

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Considerations:

1. Children go through a sensitive period* for language learning around 7 months in utero to 6 years of age.
2. Prepare the language environment.
3. Establish routine times for language.
4. Use rich language when communicating.

*A sensitive period is like a 'window of opportunity'. A specific limited period of time, like a bright light shining on a particular aspect of the child's development. They are universal and occur in all children all over the world. Contemporary researchers have found that a brain fast mapping of names occurs only when a child is on the verge of the vocabulary spurt (Honig, 2007).

Montessori (1949) stated that language not only fuses humans "into groups and nations, but it is the central point of difference between the human species and all others. Language lies at the root of that transformation of the environment that we call civilisation...A curious thing to note is how few sounds are needed to make up so many words. These can be combined in such an immense number of ways that the words we can make from them are endless. This sound may precede or follow that, some are voiced, others unvoiced, some are spoken with the lips closed, others with the lips open. But more astonishing, even, than that is the power of memory to recollect so vast a quantity of combinations and their meanings. Again, there is the question of thought, which has to be expressed by grouping words together into sentences. The words in these sentences have to be arranged in a particular order. They cannot just be jumbled together like pieces of furniture in a room. There are rules which guide the hearer as to the intentions of the speaker. To express a thought about something, the speaker must use its names and near this put the adjective. The subject, verb and object, all have their proper positions in the sentence. To get the words right is not enough; their order is equally important" (p. 108).

Language and movement tend to develop along parallel lines and when one of them starts to plateau the other takes off. This is due to the amount of neurological development that is required for both. The adult is the main language giver at this age and studies show that girls tend to talk earlier than boys as girls mature earlier and their brains devoted to language becomes specialised sooner (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Opasek, 1999).

Communication: Adults do "not teach her child language. It develops naturally, like a spontaneous creation. Also, its development follows fixed laws which are the same in all children. The various periods of the child's life show same stages in the level reached—a thing repeated for children all over the world, regardless of whether language be simple or complex" (Montessori, 1949, p. 111).

Music: Every human group loves music. Each creates its own music, just as it does its own language. Each group responds to its own music by bodily movements and accompanies it by words. The human voice is a music and words are its notes, meaning nothing in themselves but to which every group attributes its own special meaning... this means; none of the animals have music and dancing, but the whole of mankind, in all parts of the world, knows and makes up dances and songs.

References:

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Birth to 6 months spoken language development

“If we watch the production of the different sounds, we find that they also follow laws. All the sounds that occur in words are produced by the use of certain mechanisms. Sometimes the nose acts in unison with the throat, at others the muscles of the tongue and of the cheeks have to be coordinated... we can only use the machinery of our own language; no one but a child can construct their own machinery and so learn to perfections as many languages as they hear spoken about them. This is not conscious work. It is something done at an unconscious level in the mind” (Montessori, 1949/1988, p. 101). Remember that language develops fully when it encounters few obstacles and adults socially interact with babies. Adults must know what powerful oral language boosters they can be for children.

How can adults help: give child undivided attention, look in their eyes, wait for child to formulate phrases, do not correct word pronunciations (frustrates children), from time to time nod and say ‘uh huh’ (child knows you are listening). Show you are really interested.

Research demonstrates that the ability to hear and produce rhymes is a positive predictor of success in learning to read. Playing games with pantomime is a great technique for helping children search for a rhyme, e.g. We have a big cat who wears a? Singing songs with rhymes as poetry adds zest to oral language learning. Children love onomatopoeia, when words represent the sound referred to, as in the ‘buzz of the bees’. Young children love humour which helps sharpen thinking skills and adds zest to learning. Reading aloud to a child enhances oral language skills.

Bilingualism: research shows that if a child learns a new language prior to about 10 years of age, then the child succeeds in pronouncing words like a native speaker. Babies are easily able to learn languages. Some children do frequent code-mixing when brought up in two languages. Sometimes mixing languages to give responses- generally have one speaker use one language, another speaker uses another language.

- Birth to 3 months:** Baby turns at sound of voice – child must naturally hear the sounds in use among their own people before they can repeat them...hence the sounds register in their mind, these sounds influence the movements the infant needs to make when they start ‘talking’.
The ears do not respond to every sound in universe, Montessori argues that the ears (hearing centre) are specially designed for the capture of language - of words and speech.
Dialogues also include loving gazing into eyes, breast/bottle feeding and nursing style of sitting, rocking and singing.
Absorbs the sounds in the environment.
Communicative social interactions and games.
- 3 to 4 months:** Baby starts looking intensely at speaking mouth.
Coos with throaty, open vowel sounds for communicative social interactions. These interactions send cascades of rich chemical and electrical impulses through brain neurons, stimulating infants’ early interest in oral conversations. The words heard by the infant set in motion a complicated mechanism by which they make the movements needed to reproduce the sounds and words.
- 5 to 6 months:** Says first syllable and repeats this sound. Starts producing consonant (basic speech sound) clusters, such as ‘dlth’ and vowel combinations. Easiest consonants are made by placing lips together, e.g., ‘mm’, ‘bb’. Easiest phonemes (sounds we produce in speaking) made by pressing tongue against upper palate, e.g., ‘d’, ‘n’. Then infant combines consonant with vowel.

6 to 12 months spoken language development.

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Toddlers omit the little functional words that adult speech requires, such as ‘a’ or ‘the’ so their talk is often called ‘telegraphic speech’. The first symbolic concepts toddlers learn are related to the personally important people, events, and activities in their lives. Children begin to attach labels or words to those concepts. First words are often nouns that represent familiar aspects of their environment, such as food, body parts, clothes, toys, animals, people.

Around 10 months: Becomes conscious language has meaning and a purpose.

6 to 12 months: The baby absorbs the language around them and formation of babbling. By end of first year in the depths of his unconscious they have understood and at the level they have reached of consciousness, they have created speech.
By six to nine months, your baby will start to recognise the use of certain phrases in context. For example, when you say ‘bye-bye’, your baby might wave. They will also start to turn to familiar voices across a room and will probably begin to respond to their own name. Towards the end of the first year, your baby will have built up a small vocabulary of words that they understand. It is important to remember that this often occurs even before your baby says their first word.
Around 12 months the infants first intentional words said.
Infants combine sounds into longer sequences, vowels like ‘ah’ with consonant-type or hard sounds like ‘d’. They may make single sounds initially or repeat some sounds such as ‘dada, gaga’.

Play sound games when sitting facing your baby so they clearly see your face/mouth.
Develop baby’s listening skills through bells or hand clapping and talking to them.
Respond to their cries by touching and holding them or by singing and talking to them and read books with them.

1 to 3 years spoken language development.

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If a child neither understands nor says any words by 18 months, rarely babble, do not respond to a whisper, showing little interest in communications further help should be sought.

12 to 18 months child begins to understand sense expressed in language:

- Baby talk—prevalence of vowels and interjections
- Next few months leads to explosion of words and grammar.

By 19 months children seem to adopt one of two distinct strategies for learning oral language, both of which are successful. (Nelson, 1981) ‘referential’ – children acquire large vocab of nouns early, naming objects, use lang happening around them (parents speak about objects and name them more). ‘expressive’ – children tend to use pronouns and repeat many formulaic phrases (parents talk more about persons and social scenarios).

Around 18 months toddlers often demonstrate an explosive period of vocabulary growth:

- Nouns and phrases formed without grammar.
- Infants will call an animal by the sound the animal makes, such as ‘quack-quack’.
- Infants may know words for one type of creature to cover many others, so ‘doggie’ covers, cow, sheep, pig, etc..

Around 21 months child know phrases of a few words.

21 months to 2 years: Sudden word increase is explosion development to hundreds of nouns, prepositions, verbs, and adjectives.

2 years: Completion of vocabulary: prefixes, suffixes, conjunctions, verbs, conjunctions, adverbs

2 to 2 ½ years: Words joined to express thoughts and a variety of phrases increases rapidly. Coordinated, subordinated phrases with the subjunctive.

Play sound games at any time. Talk and read books with them.