

CHAPTER

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Swati Popat Vats

Eletelephony

*Once there was an elephant
Who tried to use the telephamt-
No! No! I mean an elephone
Who tried to use the telephone.
(Dear me! I am not certain quite
That even now I've got it right)
Howe'er it was, he got his trunk
Entangled in the telephunk.
The more he tried to get it free
The louder buzzed the telephee.
(I fear I'd better drop the song
Of elephop and telephong!)*

- Laura E Richards

Loris Malaguzzi (Reggio Emilia- Italy) rightly said, “Children have a hundred languages and we the school and society steal the ninety nine and then we ask the child to use only one language”. It is important for adults to learn how to communicate from children. Because children know 100 ways of communicating with you, but sadly we know only one- talking. What happened to raised eyebrows, smiling, hugging, biting your lips, are these not forms of communication? Remember, communication happens on two levels, one with words but 80% is with body language. Accept and understand both forms and life will be happier and easier. Before our children acquire language skills we focus on and accept their non verbal communications, but as soon as the child acquires language skills, parents stop focusing on the non verbal cues and this somewhere frustrates the child and makes the parent-child relationship more stressful.

During language development the child will do all of these-

Coo	Listen	Use actions	Speak	Pause mid sentence
Babble	Make sounds	Use words	Ask questions	Want to talk many things together
Imitate sounds	Read symbols	Use words incorrectly	Use short sentences	Make no sense to adults
Repeat words	Follow directions	Want to listen	Babble on and on	Talk

Children have two different types of language skills- *Receptive and Expressive language:*

1. Receptive language skills is language that a child can understand, this has nothing to do with how much the child is able to speak. Young children learn the meaning of words much before they are able to say these words. In receptive language development, the more the merrier, this means the more an adult talks to the child the more the child will understand and later be able to speak.
2. Expressive language skills are those that a child speaks. The child’s spoken vocabulary, and the grammar and syntax of language of the child.

So, it is imperative that the early childhood teacher and caregiver focus on the stimulation of both expressive and receptive language in daily interactions with children. Teachers and care givers can be trained in using a variety of language-stimulation techniques that will support receptive and expressive language skills development.

These techniques are, description, parallel talk, self-talk, expansion and expansion plus.

Description –

Description is a technique in which the teacher or caregiver narrates or describes what is going on by putting world labels on things. For example, if a teacher is distributing books, then she will say, “Here are some books for all of you and I am going to give them to you to read”. Or a teacher while putting on a raincoat for a child describes all the steps as they occur.

Parallel talk –

Parallel talk usually begins with “You.” In parallel talk a teacher uses a short sentence that focuses on what the child is doing presently. For example, “You’re playing

with the sand in the sand pit.” or “You are now opening your snack box and sitting with your friends.” Is parallel talk. Since the teacher is focusing on specific actions of the child it helps the child to put word labels to actions and objects and to connect the two and make sentences.

Self-talk –

Self-talk begins with ‘I’. In self talk a teacher uses short phrases that describe what a teacher or care giver is doing or is going to do. For example, a teacher might say to a child who is unable to open the snack box, “I am going to help you open your snack box”. Self-talk is especially important in the early years as young children like routine and if there is anything that deviates from that routine it tends to upset them. So self- talk kind of helps a teacher or caregiver prepare the child. It is especially important during transitions, so a teacher can say, “I am going to ask you to keep your blocks away in 10 minutes, so try and complete your designs.”

Expansion and Expansion Plus-

As children’s vocabularies grow, we notice that they tend to use a word to signify a whole sentence or use incomplete sentences. This is where Expansion and Expansion Plus are important techniques to be used by the teacher or care giver. In expansion the teacher takes what the child has said and expands on it, for example if the child says ‘blocks’ the teacher expands and says, ‘Do you want to play with those blocks?’ In expansion plus the teacher or caregiver adds to what the child has already said, so for example, the child says, ‘look crow’, the teacher or care giver uses expansion plus and says, ‘Yes, that is a crow and look, it is black in color’. Expansion and expansion plus help children put their thoughts and needs in sentences.

Language is a skill which is learnt by imitation. How did you learn your mother tongue? You listened to the people in your environment, then you imitated and were motivated by others and so language development took place. You made mistakes and you were corrected and that’s how your mother tongue was learnt. No grammar taught separately, no teaching of nouns and verbs separately, no sentences given to turn into active and passive. You lived, experienced and heard the language every day. That is the best way to learn any language.

Language is best learnt by doing the following in the classroom-

- Talk to the child.
- Expose him to songs and stories.
- Label everything in the environment.
- Choose age appropriate books- first picture books, then books with one word, then books with short sentences and then short stories.
- Use picture talk often in daily activities.

- Let him name objects.
- Do not make him repeat after you.
- Use songs that have chorus lines that children can participate in.
- Avoid using cassettes in which singers have a very heavy accent.
- Talk, talk, talk and talk to children.
- Listen, listen, listen and listen when they talk- do not prompt, interrupt or correct them when they are trying to talk.
- If you want to correct them, then after they complete their sentence, you can repeat the sentence in the correct way. They will learn by imitation.

Remember these points about language development in young children-

1. Children will talk only if they have something to talk about.
 - So give rich experiences and activities to the child every day, something novel, done in a unique and creative manner; this will get him excited and want to make him talk about his activity or experience.
2. If you correct kids while they are talking then they may forget what they were going to say, and this can frustrate children.
 - Please understand what the child is going through when he is learning English, the second language (his first language is his mother tongue and hence English is his second language) which in most of our schools is the ‘first language’. The child thinks in his mother tongue, he experiences something that he wants to talk about, he is trying to translate his thoughts into English, and that takes time, so he pauses after a word or repeats some words again and again(I.....I.....I.....wentwent.....water). Now if you interrupt him by saying, “Okay, where did you go? To the supermarket?” You have completely misunderstood him and now he is on another track, that of answering your question. So he loses his train of thought and suddenly communication in English becomes a very difficult task for him. Instead, you could have waited patiently for him to finish speaking and then could have said- “Okay, so you *want* to drink water.”
3. Since children learn by imitation, the more they hear the better will they be able to talk.

Listening is a very important skill to language development. Some dos and don'ts for early care givers-

- Do not keep repeating instructions.
- First get the child's attention and then give the instruction.
- Talk in a soft, clear voice.

- Don't nag, yell or be shrill.
- Be clear about your pronunciations.
- Never make children repeat the sentence after you. For example, if the child said- 'I went water', do not say, 'No dear, it is I want water, now say it.' Instead just say, 'Oh, you want water.' Listening to you will automatically teach him the right pronunciation.

4. Avoid using unnecessary questions.

Questions like, 'Are you going to eat your food or not?' in which there is no choice or actually no real choice, tend to confuse children and then they feel frustrated when you do not do what they answered. Sometimes many teachers ask children, 'Do you want to listen to a story?' and children may say 'no' but the teacher still continues with the story, this irritates children and they feel let down. Because your question made them feel that they have a choice and when they opted for the choice, you still forced them to do what you want. Isn't it frustrating?

5. Give requests and directions positively; start a sentence with a positive and not a negative-

'Walk slowly' would be a better way of instructing, instead of saying, 'Don't run'. Similarly, instead of saying, 'Don't sit there', it is better to say, 'Let's sit here as you may get hurt on that stool'. Yes, it requires longer sentences and sometimes we do not have the patience, but imagine if your world was always filled with, 'no', 'don't', 'never'? It is important to give instructions to children that also explain the reason why you do not want them to do the particular thing or act. Just telling them not to do it, is not enough.

6. Avoid repeating your instructions.

Repetition is good for children, but the repetition should not be boring or it becomes drill and then children tend to switch off and ignore the message. When you tend to repeat yourself too much, then it also teaches children that you are not serious the first time and they will learn to listen to you only after you have repeated the instruction a couple of times. So if you want your children to listen to you then get the attention first – eye contact is very important for good listening and once you have their attention, give your instruction to the point. If you feel you want to repeat, then questioning would be a better way to repeat.

7. Do not talk too loudly.

I believe that inside us are an angel and a devil. The angel talks very softly and the devil shouts. So if the child is surrounded by adults, who talk loudly and shout all the time, then the child learns to listen to loud voices and hence he will always listen to the inner

devil. But if we surround the child with soft voices, soothing calm voices, then he will hear the voice of the angel and it will guide him to make the right decisions. (Basically the devil is a metaphor for the voices of temptation that he will hear lifelong around him and the angel is a metaphor for his inner voice of conscience)

8. Teach children how to listen to and comprehend instructions.

For this I have successfully used the step method; many teachers and parents that I have taught it too, find it extremely successful.

- At age one, your child should be able to follow one step directions like - Come here, Sit here, etc
- At age two, he should be following two step directions like- Bring the ball and come here, etc
- At age three, it's time for three step directions like - Go to the table, pick up the spoon and bring it here.
- At age four, he should be able to follow 4 step directions and by age 5 and forever at least 5 step directions. Because when he comes to high school, the teacher uses a lot of directions in her conversation. Children, who are unable to listen, tend to ask their neighbor and get labeled as talkative and the child, who tends to ask the teacher as to what to do, gets labeled as a baby, always requiring help. So to make his life easier, start playing direction games at home. (Also important, how many step directions are you able to follow?)

Sing songs for language development-

Singing songs, reading stories to children, all help in developing listening skills. Also important is to let children listen with their 'ears' and not their 'eyes'! Do not translate all your instructions into actions, then they will look at your actions and understand what you are saying, they will not listen. Always wait for the children to stop talking before you give instructions, do not shout instructions, sing the instructions if you have to-

Twinkle twinkle little star
Time to wind up, where you are.
Time to put your toys away
Time to tidy up the class
Twinkle twinkle little star.

How does drawing help language development?

Drawing is a significant form of communication that can express the child's response to everyday experiences and the world more readily than words. Important

experiences can find expression in drawing and perceptions are sharpened. Adults can help by displaying a positive attitude towards their drawing. Ask the child if he would like to tell you/talk about his drawing but do not push or nag if the child is reluctant. Be sympathetic and interested. It is more appropriate to say 'Tell me about your drawing.' than to ask 'What is it?' You can even write down/document the child's responses/ideas as the child shares them with you.

Planning a language program for the early childhood classroom-

For a meaningful language program I find it better to keep in mind the teaching maxim of whole to part or simple to complex.

Language, reading and writing are learned as children have creative and meaningful experiences with language. (Songs, stories etc)

Then they will be aware of words. (Do an activity like word naming or picture naming or match the pictures)

Next, they will become aware that words are made up of sounds (here do the activity of syllable clapping- beautiful- beau-ti-ful, a clap for every syllable, they can practice clapping for the syllables in all their names) then they will become aware that letters have sounds and here the teacher needs to introduce letters and letter names.

Thus, we go from the whole (story or message) to the sentences, then to the words that make up the sentences, and finally to the letters and the sounds they make, and not the other way around.

When designing your own language program, it is important to keep in mind that different children have different learning styles- looker, listener and mover.

So language and even 'phonics' is taught best if done through the four avenues of the brain-

Sight, Sound, Speech And Writing-

- Students see the symbol
- Hear the teacher say the sound
- Say the sound or repeat it
- Write the symbol

The road to language and phonics is given below-

- See
- Hear
- Say
- Write

1. See-

- Get children to see letters everywhere- labeling, interactive charts, Glenn Doman words.

2. Hear-

- Rhymes
- Syllable clapping

Nursery rhymes

“One of the best indicators of how well children will learn to read is their ability to recite nursery rhymes when they walk into kindergarten. The ability to recite nursery rhymes is considered an indicator of phonemic awareness”.

The best way to teach songs and rhymes to preschoolers is:

First – Sing the whole song for the kids. Children need to hear language in its entirety.

Echo game - Now sing one portion of the song and have the children echo (repeat) it back.

Follow me- Now sing a small portion of the song and stop and motivate the children to sing the next line etc. Mistakes in pronunciation etc are possible at this stage. Please do not stress on the mistakes.

3. Say-

There are two types of sounds in English. One sort makes a pure continuous sound, e.g. ssssssss, fffffff, rrrrrrr, mmmmmm, nnnnn, vvvvvvvv. The others have a ‘schwa’ on the end of them. The ‘schwa’ is like an ‘uh’ sound on the end of the letter sounds, e.g. ‘Bb’ (Please corroborate – have put as it did not make sense otherwise) cannot be said without a schwa-‘buh’. The continuous sounds can be said with or without the schwa.

1. Hence the right mouth movements and breathing are very important for phonics.
2. How do we breathe?
3. Intercostal diaphragmatic method
4. Breathing for voice production-
5. The diaphragm expands- intercostal muscles pull the ribcage out- the bronchial tubes take in air through the trachea
6. Then the exact opposite – the air on the way out strikes the vocal cords and sound is released
7. Sounds resonate because of the cavities in the chest, mouth and head.
8. The right breathing and the right mouth movements lead to good articulation.
9. Good articulation is the right pronunciation of consonants.

10. Consonants are those groups of sounds which are made in different parts of the mouth.

11. Which parts of the mouth are used?

- Lips
- Tongue
- Tip of the teeth
- Back of the mouth
- Front of the mouth
- Velum in the back of the mouth
- Teeth ridge
- Soft palate
- Back of the tongue
- Tip of the tongue

4. Write-

Important to choose your particular writing style (font) and stick to the same throughout. For writing it is important to first concentrate on formation, then size. So give him a plain paper and let him copy the letter, for the child to copy a letter first show him by using your finger and drawing the letter in the air, let him do the same, then do it on sand and simultaneously use sand paper letters for them to trace and get the 'feel' of the formation of the letter. Children should know how the letter 'feels' and then they will be able to guide the pencil accordingly. All this while it is important to note that the child's finger muscles should be developed and eye hand co-ordination should be in place.

Some important points I need to mention here-

Along with every school's (and parents) enthusiasm to be 'English speaking', came the pressure for children to speak in English sooner and better, without regard to what was developmentally appropriate for young students. Thus the teaching of reading was pushed into pre primary with very few adaptations.

- So for seeing- children must be given reading readiness exercises of same and different, to be able to identify the differences in the letter formations.
- Say- the teaching of phonics, sadly is being done even before the children have learnt to speak, hence articulation is not proper, also one cannot teach the English letter sounds in the mother tongue! So many schools give out sheets with the letter and its translation in Hindi (saying it will help the parents). It is no help to the parent but makes the child pronounce English in the mother tongue!
- If writing of the letters is being done with the sounds then initial writing patterns and writing rules should be clear to all children.

- “For effective language development, a child needs a way (form), a reason to communicate (function), and content (something to communicate about)”.
- “First word combinations appear between 18-20 months; and around age two, children start using sentences, although the first phrases are usually verb/noun combinations such as “me go” or “go bye”.
- While teaching vocabulary- first nouns, then verbs and then adjectives and the others.

Language is a means to communication and all learning is based on communication, so please see that the child is comfortable with the language, only then will learning take place.

A question often asked is by which age the teacher should speak only in English to the children. I would say in the initial stages, speak in the language of understanding of the children and repeat the sentence in English. After a year speak only in English, but allow the children to answer in any language. Another year later, motivate them to speak and answer in English, but not by penalizing them or ridiculing them for not speaking in English. Many schools fine the children for speaking in Hindi, and Hindi is our national language! What are we teaching our children by acts like these?

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