Facilitating Infant and Toddler Language Development through Coaching: Putting What We Know into Practice

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Participants will...

• Explain how infant and toddler teachers and caregivers can promote brain development during everyday interactions

• Identify language facilitation strategies for interacting with toddlers and infants

• Recognize elements of coaching that support infant and toddler caregivers and teachers to use best practices in their work with young children
Zero to Three Video Reflection

Assign a recorder for your small group:

- What are three key points you already knew about promoting healthy brain development with infants and toddlers?
- What was new to you?
- What gets in the way of infant and toddler teachers using language facilitation strategies?

https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/156-brain-wonders-nurturing-healthy-brain-development-from-birth
Professional Development Project for Early Head Start (EHS)

- Why?

- Goals of the professional development project:
  - To increase EHS teacher’s use of language facilitation strategies during interactions with infants and toddlers.
  - To improve the quality of teacher-child interactions across the day through using language facilitation strategies in routines and planned activities.

- Workshops (5 two-hour) on:
  - 1) Early brain development,
  - 2) Developmental milestones during the first three years,
  - 3) Language Development and Facilitation Strategies
  - 4) Powerful interactions during everyday routines
  - 5) Literacy and math experiences for infants and toddlers
Strategies to Enhance Language Development with Infants

- Consistently expose infants to language in the classroom
  - self talk: talk about what you are doing
  - parallel talk: talk about what children are doing
- Label and describe objects in the environment
- Imitate and initiate sounds with infants
- Provide words for infants communication
Strategies to Enhance Language Development with Toddlers

- Model and engage in conversations
- Provide time for toddlers to respond
- Repeat and extend child responses
- Use a variety of words
Language Facilitation Strategies

- Self talk (thinking out loud)
- Parallel talk (describing what child is doing)
- Encourage back and forth exchanges (simple questions)
- Providing words for communicative attempts
- Repeating and extending
- Open ended questions (toddlers)
- Labeling/naming objects (toddlers)
Partner Activity

Assign role of teacher and toddler
Use container play to demonstrate “parallel talk”
Switch role to demonstrate “repeating and extending”.

- **Parallel talk**
  - Narrating what the child is doing

- **Repeating and extending children’s language**
  - Form of active listening in which we repeat or paraphrase what a child has said and add more information
Having meaningful conversations with children

- Get a child’s attention
  - getting down to her level
  - calling her by name
  - softly touching an arm as you speak

- Model pleasant conversation for and with children
  - Really listen to children
  - Stop what you are doing
  - Establish eye contact
  - Stay focused
  - Respond encouragingly
Having meaningful conversations with children

- Make meals a place and time for conversation
- Establish a comfortable environment for adults and children to talk with each other.
- Bring interesting things into the classroom and encourage them to guess the purposes, functions and names.
Use expressions like these to encourage conversation:

- That’s interesting.
- What happened next?
- How could that be?
- Does anybody else have an idea about that?
- Did that ever happen to anyone else?
The Daily Dozen

- Establish a caring relationship
- Take turns during interactions
- Respond to the infants nonverbal communication
- Use information talk
- Use a rich and varied vocabulary
The Daily Dozen

- Use infant directed speech
  - Short sentences, repeating words
- Draw the infants attention
- Use meaningful talk that describes concepts
- Ask questions and use wait time
- Listen with your eyes
- Use social routines
  - songs and fingerplays are well suited to playtime interactions
Pause and Reflect

• What do young children learn from songs and fingerplays?

• How can we use songs and finger plays as a bridge to literacy?

• How does a real person singing differ from a child listening to iPad, video...?
Partner Activity

- Share favorite song or finger play for infants and toddlers
- Take notes on words and actions
Coaching: Putting strategies into practice

- Widely accepted to be an effective means of facilitating the transfer of learning from PD workshops to practice in early childhood classrooms
- Increases the likelihood that teachers use the learned practices with fidelity
Practice Based Coaching

- Recommended by Head Start due to its research and experience base in supporting EC teachers to develop skills in using effective teaching practices

- The coaching components of PBC include
  - a) planning goals and actions steps,
  - b) focused observation, and
  - c) reflecting on and sharing feedback

(National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2017)
Practice Based Coaching

• Teachers were video-recorded for 15-20 minutes while interacting with infants and toddlers during everyday routines and activities (monthly for three months)

• Teachers used a reflection guide to engage in video-based self reflection

• UNI Coaching Facilitators and Program managers coached each teacher using a structured coaching protocol with teachers
Video Based Reflection Activity

- Watch the video of Jenny leading conversation with toddlers around books
- Identify the strategies the teacher is using
- Be the teacher and complete the Video Based Self Reflection Guide (last HO)
- Share with group
Discussion:
Your Coaching Experiences

- What works best when you are being coached?
- What works best when you are coaching?
- What does not work?
Powerful Interactions
(Dombro, Jablon & Stetson, 2011)

- Very intentional and purposeful exchanges between a teacher and child that can have a significant and highly positive impact on learning
- Teacher intentionally connects with a particular child to extend their learning

Everyday Interactions-------------------Powerful Interactions
Coaching Model based on Jablon, Dombro & Johnsen (2016)

- **STEP ONE:** Be present to coach

- **STEP TWO:** Connecting as a Coach
  - Be trustworthy
  - Validate the teacher
  - Validate teacher strengths using “I notice” statements (Behavior + outcome)
  - Invite the teacher to share what she observed herself doing on the video

- **STEP THREE:** Coaching to Extend Learning
  - Prepare open ended questions in advance to explore areas for follow up
  - Involve teacher in generating goal for next time
Coaching “I notice” Feedback

Feedback needs to describe three times as many strengths as challenges.

Descriptive praise from effective coaches links the teacher’s specific actions and words to specific child outcomes (highlighting how teacher behavior promotes child development)

- Behavior: “I noticed you put a variety of toys just beyond her reach…

- Outcome: ....This encourages her to crawl more and explore the toys”.

Partner Activity: Identify the Child Outcome

1) I noticed during the book sharing that you asked the children a couple of open ended questions, with no right answers, like “what do you think he will do?”

Outcome:

2) I heard you talk with the children about what they are playing with.

Outcome:

3) I saw you sitting and having conversations about animals we see at the zoo during snack.

Outcome:
Coaching Conversation Starters

Invite the teacher to share how she responded to the video based self reflection guide by asking the teacher the following questions:

- What was surprising or interesting?
- What strategies did you use with children? What did that sound like or look like?
- What missed opportunities did you notice?
- What goal do you want to work on in the next month?
- What do you need to reach that goal?
Follow Up or Probing Questions

- How do my observations compare to yours?
- What worked well for you? What worked well for the children? Why do you think so?
- Tell me more about ____
- Lets think about another way you could use that strategy to _____
- What questions could you ask?
- What did you do or say to get back and forth exchanges (or conversations) going during _________________?
- Let’s list what new words you can use next time...
- What classroom activities might facilitate more child language?
Changes linked to Goal setting

Infant Teacher B

Number of Occurrences

Self-Talk | Parallel Talk | Imitate | Provide Words | Encourage

- Baseline
- 1st Coaching
- 2nd Coaching
- 3rd Coaching
- No Coaching
Changes linked to Goal Setting

Toddler Teacher A

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<th>Self-Talk</th>
<th>Parallel Talk</th>
<th>Back/Forth</th>
<th>Respond Attempts</th>
<th>Repeat/Extend</th>
<th>Open Ended Quest</th>
<th>Label/Naming</th>
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What we Learned

- Video-based self reflection and coaching allowed EHS teachers to see what they were already doing well
- Goal setting was particularly useful component
- Most Early Head Start teachers saw this PD as positive and strength based
- Some language facilitation strategies responded better to this PD model than others
- Challenges of context (child-staff ratios, limited materials)
- Early Head Start teachers want more PD on curriculum activities that promote child engagement and conversations
Questions?