18 months. Playing with toys and hiding a rattle under a blanket introduces speech development opportunity for babies and offers a natural way to make conversation and new vocabulary to babes. At about 18 months, the child begins to use some sound combination regularly this is a sign that your infant is using language in a purposeful way and is communicating with you. Acknowledgement of the baby's attempt to communicate by responding encourages language development at this stage.

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