

EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IN LANGUAGE ARTS

Third Edition



Jeanne M. Machado

***Early Childhood
Experiences in
Language Arts
Third Edition***

Jeanne M. Machado

Delmar Publishers inc.

To my ever-encouraging husband Frank, and Danielle, Katrina and Claire. Each is a uniquely special gift in my life. And to my father, Emil Hamm, who always saw the best in me.

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Delmar Staff

Administrative Editor: Adele M. O'Connell

Production Editor: Carol A. Micheli

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To The Student

Since you are a unique, caring individual who has chosen an important career, early childhood teaching, this text hopes to help you discover and share your innate and developing language arts abilities and talents! Create your own activities, author when possible your own “quality” literary, oral, and prewriting opportunities for young children. Share your specialness, and those language arts-related experiences which excite and delight you both now and when *you* were a child.

In this text I urge you to become a skilled interactor and conversationalist, “a subtle opportunist,” getting the most possible out of each child-adult situation, while also enjoying these daily exchanges yourself.

Collect, select, construct, and practice those appropriate activities so that you can present them with enthusiasm. Your joy in language arts then becomes the child’s joy. A file box and/or binder collection of ideas, completed sets, patterns, games, etc. carefully made and stored for present or future use is suggested. Filling young children’s days with developmental, worthwhile experiences will prove a challenge, and your collection of ideas and teaching visual aids will grow and be adapted over the years.

Suggested activities and review sections at the end of units give immediate feedback on your grasp of unit main ideas and techniques. You’ll find the answers to the review questions in the back of the text.

In this text, I attempt to help you become “ever better” at what you may already do well, and help you grow in professional competence. Since I’m growing too, I invite your suggestions and comments so in future revisions I can refine and improve this text’s value to new students.

Preface

Early Childhood Experiences in Language Arts is an up-to-date, state-of-the-art teacher training text designed to help early childhood education students and practicing preschool and child care personnel provide an opportunity-rich program full of interesting, appropriate, and developmental language arts activities. Beginning units present a detailed account of language acquisition, young children's emerging communicative capacities, growth milestones, and age-level characteristics, along with suggested professional techniques for promoting each child's self-esteem and potential. It is both a practical "how-to" text and a resource collection which includes a large number of classic, tried and true activities, complete with step-by-step directions.

Because a comprehensive, dynamically planned early childhood language arts curriculum consists of four broad, interrelated areas — speaking (oral), listening, prewriting, and prereading — each is fully explored and described in its own section within the text. It is hoped that the confidence and skill gained by the readers of this text will give young children enthusiastic, knowledgeable teacher-companions who enjoy and encourage them in their discovery of the language arts.

Changes in this Third Edition include more in-depth material on infant and toddler language abilities, developmental theory, cross-cultural and individual differences in language acquisition and use, and an increased emphasis on "quality" literature for children. Such issues as bilingualism, language disturbances, giftedness, and the impact of computers on language arts in the early childhood curriculum are explored. A helpful discussion concerning the recent emphasis on academics and early reading instruction for young children is presented, and advocates dedication to traditional play, discovery, and basic skill-building and readiness activities. Many new and innovative activities suitable for use in a variety of child care settings have been added, and group instructional methods have been further clarified and expanded. Resource lists have been added to many of the units in this new edition, providing further enrichment of the learning experience, and a new glossary has been added to the back of the text. An extensive appendix with numerous classroom ideas and activities and lists of additional resources also appears at the end of the text. Traditional learning aids, such as learning objectives, review questions, and learning activities, have been retained from the previous edition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author is employed as a full-time instructor with the San Jose Community College District. Currently, as department chairperson, she supervises students (both

early childhood education majors and parents) at two on-campus laboratory child development centers at San Jose City College and Evergreen Valley College, in addition to child care centers within the community. Her teaching responsibilities encompass early childhood education, child development, and parenting courses. The author received her Masters degree from San Jose State University and her vocational community college life credential with course work from The University of California at Berkeley. Her experience includes working as a teacher and director in public early childhood programs, parent cooperative programs, and a self-owned and operated private preschool. Ms. Machado is an active participant in several professional organizations which relate to the education and well-being of young children and their families. Her writing efforts include, in addition to this text, the publication of *Early Childhood Practicum Guide*, which was co-authored with Dr. Helen Meyer of the University of California at Hayward and published in 1984, by Delmar Publishers Inc.

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Section 1

Language Development in the Young Child

Unit 1

Beginnings of Communication

OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit, you should be able to

- describe one theory of human language acquisition.
- identify factors which influence language development.
- discuss the reciprocal behaviors of infants and parents.

Each child is a special combination of inherited traits and the influence of his environment. The qualities a child receives from both parents and the events that occur help shape language development.

In a short four to five years after birth, the child's speech becomes purposeful and adult-like. This growing language skill is a useful tool for satisfying needs and exchanging thoughts, hopes, and dreams with others. As ability grows, the child understands and uses more of the resources of oral and recorded human knowledge, and the natural capacity for categorizing, inventing, and remembering information aids a child's language acquisition.

Although unique among the species because of the ability to *speak*, human beings are not the only ones who can *communicate*. Birds and other animals can imitate sounds and signals and are known to communicate. For instance, chimpanzees exposed to experimental language techniques (American Sign Language, specially equipped machines, and plastic tokens) have surprised researchers with their abilities. Some have learned to use symbols and follow linguistic rules with a sophistication that rivals some two-year-olds, and researchers con-

tinue to probe the limits of their capabilities (de Villiers, 1979).

Speech itself, however, is a human trait; much more complex than simple parroting or a primitive level of functioning. The power of language enables humans to dominate other life forms. The ability to use language creatively secured our survival by giving us a vehicle to both understand and transmit knowledge and to work cooperatively in concert with others (Hoy and Somer, 1974). Language facilitates peaceful solutions between people.

DEFINITIONS

Language, as used in this text, refers to a system of intentional communication through sounds, signs (gestures), or symbols which are understandable to others. The language development process includes both sending and receiving. Input (receiving) comes before output (sending); input is organized mentally by an individual long before decipherable sending takes place.

Communication is a broader term, defined as giving and receiving information, signals, or messages. A person can communicate with or

receive communications from animals, infants, or foreign speakers. Even a whistling teakettle sends a message that someone can understand.

INFLUENCES ON DEVELOPMENT

A child's ability to communicate involves an integration of body parts and systems allowing hearing, understanding, organizing, and using language. Most children accomplish the task quickly and easily, but many factors *influence* the learning of language.

Sensory-motor development, which involves the use of sense organs and the coordination of motor systems (body muscles and parts) are all vital to language acquisition. Sense organs gather information through sight, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, figure 1-1. These sense-organ impressions of people, objects, and life encounters are then sent to the brain. Each *perception* (impression received through the senses) is recorded and stored, serving as a base

for future oral and written language. Sensory-motor tasks are covered in greater depth in Unit 5.

The child's social and emotional environments play a leading role in both the quality and quantity of beginning language. Much learning occurs through contact and interaction with others in family and then in social settings, figure 1-2. Basic attitudes towards life, self, and other people form early as life's pleasures and pains are experienced. The young child depends on parents and other caregivers to provide what is needed for growth and *equilibrium* (a balance achieved when consistent care is given and needs are satisfied). This side of a child's development has been called the *affective sphere*, referring to the affectionate feelings (or lack of them) shaped through experience with others, figure 1-3.

Another important factor which is related to all others is the child's mental maturity, or ability to think. The ages, stages, and sequences of increased mental capacity are very



FIGURE 1-1 Look at his exploring concentration!



FIGURE 1-2 Positive experiences and interactions are important for language acquisition. (From Machado and Meyer, *Early Childhood Practicum Guide*, Copyright 1984 by Delmar Publishers Inc.)



FIGURE 1-3 Loving care and attention in the early years can influence language development.

closely related to language development. Yet, at times, language skill and intellect seem to be growing independently, with one or the other developing at a faster rate. The relationship of intelligence and language has been a subject of debate for a long time. Most scholars, however, agree that these two topics are closely associated.

Cultural and social forces touch young lives with group attitudes, values, and beliefs. These have a great impact on a child's language development. Some cultures, for instance, expect children to look down when adults speak, showing respect by this action. Other cultures make extensive use of gestures and signaling. Still others seem to have limited vocabularies. Cultural values and factors can indeed affect language acquisition.

CURRENT THEORIES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Many scholars, philosophers, linguists, and researchers have tried to pinpoint exactly how language is learned. The view most early childhood educators hold focuses on *hearing* and *imitating*, and the child's realization that speech is useful in getting what he wants and needs. People in major fields of study: human development, linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, speech-language pathology, and animal study (zoology) have contributed to current theory. The following are major theoretical positions.

Behaviorist (or Stimulus-response) Theory

Theorists taking this position emphasize that language is only partially learned through imitation. As parents reward, correct, ignore, or punish the young child's communication, they exert considerable influence over both the quantity and quality of language usage and the child's *attitudes* toward communicating. The most important factor to consider in trying to promote language using this theory focuses upon the reactions of the people in a child's environment. In other words, positive, neutral, and/or negative reinforcement plays a key role in the emergence of communicating behaviors.

The child's sounds and sound combinations are thought to be uttered partly as imitation and partly at random, on impulse, without pattern or meaning. The child's utterances grow, seem to stand still, or are stifled depending on feedback from others. This theory is attributed to the work of B. F. Skinner, a pioneer researcher in the field of learning theory.

Predetermined Theory

In this theoretical position language acquisition is seen as being *innate* (a predetermined human capacity). Each new being is believed to possess a mental ability "wired-in" which equips

that being to master *any* language. Chomsky (1968), a linguistic researcher, theorizes that each person has an individual Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Chomsky also theorizes that this device (capacity) has several sets of language-system rules (grammar) which are common to all known languages. As the child lives within a favorable family climate, his perceptions spark the device and the child learns the "mother tongue." Imitation or reinforcement are not ruled out as additional influences.

Chomsky notes that two and three year olds can utter understandable, complicated sentences that they have never heard. The child has to either possess remarkable thinking skills to do so, or very special skills as a language learner. Chomsky favors the latter explanation. Theorists who support this position note the infant's ability to babble sounds and noises used in languages the child has never heard.

Cognitive-transactional Theory

In a third theory, language acquisition is said to *develop* from basic social and emotional drives. The child, within this theory, is naturally active, seeking, adapting, and is shaped by transactions with the people in his environment. Drives stem from a need for love and care and the *need* prompts language acquisition. The child is described as a reactor to the human social contact that is so crucial to survival and well being. The child's view of the world consists of the mental impressions built as life events are fit into existing ones or categories are created for new ones. Language is an integral part of living, consequently the child seeks to fit its occurrence into some pattern which allows understanding. With enough exposure and with a functioning sensory receiving system the "code" is cracked slowly and the child eventually becomes a fluent speaker. The work of Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, and J. McVicker Hunt has prompted wide acceptance of this theory by early childhood professionals.

Maturational (Normative) Theory

The writings of Arnold Gesell and his colleagues represent the position that children are primarily a product of *genetic inheritance* with environmental influence being secondary. Children are seen as moving from one predictable stage to another with *readiness* the precursor of actual learning. This position was widely accepted in the 1960s when linguists studied children in less than desirable circumstances and discovered consistent patterns of language development. Using this theory as a basis for planning instruction for young children includes (1) identifying predictable stages of growth in language abilities, and (2) offering appropriate readiness activities to aid the child's graduation to the next higher level.

Other Theories

There is no all-inclusive theory of language acquisition which has been substantiated by research, rather there is some truth in each possibility; many relationships and mysteries are still under study. Current teaching practices involve many different styles and approaches to language arts activities although some teachers may prefer using techniques in accord with one particular theory. One common goal among educators is the desire to provide instruction for the child that encourages social and emotional development while also offering activities and opportunities in a warm, language-rich, supportive classroom, center, or home. Eveloff (1977) identified three major prerequisites of development and language acquisition. They are:

- thinking ability.
- a central nervous system allowing sophisticated perception.
- loving care.

These are all present if children are in good health and in quality day care and preschool facilities.

This text presents many challenging activities which go beyond simple rote memorization or passive participation. There's an attempt to offer an enriched program of literary experience which provokes thinking and enhances the child's ability to relate and share what's on his or her mind.

Dr. Maria Montessori, well known for her work with young children, described a sequence of development in language gathered from her observations, figure 1-4. It's offered here to stimulate your observation of the young child, and to urge you to be consciously alert to the child's emerging abilities.

COMMUNICATIVE BEGINNINGS IN INFANCY

Development of the ability to communicate begins even before the child is born since the prenatal environment plays such an important role. Factors can affect the development and health of the unborn such as emotional and physical stress of the mother and her health and nutrition. These, in turn, may lead to complications later in the child's language-learning capabilities.

The newborn quickly makes its needs known. The baby cries; mother or father responds. The parent feeds, holds, and keeps the child warm and dry. The sound of the parents' footsteps or voices, and their caring touch, often stops the baby's crying. The baby learns to anticipate. The sense perceptions received begin to be connected to stored impressions of the past.

As the child grows, he or she makes vocal noises; cooing after feeding, for instance, seems to be related to the child's feeling of comfort. During cooing, sounds are relaxed, low-pitched, gurgly, and are made in an open-mouthed, vowel-like way — for example, e (as in see), e (get), a (at), ah, and o, oo, ooo, figure 1-5. The infant appears to be in control of this sound making. Discomfort, by comparison, produces

-
1. Individual sounds.
 2. Syllables.
 3. Simple words, often doubled syllables like "dada." This is when the child first is said to speak, because the sound he produces communicates an idea.
 4. Understanding and saying words that are the names of objects (nouns).
 5. Understanding and saying words that refer to qualities of objects named (adjectives).
 6. Understanding and saying words that refer to the relationship of objects named.
 7. Explosion into language (verbs and the exact form of nouns and adjectives, including prefixes and suffixes).
 8. The forms for present, past, and future tenses of verbs, use of the pronoun as a word that "stands in place of" a name.
 9. Construction of sentences with mutually dependent parts.
-

FIGURE 1-4 Montessori sequence of language acquisition (*From Maria Montessori's The Discovery of the Child, translated by M. Joseph Costelloe, Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1967.*)

consonantlike sounds, made in a tense manner with lips partly closed.

Infants differ in numerous ways from the moment of birth. Freedman's research (1979) concludes that significant ethnic differences and similarities exist in a newborn's reactions to various stimuli. However, in most cases, milestones in language development are reached at about the same age and in a recognizable sequence.

Eye Contact

Babies learn quickly that communicating is worthwhile since it results in actions on the part of another. Have you ever watched a baby gaze intently into his parent's eyes? Somehow, the child knows that this is a form of communication — and he is avidly looking for clues to fur-



FIGURE 1-5 Cooing is related to a child's comfort level.

ther his meager knowledge. If the parent speaks, the baby's entire body seems to respond to the rhythm of the human voice. The *reciprocal* nature of the interactions aids development. Clarke-Stewart (1981) reported a high degree of relationship between a mother's responsiveness and the child's language competence. In a longitudinal study of infants from nine to eighteen months of age, more responsive mothers had children with greater language facility and growth.

Infants quickly recognize subtle (fine) differences in sounds. A parent's talk and touch increases sound making. Condon and Sanders have observed infants moving arms and legs in synchrony to the *rhythms* of human speech. Random noises, tapping, and disconnected vowel sounds don't produce the behavior (1982).

Research continues to uncover responding capabilities in both infants and their parents which have previously been overlooked. In one such experiment, newborns learned to suck on an artificial nipple hooked to a switch that turned on a brief portion of recorded speech or

vocal music. They did not suck as readily when they heard instrumental music or rhythmic sound as when they heard a human voice (de Villiers, 1982).

The special people in the infant's life adopt observable behaviors when "speaking" to him just as the child seems to react in special ways to their attention. Mothers sometimes raise their voice pitch to a falsetto, shorten sentences, simplify their syntax, use nonsense sounds, and maintain prolonged eye contact during playful interchanges. Infants display a wide-eyed, playful, and bright-faced attitude toward their fathers and mothers (Brazelton, 1982). A mutual readiness to respond to each other appears built-in to warm relationships. The infant learns that eye contact can hold and maintain attention, and that looking away usually terminates both verbal and nonverbal episodes.

Around the fifth to tenth week of life, a significant event happens — the baby's first social smile. This is a giant first step to the many parent-child two-way conversations which will follow. Ainsworth and Bell (1972) concluded that responsive mothers (those who are alert in caring for the infant's needs) have babies who cry less frequently and have a wider range of different modes of communication. These responsive mothers create a balance between showing attention and affording the infant autonomy (offering a choice of action within safe bounds) when the infant became mobile. They also provide body contact and involve themselves playfully at times.

Babbling

Early random sound making is often called *babbling*. Infants the world over make sounds they've not heard, and will not use in their native language. This has been taken to mean that each human infant has the potential to master any world language (Jacobson, 1968). Close inspection shows repetitive sounds and "practice sessions" present. Babbling starts at about the fourth to sixth month and continues in some

children through the toddler period, however, a peak in babbling is usually reached between nine and twelve months. Periods before the first words are marked by a type of babbling which repeats syllables over and over, as in “dadada-dadada.” This is called *echolalia*; infants seem to echo themselves and others. Babbling behavior overlaps the one and two (or more) word-making stages, ending for some children at about eighteen months of age.

Deaf infants also babble and in play sessions will babble for longer periods without hearing either adult sound or their own sounds as long as they can see the adult responding. However, they stop babbling younger than hearing children do. It is not clearly understood why babbling occurs, either in hearing or non-hearing children, but it is felt that babbling gives the child the opportunity to use and control the mouth, throat, and lung muscles. Possibly, a child’s babbling amuses and motivates him, acting as stimulus which adds variety to his existence.

In time, there is an increasing number of articulated (clear, distinct) vowel-like, consonant-like, and syllabic sounds. Although babbling includes a wide range of sounds, as children grow older they narrow the range and begin to focus on the familiar, much-heard language of the family. Other sounds are gradually discarded.

Physical contact continues to be important, figure 1-6. Touching, holding, rocking, and other types of physical contact bring a sense of security and a chance to respond through sound making. The active receiving of perceptions is encouraged by warm, loving parents who share a close relationship. A secure child responds more readily to the world around him. The child who lacks social and physical contact, or lives in an insecure home environment, falls behind in both the number and range of sounds made; differences start showing at about six months of age.

Simple imitation of language sounds begins early. Nonverbal imitated behavior such as tongue protrusion also occurs, figure 1-7. Sound



FIGURE 1-6 Touching brings feelings of security.



FIGURE 1-7 “I can do that.”

imitation becomes syllable imitation, and short words are spoken about the end of the child's first year.

UNDERSTANDING

At about ten months of age, some infants start to respond to spoken word clues. A game such as "pat-a-cake" may start the baby clapping and "bye-bye" or "peek-a-boo" brings other imitations of earlier play activities with the parents. The child's language is called passive at this stage, for he or she primarily receives (or is receptive). Speaking attempts will later become active (or expressive). Vocabulary provides a small portal through which adults can gauge a little of what the child knows.

The infant communicates with the parents through many nonverbal actions; one common way is by holding the arms up, which most often means "I want to be picked up." Others include facial expression, voice tone, voice volume, posture, and gestures, such as an infant's "locking in" by pointing both fingers and toes at attention-getting people and events. For additional examples, see figure 1-8.

Although the infant can now respond to words, speaking does not automatically follow, because at this early age, there is much more for the child to understand. Changes in a parent's facial expression, changes in tone of voice and volume, and actions and gestures are all things which carry feelings and messages important to the child's well-being. Understanding the *tone* of the parents' speech comes before understanding the words, and that comes prior to the child trying to say them.

FIRST WORDS

Before an understandable close approximation of a word is uttered, the child's physical organs need to function in a delicate unison, and the required mental maturity needs to be reached. The child's respiratory system sup-

Gesture	Meaning
Allows food to run out of mouth	Satisfied or not hungry
Pouts	Displeased
Pushes nipple from mouth with tongue	Satisfied or not hungry
Pushes object away	Does not want it
Reaches out for object	Wants to have it handed to him
Reaches out to person	Wants to be picked up
Smacks lips or ejects tongue	Hungry
Smiles and holds out arms	Wants to be picked up
Sneezes excessively	Wet and cold
Squirms and trembles	Cold
Squirms, wiggles, and cries during dressing or bathing	Resents restriction on activities
Turns head from nipple	Satisfied or not hungry

FIGURE 1-8 Some common gestures of babyhood (*From Child Development by Elizabeth B. Hurlock, 1972 — used with permission of McGraw-Hill Company.*)

plies the necessary energy. As the breath is exhaled, sounds and speech are formed with the upward movement of air. The larynx's vibrating folds produce voice: called *phonation*. The larynx, mouth, and nose influence the child's voice quality: termed *resonation*. A last modification of the breath stream is *articulation*; a final formation done through molding, shaping, stopping, and releasing voiced and non-voiced sounds which reflect language heard in the child's environment.

Repetition of syllables such as ma, da, and ba in a child's babbling happens toward the end of the first year. If "mama" or "dada" or a close copy is said, parents show attention and joy. Language, especially in the area of speech development, is a two-way process; reaction is an important feedback to action.

Generally, first words are nouns or proper names of foods, animals, and toys, figure 1-9.