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Language and Cognitive Development

Language growth rapidly increases during early years in school, and it only increases as each year passes by. Young children are going from having very little vocabulary and understanding to words, to having hundreds of words in their vocabulary by the end of the first few years of school. Language development and growth not only helps their overall development, but helps their social development and help them express their cognitive development and thoughts. Cognitive development is also greatly increasing during these early years, and language is crucial in order for children to express what they are thinking or what they are trying to tell people. Without language, people would get frustrated because they cannot find a way to communicate with others. There are many aspects to language development that are important which include alphabet knowledge and recognition, phonological awareness, and the ability to rhyme. These three aspects work together to develop language skills while putting meaning behind the language that is being spoken. By the time children reach kindergarten and first grade, most are capable of recognizing most letters of the alphabet, constructing simple sentences, basic rhyming words, and being able to articulate their thoughts and be able to construct and write simple sentences as well.

Children are more likely to experience success when learning to read when they are exposed to the alphabet and when it is familiar to them. “Correctly identifying all of the letters of the alphabet is one of the first steps in learning to read,” (Ehlert 2008 p.243). By children understanding the basics of the alphabet and how to distinguish between letters, this allows children to understand the basics of pronunciation and letter recognition. These things help children learn to not only to read, but to express these letters and sounds verbally. A letter recognition study was done with children “which consisted of presenting letters to a student at the rate of about one every 3 seconds,” (Ehlert 2008 p.244). At this time the child was to verbally repeat the letter that is shown, and if they recognize it, then it goes into the known category, and if it is not recognized, then it goes into the unknown category. This is a good activity that is done in order to create a basic understanding of what children already know about the alphabet, and what they need to work on. Repetition is super important in this, and assisting children in the beginning while they try to match the letter to sounds will help them learn and memorize it. It is important to give children praise when they are recognizing letters, and when they do not recognize them, encourage them to achieve it. It is significant to teach the alphabet in a consistent pattern, and not throw the whole alphabet on the students at once. A good way to start teaching is to teach them about their name, because it is something that they know by heart (verbally) and it is going to be important to know how to understand, read, write and know their whole life. Alphabet knowledge is also so crucial for children in the beginning stages of school such as preschool and kindergarten because language alone does not teach a child how to read or write. “Preschool and kindergarten students with poor knowledge of letter names and sounds are more likely to struggle with learning to read and be classified as having reading disabilities,” (Piasta 2010 p.8). To prevent this, children must be exposed to understanding what each letter symbolizes, and how to recognize those letters and differentiate between all letters in the alphabet, whether they are uppercase, lowercase, cursive, or any other type of fonts or logos that are displayed. One of the first things that children learn about the alphabet is the alphabet song. Children learn this early on in life. Once children start to see actual print of each letter, they start to hear letters and the names of the letters, and they begin to understand the similarities between the songs they sing and the shapes that they see in each letter. Letters are everywhere in the world and in everyday environments. If children do not learn how to recognize the letters in the alphabet, they will struggle later on in life when learning to read and being able to articulate those words and letters.

As children begin to recognize letters in the alphabet, they begin to connect the letters that they see with the sounds they hear when each letter is pronounced. This is where phonological awareness takes importance in language development. “Letter name and letter sound knowledge predict subsequent literacy skills independently of other important predictors including phonological awareness and oral language,” (Piasta 2010 p.8).Phonological awareness is the sensitivity to the sound structure of language. The English language is mostly written out sound by sound. Without phonological awareness, children will struggle trying to differentiate between letters and words. Good phonological awareness skills make learning to read, write, spell, and verbalize words a lot easier. Children need to have a firm understanding of each sound that is in their spoken language in order to understand them enough to use in a written system or to read aloud. Together as a team, alphabet recognition and phonological awareness both help the child’s language development grow rapidly. Ways for children to understand phonological awareness and be exposed to it is to read books aloud, or play with basic sounds of each letters. Use activities that provide practice with onsets and rhymes. This provides awareness about individual letter sounds and about letter patterns. It is important to know that speech is made up of small sounds, and each word has to be broken down in order to understand it as a whole. Children become aware of syllables and they eventually are able to recognize each sound in words.

As children begin to understand phonological awareness and be able to use it when recognizing the alphabet and letters, they begin to use rhyming words to help them see similarities between words. Children are able to combine consonants together to create sounds, which leads into creating rhymes between words. When children have the ability to divide words into individual sounds and syllables, and blend these sounds together, they are one step closer to successful reading. Rhyming is such an important aspect to language development because the child now can distinguish between letters and sounds. They are taking these letters and sounds to a more complex level by finding or making up similar words or sounds. For example, if a child understands the sounds to the word CAT, and they also understand the sounds to the letters B and M, they can replace the C in CAT and create new words like BAT and MAT. Children begin to create little songs and rhyming schemes that are fun and help them understand words and sounds. This helps their language development greatly because knowing one simple word and multiple letter sounds can help them expand their vocabulary rapidly. When reading books, there are a lot of rhyming patterns that are printed throughout the story, which allow children to recognize similarities and help them learn to read words that may not be as familiar. Although one word may not be something that they are familiar with, they can read it because they recognize that it is a similar word to a word that they already know. Not only does rhyming help language and reading skill, but it also is very fun for children to rhyme. They begin to create songs or silly slogans that stick in their brains. Children do not realize that rhyming is learning. They see it as playing or having fun, and children are more willing to spend a lot of time rhyming and learning about rhyme because it seems fun to them to make up new words and sounds. “As the basic element of many written languages, the alphabet—its forms, the names of those forms, and the sound units that the forms represent—is considered of prime importance in the development of reading skill,” (Evans 2009 p1824). Being able to understand the alphabet, the sounds of each word, and be able to rhyme and learn new words from rhyming really helps the child succeed in reading, writing, and language.

Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and rhyming are all major aspects to reading and language development. Without these, it is hard to be successful when learning language, reading, writing, or even teaching any of these to young children. It is important to make reading, writing, and language fun to learn, and it takes patience and a lot of repetition. Being able to recognize and distinguish between letters in the alphabet sets a child up to understand sounds and syllables in each word. Phonological awareness teams up with alphabet knowledge to create words and sounds, and understanding the structure of language. Once sounds and syllables are understood, it is implemented into verbally expressing letters and sounds, and eventually rhyming new words together to learn the basics of reading and word similarities. Rhyming is typically a fun part of reading and language, and so it is important to implement that when teaching children to read, write, and verbally express language being taught. Overall, these three things are great factors to successful language development. If these strategies are implemented in daily learning, children will likely be successful in reading, and it will be fun for them as well.

Works Cited

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