

# LANGUAGE AND THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

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# WHAT IS LANGUAGE?



# WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

'Language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves.

The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression and emotional release.'

Encyclopaedia Britannica

# CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE

- Social agreement among people in which specific sounds represent specific images
- Words come in specific order to form meaningful sentences
- Way to communicate with other people, to express thoughts, feelings and ideas
- Way to communicate with oneself when naming feelings and sensations
- Requires neurological connections, a healthy hearing and vocal apparatus

# HOW THE LANGUAGE CALLS THE CHILD



- The child is born with a unique mechanism for language learning
- The child absorbs language from the environment just like a camera captures images
- Only human speech has this tremendous effect on a newborn
- There is a critical period for language learning

# LANGUAGE

- Helps us understand the stage of a child's development and mentality
- Is innate to people; we all achieve language in the same way no matter which race we belong to
- Is a product of man; it doesn't exist in nature
- The child is born without any language so he/ she can take the language of the environment
- Doesn't just happen; there has to be language in the environment
- Younger siblings might speak quicker than their elder siblings because of imitation

## JUST LIKE A BUTTERFLY...

'Language is analogous to the cocoon. All the particulars of the words were inside, just as the butterfly was inside the cocoon. But this beautiful butterfly will not emerge if the caterpillar has not lived his life, hidden himself, eaten and done all this work, unconscious of what was to be. The butterfly does all this by heredity; it does nothing itself'

Maria Montessori

# HOW DOES LANGUAGE HELP THE CHILD?



The child

- Communicates
- Adapts to the new environment
- Acquires a sense of belonging to the new family, society and culture born into
- Is a universal language learner until the 6th month



# MONTESSORI SCHOOLS

- Are mostly bilingual; a child has the best chance of becoming bilingual by learning a second language as early as possible
- Montessori guides strictly follow the OPOL method (One Person One Language)
- Each guide speaks one language consistently and never switches to another
- The child is urged to establish an emotional relationship with the guide and to do so he/she has to use that specific language
- Children in Montessori schools are provided with activities in both languages

# WHEN DOES LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT BEGIN?

## Stages of Language Acquisition

1. 7th month in utero – 1 year (pre-linguistic phase)
  - The child gets prepared from the womb, is able to recognise the mother's voice and the rhythm of her heartbeat and breathing
  - After birth there are a series of stages where the child experiments by practising the sounds of the environment
  - At 10 months the child realises the sounds which make up words have meaning
  - So, at 12 months the child says his/her first intentional word

# WHEN DOES LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT BEGIN?

## 2. 1 year – onwards (linguistic phase)

- The child makes generalisations where one word has multiple meanings
- One word questions (mummy?)
- Two –word phrases (dog white)
- Around 24-36 months there's a vocabulary explosion
- From 3 years onwards the child acquires the symbolic aspect of language, that is, writing and reading

# HOW CAN WE, AS MONTESSORI GUIDES AND PARENTS HELP?

Maria Montessori very soon became well aware of the role of the adult in the child's life and how it influences the child physically, emotionally and mentally

That's why she talks about the **preparation of the adult**, referring to the work we need to do with ourselves



# PRACTICALLY SPEAKING ADULTS SHOULD

- Provide an environment rich in language experiences
- Attach meaning to words
- Be present body and mind in the here and now
- Be honest about their emotions as they are carried through words



## FOR EXAMPLE

- 'You look really nice in that red jumper' - if you truly think so, if not, you'd better not say anything at all
- 'I'm just tired, that's all' - it's quite common to substitute sadness, disappointment with fatigue – it's ok to feel sad or disappointed, you are also human just like your children
- 'I'm sorry I don't have any money on me?' - Are you sure? Maybe try saying 'I;m sorry I can't give you any money today'

# SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Encourage face to face communication and your child's desire to speak by being present in the here and now
- Speak clearly with proper pronunciation and articulation
- Use rich and precise vocabulary
- Be willing to repeat the words your child is trying to pronounce again and again
- Be extra careful with the quality and consistency of the language you use
- Listen to music and songs
- Minimise screen time because your child needs to learn language from another human being present

# DURING PREGNANCY AND RIGHT AFTER BIRTH



- During pregnancy, talk to the child, read out loud, listen to music and choose a song you really like
- Later on, when the child is born and feels upset or is crying, play this song to soothe him/her
- Studies have shown that babies are actually able to recognise the rhythm of the music combined with the mother's voice



# CRYING

- Is the main means of communication and parents are advised to accept it as a way of expressing needs and feelings
- Babies who are left to cry are under stress and might perceive the environment as hostile and unsafe
- 'Nobody's listening, nobody's here for me, I am not understood and my needs are not met'
- The child internalises the adult's attitude towards crying as a personal lack experiencing the feeling of 'something's wrong with me'

# CRYING AND PACIFIERS

- Obstruct speech development
- Impede the child's only means of communication
- The child gets conditioned to being comforted by sucking as whatever feeling experienced is concentrated on the mouth
- Later on in life as adults, they are usually the people who overeat or smoke because this is how they were conditioned to deal with feelings caused by uneasiness

# MORE AIDS TO SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

- Around 3 months the baby focuses on the mother's mouth, mimics the movement and begins to understand that sounds come from the mouth
- Introduce language dancing: sitting face to face, once your child says something, wait patiently until he/she has finished and then respond
- Acknowledge the child's effort to communicate and be encouraging
- Explain whatever you're doing with the child, not to the child, using simple words 'Now I'm going to take off your sock'. This also serves as a preparation for the older children.
- One word can have multiple meanings! Through observation try deciphering the true meaning behind words to avoid tantrums
- Rephrase correctly. When your one-year old says 'banana?', respond with 'Do you want a banana?'

# MORE AIDS TO SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

- 'Mum, dad! I can use 'I'! Around two comes the pivotal moment when your child begins using 'I'. To indirectly prepare your child for this stage, make sure you use 'I' when talking about yourself
- See your child with fresh eyes. 'There are breadcrumbs all over the floor. You can go fetch the broom and sweep them off the floor. Do you need help?' instead of 'You're always dropping breadcrumbs on the floor'
- Praise the effort. 'You've put on your shoes all by yourself'
- Avoid using 'Don't'. Focus on affirmations! 'Use two hands to carry the glass' instead of 'Don't drop the glass' or 'It's ok to feel sad when I'm leaving for work. I am sad, too' instead of 'Don't worry/cry'

# MORE AIDS TO SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

- Breathe in – breathe out! Remember to count to 3 in your head slowly before any reaction
- Acting as a mediator? When your two children are fighting over a toy, you could say 'I see you two want the same toy truck and I know you can both find a solution so that both of you are happy'
- Always respect the child; talk to them exactly the way you would talk to another adult or a person with dignity
- Do apologise. 'I'm sorry, I shouldn't have yelled at you. What I could have said is..'
- Keep things simple. Get your point across using the minimum number of words 'Your Lego blocks are on the floor' instead of 'Put your Lego blocks away right now'

# THE GIFT OF LANGUAGE



'It is manifest that children seek the company of adults and try in every way to take part in their lives. The child is completely satisfied only when he sits at the table with the family or warms himself before the fire with them. Those human voices that speak of peace and tranquility surely make the most beautiful music. Nature offers us this means to learn to speak'

Maria Montessori