Teachers as Communication Partners: Why What You Say Matters in Children’s Development

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Today’s Talk

- Introduction
- Why partners are critical to children’s development of communication
- Top 10 Things Teachers Can Do
- Making the Top 10 Possible
- Small talk makes big differences
Part of the Peabody/Vanderbilt Tradition

• Four decades of innovation in early intervention
• Research conducted with the goal of improving the lives of children and families
Communication Requires Partners

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Communication is Learned in Transactions with Partners

• Children learn language in every day interactions with their parents and caregivers
• Caregivers are affected by the child and the child is affected by the caregiver
• When children have communication delays, interactions between children and their partners are different
All Children are Communicating
Children Are Unique in What They Bring to Language Learning

- Imitation
- Auditory memory
- Efficiency
- Person
- Object
- Activity
- Rate
- Form
- Functions
- Transparency to partners
- Sensory Access to Input
- Intelligibility
- Fluency
Hart & Risley (1995)
Parents are children’s first language teachers

- Model what to say and how to say it
- Talk about what the child is interested in
- In the beginning, they respond to everything the child communicates…. As if it were the most important thing ever communicated
- Match complexity of their language to the child’s language skills
Ideal conditions for learning to talk

- A responsive partner
- Joins child in his activities and play
- Models words and phrases that match the child’s meaning
- Expands what the child communicates with new words
- Asks questions to gain new information from the child
Childcare Teachers as Communication Partners

• Second only to parents in influencing children’s language development
  • As much as 60% of children’s waking hours are spent in child care
    • 2000 hours year
• High quality child care influences language, social and future academic outcomes
• Quality of child caregiver relationship influences behavior, social emotional development
Children in Your Care

• Between the ages of 12 and 60 months
  o Learn an average of 4000 words
  o Learn to use language to negotiate the social world
  o Develop the foundations for reading, writing and math based on their language experience
  o Experience both brain growth and fundamental organization of the cognitive capacity for language and thought
  o Begin to define themselves and their experiential world through their understanding and use of language

  o These critical events in development occur because of the social and linguistic input they receive from their caregivers
  o The quality and impact of these developmental events is directly linked to the quality of interactions and the quality of talk with caregivers
We can make the process of communication easier for parents and caregivers; we can make the language outcomes for children better.
KidTalk

- Naturalistic language teaching strategy designed to teach communication skills in everyday conversational interactions

- More than 50 studies have investigated the effects of KidTalk and related naturalistic teaching procedures on children’s communication development
KidTalk : Enhanced Milieu Teaching

• Based on two assumptions
  o Communication is learned in interactions with partners
  o Changing partner support for communication can change child outcomes

• Goals
  o Improving social communication and linguistic outcomes for children
  o Understanding the conditions in which communication and language are learned

• Program of research
  o Broad population of toddlers and preschool children: ID, DS, ASD, language delayed, children at-risk due to poverty, children with CLP, children with behavior challenges
  o Parents and teachers as partners and participants in research
  o More than 10 research and demonstration projects funded by NIH, Department of Education, Head Start, and private foundations.
• Evidence based practices to strengthen communication, to teach adults, to design environments
• Systematic evaluation of the effectiveness, acceptability, and feasibility of research based practices
• Alligning with families and teachers in their everyday environments to translate research in to practice

KidTalk
Core Values
KidTalk Uses Developmental Principles to Support Child Communication Development

- Developmental Principles
- Child Communication
- Intervention Strategies

Goal: Create the environmental conditions for learning to communicate
The Heart of KidTalk

- Teaching partners to use specific strategies to facilitate children’s communication
  1. Arranging the environment (EA) to set up an interactive context between the caregiver and child
  2. Noticing and responding to child communication
  3. Modeling new communication forms
  4. Prompting functional expressive communication
  5. Teaching language in contexts where communication is needed now,
  6. Teaching to insure generalization across contexts

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Top 10 Evidence Based Things Caregivers Can Do to Improve Language Outcomes for Young Children

1. Be available for communication
   1. Child’s level
   2. Eye contact and touch

2. Listen, notice and respond
   1. If you can only do one thing: RESPOND
   2. Talk about what the child is saying or doing

3. Mirror and Map
   1. Do what the child is doing
   2. Label your shared actions
Top 10 Evidence Based Things Caregivers Can Do Improve Language Outcomes for Young Children

4. Create a context for communication
   Toys and activities children prefer
   Small spaces with teachers seated

5. Model talk at the child’s level
   What would Susie say
   Child words plus 2-3 words

6. Expand what the child says
   Add content words, use a sentence
Top 10 Evidence Based Things Caregivers Can Do to Improve Language Outcomes for Young Children

7. Take turns; make it a conversation

8. Use questions for choice, problem solving, and thinking

9. Introduce sophisticated vocabulary in meaningful contexts

10. Prompt new or elaborated language when the child requests
How to Find Time, Space and Motivation for the Top 10

• Create a schedule that includes times for talk
• Zone activities and staff
• Embed talk in activities
• Join children in their play
• Build relationships with children
• Set team expectations that emphasize talking and learning language
• Take data on your meaningful conversations with kids
Four Additional Evidence-Based Strategies to Improve Language in Preschool Children

- Use Dialogic reading strategies
  - Reading plus prompts and feedback
  - Completion prompts
  - Recall prompts
  - Open-ended prompts
  - Wh- prompts
  - Distancing prompts

- Extend the conversation to 4-5 turns
  - Comments
  - Turn abouts
  - Challenging questions: What if, how,

- Jump start a conversation with peers

- Bootstrap language, reading, writing
  - Phonological awareness
  - Site words
  - Narrative
Young Children with Language Impairment

- Language development is one of the strongest predictors of children’s long term academic and social outcomes.

- Young children with typical cognitive development but significant delays in language at age 2 may be at risk for later development.
  - About 60% of children with receptive delays and normal range cognition have typical language by age 7;
  - Only 25% of children with receptive and expressive delays have typical language outcomes (Law et al., 2000).

- In the absence of universal screening for language development, many pediatricians recommend wait and see rather than early intervention for this population.
## Dancing in the Dark

### Typical children
- Easy to read social cues
- Follow a dependable developmental trajectory
- Interested in partners and objects
- Use multiple strategies to learn language
- Quickly move through developmental stages

### Children with communication delays
- May be difficult to determine child intentions
- Slower, possibly disrupted developmental trajectory
- Vary in social and object interest, play, daily living skills
- Fewer strategies, less well developed
- May move slowly through developmental stages
Child Number of Different Words

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MCDI
T: 264  
C: 215  
D = 0.4

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Reduction of Language Delays

Children with scores in the average range on the PLS-4

Odds ratio: 2.391 (.98, 5.82) p = .05
Relative risk = 1.40 (.99, 1.97)
What You Say Matters

• Child care teachers are important partners in children’s language development
  o Building brains
  o Building communication
  o Building future social, educational and cognitive foundations
  o Preventing some language delays

• KIDTALK is an effective, evidence based communication strategy that can be used in classrooms by teachers


Appreciation!

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