



## Parent-Infant Interaction & Child's Language Development

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Research Questions

Why does communicating with babies matter?

What are the most effective ways of encouraging parents and carers to communicate with babies?

What gets in the way of parents and carers communicating with babies and young children?



#### Methodology



- 7 electronic databases
- Focus: Parent-infant interaction in developing language from zero to 3
- Search yielded to: 1752 hits
- Only 600 abstracts were read because of their relevance.
- Full text was read in 130 cases.
- Of these were selected as for their highest quality.

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# Why does communicating with babies matter?

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- Ohildren in most environments learn to talk by the age of three.
- In the first three years of school, they start learning how to read and write, the language skills developed during infancy establishing the foundation for later language and literacy skills.
- Early parent-child interaction does make a difference to the child's language development.
- We have found some of the ways in which this works.



#### What are the most effective ways of encouraging parents and carers to communicate with babies?

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#### **1. Contingency**



Are parent and child "in tune" with each other – really communicating together?

Ontingency  $\rightarrow$  better communication  $\rightarrow$  better language.

Not just volume of talk, but also whether it is contingent.

Effect on vocabulary, syntax and attachment.





- What Can Parents Do?
- Say again more correctly what the child has tried to say.
- Say it in better words.
- Developing what the child says more effective than just telling the child what to do.
- ✤ Better explanations → more questions is good!





### Factors Affecting Contingency

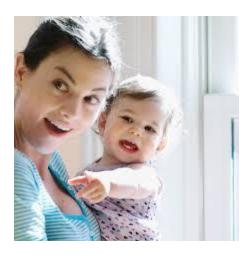
③ Gender – mothers better in short term than fathers.

Mental health – depressed mothers don't interact contingently or at all, so children's language is poor and they don't feel secure (attached).



#### 2. Different Kinds of Communication

- Gaze (looking at someone or something full in the face)
- ③ Gesture (moving mainly hands around to make a point)
- Touch (often with hands, but could be with other parts of the body)
- Sound (noises)
- Language.







#### Effects of Different Kinds of Communication

- Ohildren who gesture and point more develop better language.
- The child's use of gestures is related to better language (more than is parents' use of gestures).
- Awareness of gaze and sounds starts very soon after birth days!







#### What Kind of Parent?

Concerned with product of language or how the child gets to that point (process).

Product-oriented parents are more controlling.

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#### 2. Reminiscing

- Talking about past shared events
  Need elaborated conversations
- Introduction of new words
- Changes in expression
- Exploring cause and effect
- Exploring peoples' motivations
- Describing objects and actions
- Making links to other experiences
- Making logical connections



#### 3. Questioning

- Ose many "wh" questions (who?, where?, why? Etc...)
- Avoid questions that could be answered just yes or no
- Listen carefully to the child and follow his/her lead don't be bossy
- Share a book even one with no words, only pictures.







#### 4. Other Useful Things

- Telling nursery rhymes having the child join in
- Playing rhyming games
- Telling or discussing stories
- Learning the alphabet, numbers, and letters
- Learning activities outside the home, such as going to the shops, library or museum
- Think about the nature of toys and books how can they be used interactively



#### What gets in the way of parents and carers comunicating with babies and young children?

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#### **Differences in Parents**

- Parents think they talk more to children than they do
- Image Wore "turns" of conversation → better language development
- More parent-child talk towards end of day so try earlier!
- Turn off the TV it stops parent-child talk
- Ose baby buggies that have the child facing the parent

#### **Differences in Parents #2**



- Young mothers talk less and are less contingent
- Opper-class mothers talk more and give orders less
- More educated parents talk more and are more contingent

#### **Differences in Parents #3**

- Low-income African-American families talk less and are less contingent.
- But they are good to start with and decline over time (after 30 months).
- Higher-income African-American families do perfectly well.

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#### **Differences in Parents #4**

**Bilingualism:** 

- Children learning two languages develop language similarly to children using one language
- However, children learning two languages tend to know fewer words in each of their languages than children who only know one language.



#### **Differences in Parents #5**

- Oepressed women talk less and are less contingent → less child language
- Fathers affected by mother's depression
- High anxiety mothers similar
- Angry mothers even more so



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#### **Differences in Parents #6**

- ③ Girls seemed more vulnerable to parenting.
- Mothers with many adult friends interacted more with their children.
- Family income was not linked to parenting behaviours what you do is more important than what you are.



#### **Role of Others**

- Siblings and peers are a source of interaction, negotiation, and joint planning  $\rightarrow$  enhance language development.
- Role of conflicts and its resolution is particularly important; girls seem better at this than boys.
- In non-western cultures, communication is more likely polyadic and the role of overhearing correspondingly more important.

#### Interventions



- A few programmes effective (e.g. Mother-Child Home Program and Early Head Start).
- Early Learning Partnership positive messages from parents; no evidence of gains for children.
- Massage effective with depressed mothers.
- Speech and Language Therapy effective in some respects.
- Parents can be as effective as professionals after parenting classes (eg. Baby Talk program).

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#### What gets in the way of parents and carers communicating with babies and young children?

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- Barriers and challenges to parents are often not directly related to language interaction
- E.g., age, education, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, bilingualism (or parents' first language) and mental health.
- Barriers = what parents are, possibilities = what parents can do.





- Parents can make an enormous difference.
- This is of great importance for children, parents, teachers, a range of professionals, external funders and indeed, everybody.



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#### Reference

Keith Topping, Rayenne Dekhinet & Suzanne Zeedyk (2013) Parent-infant interaction and children's language development, Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology, 33:4, 391-426, DOI: 10.1080/01443410.2012.744159





### Thank you...

