

PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

**Early Childhood Development
A Multicultural Perspective
Jeffrey Trawick-Smith
Sixth Edition**



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Child Guidance

The Naming Game

As infants acquire language, they become eager to learn the names of objects and persons around them. “Wha dat?” (“What’s that?”) is a very common question as early as age 1. Caregivers can take advantage of this fascination with words by initiating a naming game to promote vocabulary growth. The game can be played in distinct phases, beginning in the first half year of life and continuing through toddlerhood.

In phase 1, an adult simply names objects that a baby sees or holds, using an exaggerated intonation (e.g., “That’s a ball” or “Look, you have a bear. It’s a bear”). This phase can be initiated long before a baby can even speak words. In phase 2, which begins after a child is speaking one-word utterances, the adult introduces the “What’s that?” question. As the child sees or handles objects, the adult says, “Look! What’s that?” then pauses to allow the baby to answer. Initially, the baby may have little to say. So, after a brief wait, the adult answers the question: “That’s a book.” Over time, the child will begin naming objects, particularly

those that are very familiar (e.g., “Book!”). The adult now restates the word with much enthusiasm: “Right! That’s a book!”

Phase 3 begins when babies start asking for the names of things on their own. At this point, the adult gives over much of the regulation of the game, including the question asking, to the child. For example, a child, holding out a jonquil she has just snatched from a vase on the dining room table, asks, “Dat?” The adult names the object for the baby with enthusiasm (e.g., “Oh, that’s a flower”) while at the same time quickly rescuing the flower and returning it to its vase. Over time, these questions increase in frequency, and the game can become quite exhausting for adults. Children, in contrast, can play forever, without tiring. Answering each and every question is important for language learning, however. (It is a myth that children ask these questions merely for attention or to torment their weary parents.)

Summary

Babies acquire receptive communication—the ability to perceive and understand speech—before they can actually talk. Productive communication—the ability to communicate to others through words, crying, noises, and even nonvocal means, such as gestures—often emerges before age 1. Children’s early language is quite different from that of adults. The words they use hold unique meanings. The word *ball* could stand, too broadly, for all round objects or, too narrowly, for just one specific red ball in a child’s room. Early sentences in toddlerhood often do not include articles or even subjects or verbs. Children growing up in

bilingual homes have the special challenge of sorting out the rules of two different languages spoken around them. They initially learn words from both languages as if they were part of one big vocabulary. They confuse the grammatical rules of one language with the other.

Infants and toddlers not only acquire oral language but can also begin to enjoy and understand books. A variety of challenging conditions can lead to language delays. Child care providers can adapt their interactions to promote language development in infants and toddlers with hearing impairments, Down syndrome, or general language delay.

Research Into Practice

CRITICAL CONCEPT 1

Infants begin to understand language long before they can talk. At birth, they can distinguish speech from other kinds of sounds and recognize the voices of significant adults. In the second half of the first year, they are able to understand words and phrases.

Application #1 Talk to babies, and encourage parents to do so, starting at birth, even though babies are not yet talking themselves. Rich conversation directed toward infants will stimulate language centers in the brain and promote later communicative competence.

Infant and Toddler Language and Literacy

Application #2 Because it is not known precisely when infants understand words, be careful about what you say around them. Toddlers who are not yet speaking may still comprehend a sensitive or confidential topic discussed by adults in their presence.

CRITICAL CONCEPT 2

Early in life, babies communicate through crying, making noises, smiling, gesturing, and pointing.

Application

Watch for and respond to infants' nonverbal communication. Responding quickly to signals such as crying and smiling will show babies the pleasure and the power of vocalization and will encourage them to refine their communicative abilities.

CRITICAL CONCEPT 3

Near age 1, babies can speak words. Vocabulary grows exceedingly quickly during the first 2 years of life. The first words babies learn are often names of things they can act on, such as *ball*, or words that have social meaning, such as *bye-bye*.

Application #1 Provide a language-rich environment for babies since language grows so quickly during the first 2 years of life.

Application #2 Name objects that children look at and play with. After children learn the names of things, point to objects and ask, "What's that?"

Application #3 Use social words with infants, such as *bye-bye*, *night-night*, and *hi*. Encourage babies to use these words, as in "Say 'bye-bye' to Grandma."

CRITICAL CONCEPT 4

Bilingual children learn words in two different languages and combine these into one large mental dictionary. Sometimes they become confused about which language to speak at which time, and sometimes they combine words from the two languages into a single utterance.

Application #1 Appreciate the challenge of learning more than one language and be patient with children who show confusion in word learning.

Application #2 Labels for objects and social words should be spoken in both languages to infants who are bilingual. Learn enough words in a baby's native language to be able to name important objects or events in their lives, such as *lunch*, *naptime*, *bathroom*, and *goodbye*.

Application #3 In assessing language development, consider the size of children's full mental dictionary, not just their English vocabulary. Asking bilingual children to name objects or pictures in both their native language and the language being learned will give a true picture of semantic development.

CRITICAL CONCEPT 5

Two-word utterances are constructed in toddlerhood. At this point, children must learn early rules of word order. They can accurately place the agent before the action, as in "Daddy throw" rather than "throw Daddy." Infants who are bilingual have a harder time learning word-order rules since they often must acquire two very different sets of language rules.

Application #1 Talk with toddlers using simple sentences that clearly identify the agent, action, and object. Overlay these statements across children's activities, as in "You're throwing the bean bag" and "Jamal took your block."

Application #2 Understand how challenging it is to learn the syntax of two different languages. Be patient when children use the word-order rules of one language when speaking in another. Such errors are a fundamental part of bilingual development.

CRITICAL CONCEPT 6

Infants and toddlers who are read to will acquire early literacy abilities and dispositions. They learn to handle books or turn pages and discover that reading is interesting and worthwhile. They come to understand that stories are read with a certain pacing and intonation.

Application #1 Read to babies very early in life. Books published specifically for infants that are chew resistant and waterproof and include bright colors, textures, and even sounds are ideal.

Application #2 Scaffold children's literacy learning as you read to them. In scaffolding, read the story but at the same time give over some of the responsibility for reading to the child. For example, encourage a toddler to turn pages, name the illustrations, or guess what a particular animal or character in the story might say next (e.g., "woof-woof" or "baa").

CRITICAL CONCEPT 7

Challenging conditions can cause language delays that may be identified in infancy. Hearing impairment, Down syndrome, and general language delay are examples.

Application #1 Provide conversation-rich play environments that allow children with special needs to acquire language in naturalistic settings.

Application #2 Adapt your interactions with children who have special needs to enhance language. Respond to children quickly, using rich language and whole communication in which gestures, facial expressions, and physical touch are also used. Expand children's one-word utterances, rephrasing them in longer, more complex sentences. You can name objects, persons, and actions in children's lives.

Application #3 Teach children to engage in turn-taking conversations with objects. Handing objects back and forth or trading objects are examples. These strategies teach children with special needs the social rules of communication.

Infant and Toddler Language and Literacy

ASSESSING YOUNG CHILDREN: Infant and Toddler Language and Literacy Development

Areas of Development	What to Watch For	Indicators of Atypical Development	Applications
Oral language abilities	Uses crying, gestures, and babbling to communicate needs or make contact with others. Babbles speech sounds that are found in the child's family's language. Understands some words by 1 year. Utters single words by this age. Speaks two-word utterances between 18 months and 2 years.	Failure to cry or in other ways communicate needs. An inability to understand or respond to language by age 1 year. Failure to use one-word utterances by 18 months. Use of only one-word utterances beyond 2 years.	Provide language-rich play experiences. Talk to babies even before they are able to speak. Name objects, persons, or actions, using an enthused intonation. Use total communication, in which gestures, facial expressions, and physical touch are used, as well as oral language.
Literacy skills	Responds to children's literature or other adult reading material with smiles, coos, or animated babbling by age 2. By this same age, shows an understanding of how books work (e.g., how pages turn).	An inability to attend or respond positively to shared reading experiences with an adult.	Read to infants and toddlers regularly. Scaffold their use of books. Encourage them to turn pages and point to and name illustrations.

Interpreting Assessment Data: Variations in language and literacy are due to the specific languages spoken in the home and cultural differences in reading preferences. Children will babble different sounds and will utter one or two words less early in life if they are trying to learn two languages simultaneously. They may be more attentive to magazines or mail-order catalogs than to children's books if these are more common in their home. Significant delays in understanding and production of simple one- or two-word utterances, however, may indicate challenging conditions, such as hearing impairment or general language delay. Further evaluation and early language intervention may be needed.

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