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Language and literacy development for young toddlers

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Language and literacy development for young toddlers

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ED 590 Research & Complete Capstone

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Dedication

to my students: this is all for you so I can be a better teacher.

to my parents: thank you for always supporting me.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the Concordia professors for their support and encouragement. Thank you to my cohort peers for being there every step of the way.

Abstract

Language and literacy development is tremendously important for young children in the first year of life. The purpose of this capstone is to discover strategies to foster emergent literacy and implement those strategies. Towell, Bartram, Murrow, & Brown, (2021) suggested several strategies to help educators foster literacy development including lap reading, reading aloud, reading to children from birth, dialogic reading, establishing routines, creating books with children, asking questions, and making comments. According to Dowling, Shanty, Sonnenschein, and Hussey-Gardner (2020), it is never too early to introduce language and literacy skills. Infants learn best through responsive, playful interaction that occur in natural, everyday settings (Dowling et al., 2020). Gillespie (2019) also suggested several strategies for educators including making books readily available and a part of daily routines, read aloud in a casual, conversational manner, and find books that provide sensory experiences. According to Horst, Stewart & True (2019), quality matters and educators should re-read books.

Key terms: dialogic reading, repeated read aloud, shared reading

Keywords: language and literacy, shared reading

Chapter One: Introduction

Building a foundation for literacy and language development beginning in infancy and toddlerhood is important for future language development. Without a solid foundation, language development will be more difficult. During the first years of life, children's brains are developing rapidly and laying the foundation for learning (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Early language development has many benefits for children, especially with academics. Children are starting to speak first words in an older infant or young toddler room which will be supported by a print rich environment with many diverse types of books and exposure to language. A print-rich environment has many benefits. According to Dowling, Shanty, Sonnenschein, and Hussey-Gardner (2020), it is never too early to start language and literacy skills and infants learn best through responsive, playful interactions.

Definitions of Terms

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is a research based strategy that helps children of all ages develop a love of literacy, grow vocabulary, read independently, and think critically (Towell, Bartram, Murrow, & Brown, 2021).

Shared Reading

Shared reading is an educator/infant book-focused interaction which includes reading aloud from picture books and talking about the meanings of the words and pictures (Torr, 2019).

Emergent Literacy

Emergent Literacy is the skills, knowledge and attitudes that precede learning to read and write and the environments that support learning (Elek, Gray, West & Goldfeld, 2022).

Dialogic Reading

Dialogic Reading is a shared reading technique that involves strategic questioning and conversations during multiple readings.

Repeated Read Aloud

Repeated read aloud is the repeated reading aloud of a children's book from start to finish three to five times (Horst, Stewart & True, 2019).

Concept Formation

Concept formation refers to rule application and switching from one rule to another as well as the ability to reason, form concepts and solve problem (Niklas, Cohrsen & Tayler, 2016).

Proximal Processes

Proximal processes are the repeated patterns of regularly occurring, responsive and sensitive interactions of adult caregivers with children (Norris, Holm, and McMullen, 2016).

Language Development

Language development is the process through which a child learns expressive and repetitive language (Gillespie, 2019).

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is the process through which children acquire language for communicating feelings or expressing ideas (Gillespie, 2019).

Importance of Topic

Literacy development begins in infancy and continues throughout life. It is hard to be successful in the world without some form of literacy or language development. If children do not have a solid foundation in literacy and language, school and life will be more difficult. A child's level of literacy affects opportunities and outcomes related to education, employment,

income, health, and well-being (Elek et.al., 2022). The years between birth to five are critical for building foundational or emergent literacy skills. Children who start school with poor language, cognitive and emergent literacy skills are unlikely to catch up to peers in literacy achievement. The activity of adult/child book reading provides an opportunity for facilitating infants' language development (Torr, 2019). Reading aloud stimulates young children's language development (Towell et al., 2021). Babies that are read to from birth improve chances of becoming happy and successful throughout life.

Scope of Research

Shared Reading

Dialogic reading is a shared reading technique that involves strategic questioning and conversations during multiple readings (Towell et al., 2021). Reading aloud is a research based strategy that helps children of all ages develop a love of literacy, grow vocabulary, read independently, and think critically. Lap reading is a type of reading aloud that creates a love of literacy and creates a strong bond between caregiver and child.

Reading aloud provides a language rich introduction to books, pictures, and written language (Torr, 2019). The active participation of children includes naming and touching pictures, flipping pages, chiming in with familiar rhymes and verbalizing in response to questions and comments from adults. These forms of active participation are simple enough that even infants can do the tasks. A verbal response does not have to be something that the adult reading understands, the point is that the infant responds. Adult-child book reading provides a rich opportunity for facilitating infant's language development.

Literacy Engagement

A form of literacy engagement is joint/shared attention. Joint/shared attention is the practice of sharing attention by following the focus of another person's attention or by drawing attention to one's focus of attention (Farrant & Zubrick, 2011). Passive listening and nonverbal communication are the first step towards becoming an active talker (Niklos, Cohrsen, Tayler, 2016). Teachers should describe what is going on in the infant's environment (Dowling et al., 2020). Educators should describe shared interactions, point out and label objects and respond to infant vocalizations. Exposure to print-rich environments is important long before children can read. Singing is calming for caregivers and infants and an effective way to expose children to language. Reciting nursery rhymes exposes infants to language sounds and contributes to phonological awareness.

Breakdown of Research

Research in literacy and language development features many strategies. These strategies will be described and examined. Chapter two will begin with the importance of children's interactions with caregivers and how these interactions should be. One section will focus specifically on talking, reading, singing, and rhyming ending with the characteristics of these interactions. As mentioned in the introduction, infants learn best when interactions are playful and responsive and when these interactions take place in natural everyday settings (Dowling et al., 2020). Next, early exposure to literacy and language development will be examined followed by emergent literacy. Developing strong language and communication in the first year of life contributes to several positive outcomes: school readiness, early literacy skills, and self-regulation (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021) Lastly, the three strategies: repeated read aloud, reading aloud, and shared reading; will be examined followed by the learning environment. Reading

aloud is more than saying printed words aloud (Santos et al., 2012). During read alouds, teachers and parents engage children in conversation about the story and the images. Reading the same book often is an effective way to support language and social-emotional development. There is real value in not just reading aloud but in the quality of the read aloud (Horst et al., 2019).

Chapter two will also look at language development and what educators can do.

Conclusion

The research question is: How can early childhood educators implement intentional teaching strategies that foster emergent literacy skills for infants and toddlers? The research question relates to the program essential question because of the focus on the future of literacy development. Literacy development is changing as more research is done. Early childhood educators can contribute to research and literacy development by implementing strategies that have been researched and continue to research and find new strategies. Chapter two will focus on the bulk of research based strategies. Talking to children is one of the most important ways adults can help children learn to communicate and develop strong language skills (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Early exposure to language and literacy has many positive benefits (Dowling, Shanty, Sonnenschein, & Hussey-Gardner, 2020). Infants learn best through responsive, playful interactions with caregivers.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Children benefit when reading occurs early. Children can understand language even before verbal responses occur. Early exposure to language and literacy has many positive benefits (Dowling, Shanty, Sonnenschein, & Hussey-Gardner, 2020). Infants learn best through responsive, playful interactions with caregivers. Children should be exposed to literacy and language early on. There is research that shows that early exposure impacts future language development for young children. Talking to children is one of the most important ways adults can help children learn to communicate and develop strong language skills (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013).

Interactions with Caregivers

As mentioned in the introduction, infants learn best when interactions are playful and responsive and when these interactions take place in natural everyday settings (Dowling et al., 2020). There are four types of language activities that caregivers can use with infants: talking, reading, singing, and rhyming. Caregivers can also incorporate toys into interactions that involve language. Rattles, finger puppets, and other age appropriate toys can be incorporated into language activities to promote sensory and language development (Dowling et al., 2020). From birth, children are comforted by listening to caregivers' voices (Santos, Fettig & Shaffer, 2012).

Infants' participation in and the quality of interactions with adults plays a critical role in language development (Degotardi, Torr, & Nguyen, 2016). Infant educators may overlook the pedagogical significance of interactions. Individual differences related to educator qualification level and whether the educator sat with children and related to infant-educator ratios. The quantity of talk directed to young children repeatedly is associated with language growth and the richness of the conversation is also important. Interactions that children have with adults

influence how children develop and learn (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Early childhood educators can provide children with interactions that support children's growth and development. When teachers ask questions, respond to vocalizations, and engage in positive talk, children learn and use more words. Promoting high quality language interactions between children and adults provides children with experiences that can foster growth in language and communication.

Chatting with children is important and gives examples of how people use words to share ideas and get information (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Words that adults speak to children make up the language that children need to use to learn new words and ideas. The more input that is given to children, the more opportunities children must learn how to express ideas and emotions as well as understand what others are saying. The words that adults speak to children can give children a larger vocabulary.

Mealtimes provide children with an opportunity to engage in rich language interactions that can foster language development (Degotardi et al., 2016). Mealtime language opportunities can vary- some conversations focus on social aspects and others focus on behavior. When educators focus more on interaction with children, the conversations tend to include a broader range of topics and use more diverse vocabulary (Degotardi et al., 2016; Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Compared to play and reading time, teachers spoke less during mealtimes. Mealtimes feature more decontextualized talk and the teacher discussed past and future events with children.

Educators should establish a caring relationship with infants which can be done in several ways including positioning the infant to face the caregiver and making eye contact (Stockall & Dennis, 2014). Playful responsive behavior (smiling, cooing, and singing) emphasizes emotional support and communicates caregivers' interest and acceptance. Infants are more likely to respond

when infants feel cared for and safe. Children are more likely to display cooperative behavior when control is shared with caregivers. Give and take between caregiver and child helps to sustain interactions. Repeated social encounters can help foster and grow relationships between caregiver and child.

Educators should use meaningful talk that describes concepts. Children develop simple concepts (up and down, colors) with help from others (Stockall & Dennis, 2014). Infant-directed speech is very useful and involves speaking in short sentences, repeating words frequently and using parts of sentences rather than complex parts. When an infant coos and babbles, the caregiver can repeat sounds and add more to what the infant says. Questions are important in modeling language and waiting for a response creates the expectation of a response so that the infant can take a turn with cooing or a motor response. When the infant responds, look surprised and express joy in playful interactions, and use expressive eye gaze.

With infants, whatever captures interest now is the perfect topic of conversation (Wright et al., 2022). Talk about what infants can see and touch and talk about what the teacher is doing. Back and forth conversations with infants, even if nonverbal- coos and babbles. Build relationships and observe children carefully. Early childhood educators can help children develop new interests by creating new experiences, through field trips.

Talking, Reading, Singing and Rhyming

Exposure to language in an early childhood setting has a positive impact on children's later language and literacy abilities (Dowling et al., 2020). There are several ways that teachers can expose young children to language. Describe to the infant what is going on in the environment which helps the child to become familiar with the environment and how to describe places or things (Dowling et al., 2020). For example, the caregiver can describe the diaper

changing process. When interacting with an infant, describe the interaction and point out objects, describing the objects as well (Dowling et al., 2020). Infants make many sounds, so it is important for caregivers to respond to vocalizations even if the vocalizations are meaningless (Dowling et al., 2020, Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Responding to vocalizations sets the stage for future language development and taking turns in conversations. Passive listening and nonverbal communication are the first steps to becoming an active talker (Niklas et al., 2016).

Infants should be exposed to a print-rich environment as exposure to books is important long before children can read (Dowling et al., 2020). Infants may not pay attention to the book, and may become disinterested, but are still listening and learning. Exposure to books also supports vocabulary development (Niklas et al., 2016). Niklas, Cohnsen and Taylor (2016) found that the later parents read to children, the less often the children were read to. The children who were read to earlier showed increased rhyming ability, verbal comprehension, and concept formation. These researchers also found that rhyming and concept formation were strongly associated with the onset of reading. The children who were read to earlier showed increased performance in assessment tasks. The study also found that early support of language development is essential, and literacy and language skills play a key role in everyday life and are important for academic achievement and success in life.

Singing to children may seem intimidating to a teacher but the child does not care about the quality of the voice. Singing can be calming for children and caregivers and used to smooth over a moment of high stress (Dowling et al., 2020). It is also an effective way to expose children to language and pass on traditions. Nursery rhymes are especially important for developing phonological awareness. Studies have shown that rhyming activities support literacy skills that further develop language sounds.

Characteristics of Interactions

Interactions should be pleasant for both the caregivers and infants (Dowling et al., 2020). Caregivers should approach these interactions with warmth and a positive attitude. Caregivers should use a soft, enthusiastic voice, be aware of infants' needs and look for signs of overstimulation. If infants become overstimulated, it is okay to take a break and come back to the activity later. Infants and toddlers see teachers as a source of comfort and use teachers as a secure base for exploring. Teachers should use language modeling, a strategy related to quality and quantity of teachers' interactions with children. Teachers should also engage children in conversations, ask open ended questions and repeat or extend children's talk.

Healthy development of infants is dependent on individual characteristics and responses of caregivers. (Norris, Holm & McMullen, 2016). Proximal processes serve as the primary mechanism for children's developmental change and growth. There are three types of proximal processes related to interactions between caregivers and children: building relationships between teacher and learning in the context of play and between children and peers, fostering cognitive development and learning in the context of play, and encouraging language and literacy development through reading and conversation. Teachers should improve observation skills to recognize opportunities to respond to the language of infants and toddlers.

Early Exposure to Literacy and Language Development

The first three years of life are a critical period for young children's language development (Gardner-Neblett, DeMarco & Sexton, 2021; Elek, Gray, West & Goldfeld, 2022; Gillespie, 2019; Degotardi, Torr, & Nguyen, 2016). During the first years of life, children's brains are developing rapidly and laying the foundation for learning (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Literacy development begins well before a child begins formal schooling and

children are sensitive to language even before birth (Niklas, Cohrssen, & Tayler, 2016; Wright, Cabell, Duke & Souto-Manning, 2022). Infants recognize parents' voices and use different sounds for unique needs (Wright et al., 2022).

Children learn through observations and interactions with knowledgeable caregivers (Niklas et al., 2016). Language development during these years is very highly dependent on interactions with caregivers (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021). Children with stronger early linguistic skills tend to perform better than children with weak early linguistic skills (Niklas et al., 2016). General language experiences are more likely to make a difference than reading aloud. However, there are no negative benefits to reading aloud and the sooner the better is best for children. Children need access to books to develop literacy skills (Santos et al., 2012).

Developing strong language and communication in the first year of life contributes to several positive outcomes: school readiness, early literacy skills, and self-regulation (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021). Infant and toddler educators play a key role in supporting the foundation language skills for children. Toddlers whose educators provide rich language opportunities are likely to experience improved language growth over time. Infants and toddlers often receive low quality language support from educators but can be improved through increased self-efficacy and professional development.

Professional Development

Participation in professional development has many benefits. Self-efficacy plays a key role in educator effectiveness and can be improved through professional development (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021). While the Gardner-Neblett et al (2021) study found some benefits of professional development, the study also had several limitations: the researchers faced budget

constraints, a lack of random assignment of the participants, the possibility of selection bias occurring, and the participants volunteered for the program and coaching.

The Elek, Gray, West and Goldfeld (2022) study focuses on professional development for early childhood educators which has proved effective in enhancing emergent literacy environments and practices. The purpose of the study was to evaluate an Australian professional development program: the let's read professional development program. The research question was how did participation in the let's read professional development program impact the literacy promoting practices and environments of early childhood centers compared with standard practices? The scores were higher for the intervention group and higher for the emotional and behavior support domains. For the intervention group, there was an improvement in literacy practice and environments.

Emergent Literacy

Level of literacy affects many areas of a person's life. Level of literacy affects opportunities and outcomes in relation to education, employment, income, health, and wellbeing (Elek, Gray, West & Goldfeld, 2022). The years from birth to age five are critical for building foundational or emergent literacy skills. Children who start school with poor language, cognitive and emergent literacy skills are less likely to catch up to peers. Children who develop strong language and communication skills are more likely to arrive at school ready to learn and to have higher levels of achievement (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Children are also less likely to have difficulty reading. When the teacher provides children with higher levels of language stimulation during the first years of life, children have better language skills.

Read-Alouds

Reading aloud is more than saying printed words aloud (Santos et al., 2012). During read alouds, teachers and parents engage children in conversation about the story and the images. Reading the same book often is an valuable way to support language and social-emotional development. There is real value in not just reading aloud but in the quality of the read aloud (Horst et al., 2019). Variety is important and young children benefit from opportunities to engage with print during play (Wright et al., 2022). Caregivers should provide print materials that are specifically aligned to the play center or area. Recommended books for young toddlers include concept books, rhyming books, books children can manipulate (lift the flap, pop-up), and books that represent familiar settings, people, and experiences. Recommend books for infants include board books, vinyl or cloth books, books with large, prominent pictures, and books with pictures on each page.

Children should be encouraged to be active participants in the read aloud. The active participation of children is critical to language and literacy learning opportunities (Torr, 2019). Active participation with infants includes naming and touching pictures, handling books, turning pages, and verbalizing in response to adults. The frequency of adult-infant book reading is connected to the development of vocabulary and other language skills. Infants spend most of the time during a read aloud looking at the pictures and pictures are open to multiple interpretations. Read alouds should encourage children to interact with the teacher and what the teacher is doing (Wright et al., 2022). Young toddlers can begin to actively participate by saying words from familiar texts.

Educators should do several things to ensure a quality read aloud experience. Educators should be conversational while reading aloud, talk and label pictures, use an animated voice, and

characterize emotions (Gillespie, 2019). Books should be readily available and part of the daily routines. Invite families to make homemade books. If you are fluent in it, read to children in the home language. Ask questions, even of preverbal children, wait for children to respond in a unique way before start to talk again. Find books that provide sensory experiences and teach children how to turn the pages of the books. Make a cozy reading corner and read for as long as the child is interested. Reading to infants is an intimate, shared experience that boosts development and learning and should be treated as such. Read aloud with a small group of children so all children can participate easily (Wright et al., 2022). Introduce distinct types of texts-informational texts, storybooks, rhyming books and digital or audio books. Young children learn new words and concepts when adults read aloud to children.

Reading aloud is an easy and effective way for parents and caregivers to contribute to a child's literacy development (Towell et al., 2021). Effective techniques and practices for reading aloud to young children are recommended to support literacy development, reading engagement and love of reading. Reading aloud stimulates young children's language development and acquisition. Read alouds should encourage children to interact with the teacher and what the teacher is saying (Wright et al., 2022). Toddlers are beginning to understand that a book is something that can be read aloud.

Reading books to children is one of the most effective ways to provide children with opportunities to develop language skills (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Opportunities for helping children develop language skills with books are significant when adults help children to become engaged by encouraging children's participation in the story, expanding on children's responses, and giving feedback. Sharing storybooks with children helps learn new words. Some of these books will become favorites that children will ask for repeatedly. After hearing a story

many times, children can pay less attention to the other parts of the story and can focus attention on other details such as learning new words. The more often adults read to children, the better children's language skills. One encounter with a new word is not enough to support word learning, children need to hear words many times before learning the words. Children learn more new words if a story is read multiple times than if several stories are read only once.

Repeated Read-Aloud

A repeated read-aloud of the same books can be used to practice dialogic reading which draws the listeners into a conversation about the story which helps the children to become tellers of the story, not just listeners (Horst et al., 2019). There are several elements that must be included in a repeated read-aloud. Teachers should explain concepts about print and books and provide a summary of the story. To further children's thinking, teachers should use open-ended thought provoking questions, engage in letter naming or phonological awareness, and incorporate think-pair-share. There are four steps to create a repeated read aloud plan: select a relevant book, develop vocabulary cards (age appropriate), prepare an introduction, questions, summary, and activities, and put the plan into action.

Every day, teachers should introduce new vocabulary and use games to practice new vocabulary (Horst et al., 2019). Wait-watch-listen is a useful strategy in which teachers ask a question or make a comment, watch the children, and wait for a response (verbal or nonverbal) and listen to become aware of the children's thoughts. Shared positive messages between teachers and children (smiles, nods, thumbs up, eye contact and positive tone) helps children to focus and grow to love reading. Affirmations are a way to incorporate specific, descriptive effort focused feedback during repeated read alouds.

Shared Reading

Shared reading provides children with numerous benefits including the rich opportunity for children to acquire new vocabulary, practice new words, and experience the importance of print media (Niklas et al., 2016). A key feature of shared reading is children's active verbal and nonverbal participation (Torr, 2019). Benefits of shared reading are related to the quality of adult-child discussions surrounding the actual reading of texts (Torr, 2020). Characteristics of the discussions that take place during shared reading include the child's interest, previous experience with the text, the child's current language and literacy abilities, the features of the book, and the teacher's beliefs and knowledge about how children learn to read. The quality of the shared book reading experience matters (Gardner-Neblett, Holochwost, Gallagher, Iruka, Odom & Bruno, 2017). When teachers read interactively, the child is more likely to benefit from the shared reading experience and when engaged with or focused on books. Engagement with books during toddlerhood lays the foundation for the development of language, self-regulation, and phonological awareness. Teachers promote engagement with books by providing children with opportunities to explore books independently by making books available and accessible. Children can benefit from engaging with books individually.

Torr (2019) investigated whether children in a childcare were read to by the educator, what extent the children read to and if the reading experience of infants reflect the overall quality of language and literacy environment as a whole. The study had three aims: whether infants were read to by educators (nine of twenty did not experience any shared reading); determine to what extent the eleven infants who did experience shared reading contributed verbally to the experience and to consider the language and literacy environment in each of the classrooms. With the infants who did experience shared reading, the findings varied both in the amount of

text the infants listened to and the contributions of educators. In most of the classrooms (17 of 20), the focus was on helping children understand and use language rather than on reading books. The study had three main limitations as pointed out by the author: the findings are descriptive and cannot be generalized, the study did not distinguish between infants' shared reading experiences, and experiences with educators were different based on educator qualifications.

Shared book reading stimulates children's early language skills and builds comprehension of unknown words (Gillespie, 2019). Children's knowledge of words is one long-term predictor of good literacy outcomes (Torr, 2020). Knowledge of vocabulary provides a foundation for later reading comprehension. Picture books provide children with the opportunity to encounter unusual vocabulary and linguistic patterns different from those gained through other activities. Reading picture books matters because the sooner children acquire language, the more likely children will master language (Gillespie, 2019). Children's earliest literacy experiences involve picture books (Torr, 2020). One criterion for evaluating infant and toddler environment is the availability and use of picture books.

Learning Environment

The learning environment and its quality has a major impact on language development. Infants learn from the environment and the people in the environment (Dean & Gillespie, 2015). It is important for teachers to feel confident in the knowledge and skills taught that are developmentally appropriate for the children's age. Learning often happens for infants through everyday interactions. Infant and toddler development is holistic, meaning that growth in one area boasts growth in another. Educators should model language and offer specific information or guidance when children need assistance in understanding concepts. Understanding how best to

support early childhood educators to create a quality literacy environment is crucial (Elek et al., 2022).

Educators should structure the learning environment based on infants' and toddlers' interests and development (Dean & Gillespie., 2015). There should be a variety of toys to explore that are in reach of children, especially of nonmobile infants, and changed frequently. During routine activities such as diapering and changing clothes, the caregiver can talk about the actions taking place (Stockall & Dennis, 2014). Place the child in comfortable seating to provide a wide perspective. Infants can benefit from books that can be touched and played with (Wright et al., 2022). Influences on children's language development goes beyond the home environment, even though the home is a major influence (Elek et al., 2022). Language used by families supports young children's development of oral language skills (Santos et al., 2012). Exposure to print in the home also supports literacy development. Literacy opportunities that arise naturally help to develop listening, oral language, reading and writing skills.

Language Development

Learning meanings of words and ideas through read aloud experiences helps develop listening comprehension (Gillespie, 2019). Children learn language according to five systems: phonology (sounds), morphology (units of measuring), syntax (word order and sentence structure), semantics (meaning) and pragmatic (language use in different contexts) (Towell et al., 2021). Infants and toddler responses to language depend on the level and duration of engagement experienced. Educators should use a rich and varied vocabulary. Describe actions with rich language which helps infants to understand and anticipate what is next (Stockall & Dennis, 2014). Children learn words used in meaningful ways in the environment- in discussions, read alouds, and when new things are learned (Wright et al., 2022). Children are naturally curious

about the world which offers many opportunities to build language (Wright et al., 2022; Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013).

Educators should take time to slow down and watch what the children are doing, watching for verbal and nonverbal responses (Dean & Gillespie, 2015). Educators should provide verbal support, ask questions, and wonder aloud. Educators should respond to nonverbal communication because nonverbal imitations and gestures both motor and vocal are early forms of language development (Stockall & Dennis, 2014). Pointing, gestures, touch and mutual eye gaze combine to make a rich context of interactions. Infants prefer certain types of sounds, speech that has higher register, variable pitch, and simple, repetitive content. Motherese, a singsong structure of baby talk is one type of speech. During playtime, educators can engage children in finger plays, songs, and peekaboo. The response to these can be verbal or nonverbal and educators should pay close attention to motor movements.

Language milestones for infants include cooing at one to two months, babbling at six months, gestures and understanding of words at eight to twelve months, first words around thirteen months, rapid growth in vocabulary at eighteen months, and two-words phrases at eighteen to twenty-four months (Towell et al., 2021). Some children may meet milestones earlier or later and the above is just an estimate. Around twelve months, children may play simpler games such as peekaboo and say one or two words (Wright et al., 2022). During the toddler years (about twelve to thirty-six months), children begin to understand and use many new words, two to three word sentences, and follow one to two step directions.

From birth to four months, children begin to listen and express ideas (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Educators can talk with the baby directly and face to face. Educators should follow the child's lead and repeat sounds but should avoid talking too loudly or abruptly as it

may startle the child. Educators should introduce simple sign language to help children communicate. Children also begin to recognize and react to the sounds of language. Educators can support children in this area by using nursery rhymes, chants, and repetitive language, singing songs and repeating nursery rhymes, reading with the child in lap, and talking about everyday objects.

From four to eight months, children begin to respond to sounds and words heard often, use various sounds and movements to communicate, recognize and react to the sounds of language, and begin to respond to some of the vocabulary associated with picture books (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Educators can respond to the child by promoting conversation, use repetitive words and phrases, talk to the child throughout the day, and repeat words and sounds to support language development throughout this age range. From eight to twelve months, children are starting to show more interest in speech, to understand and use common rules of communication, and demonstrate increasing vocabulary and comprehension (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Educators can talk with children as much as possible to support children and use words to describe the child's actions.

Reading aloud and talking can have a significant impact on language development (Gillespie, 2019). Exposing children to a variety of genres and topics of interest is a powerful way to encourage a love of reading (Towell et al., 2021). Infants and toddlers under the age of three should be immersed in quality children's literature which will enhance phonemic awareness and awareness of letters and sounds in spoken words, an important early literacy skill and one of the building blocks of the reading process. Repeated and varied exposure to unfamiliar words helps children to learn new words (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013).

Children whose teachers speak with more complex sentence structures have a better understanding of sentences.

Educators should be attentive, warm, and responsive to what children are saying (Wright et al., 2022). Show children that ideas matter and build on children's curiosity and exploration to facilitate language learning. Infants respond to voice, facial expression, and attention. As infants grow into toddlers, repeat words back. Educators can talk aloud about what children are doing while playing. In toddlerhood, dramatic play encourages children to imagine and talk in more sophisticated ways and teachers can play an active role in the play. Toddlers often engage in parallel play and teachers can encourage language by narrating what is being done. The social interactionist approach to language development argues that infants develop language to communicate with others in the context of meaningful social interactions (Degotardi et al., 2016).

Educator Response

Teachers should explain words and concepts to children (Wright et al., 2022). Explain word meanings during a read aloud. When reading picture books, point to pictures and say word or say the word and have the infant point. Invite young toddlers to point to pictures in books in response and describe what you see. Have authentic and responsive conversations with children and engage children in interactive read-alouds. Support children's learning about the social and natural world. Early childhood educators can support language in many ways. During meals, caregivers can name foods children are eating (Wright et al., 2022). When outside, point out objects such as plants. Teachers are language role models and should be responsive to what children are doing and saying. The language that educators use when addressing young children is one of the most powerful tools for establishing a trusting relationship (Hu, Torr, Degotardi, &

Han, 2019). Strong relationships are fundamental for the establishment of an effective learning environment.

Teaching strategies include child-centered, interaction-promoting, and language-promoting. The child-centered strategy includes being face to face with children, waiting and listening to children, and following the child's lead (Degotardi et al., 2016). Child directed talk serves to guide and regulate infant behavior within the early childhood setting (Hu et al., 2019). The interaction-promoting strategy includes encouraging turn-taking and use a variety of questions (Degotardi et al., 2016). The language-promoting strategy also includes using a variety of labels and extend and expand language (Degotardi et al., 2016). Sitting with children helps educators to be more child-oriented and provides opportunities to encourage and use more interactive and varied speech.

To promote language and communication of children, educators can do many things to help children. Teachers can talk through and comment on routines, actions, objects, and events (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Children are more likely to learn the names of objects of interest. Teachers should respond to nonverbal communication with words, ask questions and pause for responses, and expand on children's words. Educators should be a commentator by giving detailed descriptions, model language for children, and talk while demonstrating different ways that objects can be used. During playtime or mealtimes, educators can introduce new vocabulary and repeat unfamiliar words in different contexts and occasions.

Conclusion

Early exposure to literacy and language in early childhood is very important. It will help children's future academic development. There are several strategies that educators can use to foster language development. Reading aloud and the quality of read alouds is a place for

educators to begin. Educators should also talk with children. Children can learn much from conversation with others. Talking to children is one of the most important ways adults can help children learn to communicate and develop strong language skills (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Teachers can talk through and comment on routines, actions, objects, and events. Chapter three will summarize the insights gained from the research, the application of the research and future studies that can be done.

Chapter Three: Discussion, Applications, and Future Study

Insights

Level of literacy

Level of literacy affects many parts of children's development including education, employment, income, health, and wellbeing (Elek et al., 2022). Therefore, educators should try to foster literacy development in young children. Literacy development begins in early childhood but often is overlooked. Educators must not overlook the importance of literacy. Literacy can be easily encouraged by simply reading to children; however, this is only a starting point. Educators must do more than just read to children. Reading aloud stimulates language development (Towell et al., 2021). Quality and variety matter when educators read aloud to children (Horst et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2022). Children should be active participants in read alouds (Torr, 2019). Educators should re-read books often, especially at the child's request (Horst et al., 2019). Children should be encouraged to engage in reading experiences; this will foster a love of literacy. If a child brings a book, make sure to sit down and read it to or with the child. Not only does this encourage a love of reading but also creates a bond between caregiver and child.

Educator response

Educators can foster language development by describing to infants what is going on in the environment (Dowling et al., 2020). For example, teachers can talk the child through the diaper changing process, explaining what is occurring or explaining the steps for solving a challenge. Routines are a good time to practice simple skills such as colors, shapes, basic sign language, or animals. Simply talking to children and responding to vocalizations is beneficial and enforces the expectation of a back and forth conversation. Educators should create a print

rich environment and give children opportunities to engage with print during play (Dowling et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2022). A simple way to create a print rich environment is to provide books that are related to the play centers. Teachers can also simply bring out books throughout the day and have books readily available and in reach of children.

Early Exposure

Early exposure to language and literacy has many positive benefits for children (Dowling et al., 2020). Children may show an increased interest in reading and books if exposed early. Early exposure may also affect later academic development. Children learn through observations and interactions with knowledgeable caregivers (Niklas et al., 2016). Language development during these years is very highly dependent on interactions with caregivers (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021). Children with stronger early linguistic skills tend to perform better than children with weak early linguistic skills (Niklas et al., 2016). General language experiences are more likely to make a difference than reading aloud.

Interaction with Caregivers

Interactions with caregivers are crucial (Dowling et al., 2020). Educators should use mealtimes for conversation (Degotardi et al., 2016; Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Children can learn much from caregivers and the interactions with caregivers. Children like to interact with others as humans are social creatures. Classrooms should be set up to encourage interaction between children and teachers. Teachers should promote positive interactions so that both parties enjoy the interaction. Interactions should be playful, responsive, and natural (Dowling et al., 2020). Teachers should talk, read and sing to children to help children develop language. Lastly, teachers should also introduce and read rhyming books to foster phonemic awareness.

It is crucial for educators to build caring relationships with children (Stockall & Dennis, 2014). Children will flourish when there is trust between children and caregivers. Children need to feel that caregivers can be trusted. Children must feel secure in the environment and those needs will be met before any learning can take place. If children are hungry, tired or thirsty, it will be difficult to encourage learning as children's focus is elsewhere. Meeting basic needs must come first if children are to learn and thrive and create a trusting relationship between caregivers and children. Children will thrive in these conditions.

The first years of life lays the foundation for learning (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Children are learning basic human functions such as eating, drinking, crawling, walking, sitting and so much more in just the first year of life. These basic functions will enable children to explore the environment and learn from the environment. Children at this age will look to caregivers to see how to interact with the environment and others and use the teacher as a secure base for exploring the environment. Early childhood education, especially with infants and young toddlers, is so much more than instruction. Early childhood education especially focuses on the development of the whole child.

Application

The research has provided numerous strategies that can be used with young toddlers and can be easily implemented in the classrooms. It has changed practices in the young toddler classroom. Reading will be done more often using strategies and books will be added more often for children to look at during play time. The children in this setting do seem very interested in books and enjoy it when books are brought out. The children also enjoy sitting in a teacher's lap and being read to. Therefore, lap reading will be done more often. Gillespie (2019) also suggested several strategies for educators including making books readily available and a part of

daily routines, read aloud in a casual, conversational manner, and find books that provide sensory experiences. According to Horst, Stewart & True (2019), quality matters and educators should re-read books.

Mealtimes will be used for more than simply eating. One teacher will sit with the children continuously while the children are eating and focus attention only on the children. It is easy to become distracted or busy with other tasks so the importance of conversing with children during mealtimes must be encouraged. Children should also be encouraged to engage with each other during mealtimes, even if the interactions are simply noises. This will impact social development and encourage relationship building between children. Educators should use mealtimes for conversation as the conversations are less formal during this time and encourage social development (Degotardi et al., 2016; Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013).

Future Study

Throughout the research already done, it was often mentioned that early literacy exposure and language development impacted children in later life. However, only one study really examined how the children were impacted and did not focus on the impacts beyond kindergarten. More research studies should be done on how children are impacted later in life by early language development. Another area that could be researched is brain development. It would be interesting to see if brain development was affected when children received early exposure to literacy and language that is structured and features different strategies from research. Lastly, it would be intriguing to see if conversation and responding to children's vocalizations has an impact on social development. Children do seem to be social creatures and it would be beneficial to see if interactions do impact this area of development and if vocalization and the response do

as well. Teacher response does seem to matter for development and to children. It appears to bring joy and encourage further vocalizations.

Conclusion

The research done for this capstone proved to be very useful in practice. It has had an effect already on the classroom and children. It appears that it will continue to be effective in the classroom. This chapter focused on summarizing the research done throughout the paper, how teachers can apply the knowledge gained and ideas for future study. The main knowledge gained from the research is the research strategies that can be applied but also the desire to do more research and continue to learn and grow. Teachers must keep up with current research and practices within the field of early childhood education to continue to give children the best education possible. There are several strategies that educators can use to foster language development. Reading aloud and the quality of read alouds is a place for educators to begin. Educators should also talk with children. Children can learn much from conversation with others. Talking to children is one of the most important ways adults can help children learn to communicate and develop strong language skills (Gardner-Neblett & Gallagher, 2013). Teachers can talk through and comment on routines, actions, objects, and events. Chapter three will summarize the insights gained from the research, the application of the research and future studies that can be done.

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