Synthesis Paper – Speech Development

Olivia Nelson

Virginia Tech

Speech development begins from the moment a child is born. Whether crying, babbling or forming complete sentences, a child's speech development is continuous and completely dependent on the individual. According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), the first three years of life are the most important for acquiring speech and language skills. The case study child being focused on throughout this paper is H.D. (initials used for confidentially reasons), a three-year old in the Maroon Room of the Child Development Center of Learning and Research (CDCLR) at Virginia Tech. After ten weeks and over twenty hours of observation, H.D.'s speech development was closely studied and compared to material discussed throughout Human Development courses, as well as recent research articles regarding speech and language acquisition.

In a research article from *the Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* (2012), the relationship between speech development and thought in children is closely related. The author concludes that in a child's ability to form sentences, he or she is also learning the basic forms of thought, including judgments, pre-conceptual formations, and inferences. "Speech... acts very early as a universal, overall means by which the child orders and organizes content perceived in the course of vigorous activity" (p. 84). In other words, speech is a way for children to express what they are feeling and doing. H.D. was observed on numerous occasions being told to use his words, as he often became upset or overwhelmed and started to cry. The teachers in the Maroon Room were encouraging speech development for H.D. each and every time he was told to use his words. Towards week eight of observations, H.D. was building a structure for his racecar character to live in. E.G. (initials used for confidentiality reasons), another child in the Maroon Room, was running around pretending to be a policeman and knocked over H.D.'s almost-finished structure. He began to cry and, without being told, stated, "E.G.! I do not like

that." He exemplified the research from the article by putting into words what he was thinking. In his mind, H.D. was not pleased with what E.G. had done and because of his speech development he was able to express his feelings of disapproval in a complete sentence. From his time in the CDCLR, H.D. will have learned that putting how you feel into words is the best way to communicate effectively in life.

In addition to the teachers encouraging the children in the Maroon Room to use their words, they also need to engage in conversation with the children as much as possible. Teacher-student dialogue was noted in every observation log over the course of ten weeks. As discussed in class, there are multiple ways for teachers to encourage child's speech. According to Beaty (2010), the following methods are strategies to foster language production: expansion, extension, repetition, parallel talk, self-talk, vertical structuring, and fill-in (pg. 208). The strategy of expansion, repeating what the child has said but adding words to it, was the most common strategy observed by teachers in the Maroon Room. These suggestions correspond to an article from the Stanford Report, in which Carey, the author, states that talking directly to toddlers strengthens their language skills. The research included in the article, from the journal *Psychological Science,* looked at a child's ten-hour interaction at home, which can include a mother-child interaction or any interaction from any caregiver. The researchers used a Language Environment Analysis to determine there is a surprisingly large difference between children's interactions with language in a ten-hour period. According to Carey (2013), "one [child] heard more than 12,000 words of child-directed speech, while another heard only 670 words during the entire day." It can be concluded H.D. heard a large amount of child-directed speech in less than ten-hour period because of constant teacher-student dialogue, based on observation logs. During

a specific observation in week nine, a teacher in the Maroon Room initiated a conversation with

H.D. as he was painting a picture on the easel. It went as follows:

> *Teacher: "H.D., who are you painting this for?"*
> *Hayden: "My mom."*
> *Teacher: "And how is your mom going to feel when you give her this picture?"*
> *Hayden: "She will feel very good."*
> *Teacher: "And how does painting make you feel, H.D.?"*
> *Hayden: "It makes me feel nice."*

This conversation between the teacher and H.D. shows the importance of teacher-student

dialogue and how it helps foster speech development. The teacher used repetition in her

questions to assist H.D. in answering them in addition to asking him to think about how someone

else would feel about his painting, introducing the idea of empathy. This simple conversation

between the teacher and H.D. proved to be very beneficial for H.D., as he will be more likely to

speak up at home if he is continuously asked questions at school, which will increase the amount

of child-directed speech H.D. is exposed to.

In a meeting with the teachers in the Maroon Room, it was discussed that H.D.'s parents

were initially worried about his speech development and questioned whether to seek out speech

therapy. This issue can be related to an article from the Pediatrics Journal entitled *Can Clinical

Judgment Detect Children with Speech-Language Problems?* In the article, the author

investigated the clinical research from 157 parent-child dyads to determine that children with

speech development problems were most often detected through clinical judgments. These

judgments most often come from parental concern, just like H.D.'s parents showed in the

beginning. In the meeting with H.D.'s teachers, the teacher shared that H.D.'s stutter was their

initial concern, but she recommended waiting to see if he grows out of it. H.D.'s slight stutter

was noted in week five of the observation log when he was stating his side of the argument in a

discrepancy that occurred between him and the teacher. She noticed H.D. trying to reach for his

gloves in his cubby as the children were getting dressed to go outside. She told H.D. he did not need his gloves because it was warm enough outside to go without them. To this he responded, *"Bu-, bu-, bu-, but my hands will be cold!"* H.D. was trying extremely hard to get what he was thinking into words that he stuttered initially, delaying him to get to the heart of what he needed to say. No other instances of stuttering were noted during the rest of the observation time period indicating he had slowed down on his speech and started to grow out of his stuttering habit. It is important his parents were aware of a potential speech problem, as clinical screenings would have been the next step to take according to the article.

All in all, H.D.'s speech development is right where he needs to be as a three year old. He proved on multiple occasions he can contribute to conversation with adults and peers. He was often observed talking to himself while building structures or playing by himself. He learned how to voice his feelings thanks to the teachers in the Maroon Room, experienced ample child-directed speech, and proved he could slow down his words and grow out of his slight stutter brought to light by his parents. As stated earlier, speech development is a continuous process, and H.D. is right on track.

References

Beaty, Janice J. (2014). Observing the Development of the Young Child. Saddle River: Pearson.

Carey, Bjorn. (2013) Talking directly to toddlers strengthens their language skills, Stanford
    research shows. *Stanford Report*. Retrieved from
    http://news.stanford.edu/news/2013/october/fernald-vocab-development-101513.html

Glascoe, F. P. (1991). Can clinical judgment detect children with speech-language
    problems? *Pediatrics*, *87*(3), 317-322.

Podd'iakov, N. (2012). Speech and intellectual development in children. *Journal Of Russian &*
    East European Psychology, *50*(2), 84-86.

Speech and Language Developmental Milestones. (2010). In *National Institute on Deafness and*
    Other Communication Disorders. Retrieved from:
    http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/voice/pages/speechandlanguage.aspx