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Introduction

Literacy is the foundation of all learning. A student who can read confidently, comprehend fully and write clearly opens doors to worlds of discovery in science, math, literature, and history. Adults who struggle to read and write are locked out of better-paying jobs and hindered in their personal development.

In this report, I am going to talk about the role of language and literacy in understanding children's development.

Language and Literacy

Language development refers to children's emerging abilities to understand and use language. Language skills are receptive—the ability to listen to and understand language—and expressive—the ability to use language to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Children's language ability affects learning and development in all areas, especially emerging literacy.

Emerging literacy refers to the knowledge and skills that lay the foundation for reading and writing. For infants and toddlers, emerging literacy is embedded in the Language and Communication domain. This reflects how closely connected these emerging literacy skills are to very young children's beginning receptive, expressive, and vocabulary skills. For preschoolers, Language and Literacy are distinct domains. They reflect children's growing skills as they begin to grasp differences between spoken and written language, as well as how they are connected.

Language and literacy skills can develop in any language, and for the most part, they develop first in the child's home language. Supporting the development of the home language helps prepare young children for learning.

Language develops through children's interactions with other people around them. For example, a baby hears his or her mother talk directly to him or her, as well as to other people. Hearing the mother's speech may encourage a baby to try to imitate the sounds that he or she hears over time. Furthermore, the baby will quickly learn which words are connected to certain objects or people, and which words may produce particular responses from others.

Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. Like language, literacy develops through the interactions a child experiences with others. In early childhood, for example, literacy can develop through hearing stories read from books and showing children pictures with words. It is important that adults do not attempt to force adult levels of reading onto children in their early development, as this is considered developmentally-inappropriate and may actually work against healthy development. For example, a child who is pushed to learn to write too soon may come to connect the activity of writing with failure and disappointment.

Ways to Support Language and Literacy Development in Early Childhood

There are simple ways that adult caregivers can help support the language and literacy development within early childhood. One way to do this is through books. The following tips help support children's healthy development in this area using books:

- Incorporate books and reading into daily routines, like a part of a child's bedtime ritual.
- Remember that very young child may not have the attention span to sit through long books; reading a book partially is still helpful.
- Use all forms of verbal expression to read to children, including reading, singing, and conversing about the content of books.
- Connect the stories found in books to the child's life (i.e., personalize them).
- As babies get older, show them the words that you are reading, as you read them.
- Keep children engaged in reading by asking them questions along the way, or letting them tell stories.
- Keep in mind that what young children like in books is different than what older children like; for example, books with bright colors, large print, and lots of novelty are

more appealing to young children.

Communication Disorders

For some children, language development does not occur in a typical fashion and a communication disorder may emerge. Such disorders are characterized by deficits in children's skills in speaking, listening, and/or communicating with others. Common communication disorders include:

- Expressive language disorder – involves incorrect use of words and tenses, problems forming sentences (which are typical of the child's age), and limited vocabulary
- Phonological disorder – involves the trouble with correct sound production and selection (e.g., a child with this disorder may replace one sound for another)
- Stuttering – involves difficulty with the timing of sounds and words which impairs overall fluency; a child who stutters may frequently pause in the middle of a speech or repeat the same words several times while speaking.
- Dyslexia - This is considered a learning disability and not necessarily a communication disorder, although it may affect communication; it involves difficulty with separating distinct sounds contained in words and makes reading especially difficult.
- Dysgraphia – This is considered a learning disability and not necessarily a communication disorder, although it may affect communication; it involves difficulty with writing -- problems with spelling, proper handwriting, or expression of thoughts in written form.

Conclusion

Language and literacy are major domains of early childhood development. These are connected areas but refer to different things. Language development involves the development of the skills used to communicate with others through languages, while literacy development involves the ability to read and write. Babies are born with the capacity for development in these areas. There are simple ways that adults can support this development. In addition to understanding basic behaviors, adults should also be aware of common communication disorders, which may impede language and literacy development.