



Home Language as the basis of Language Teaching

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There are many theories and researches based on people's observation of how language happens to children at home and how children are able to speak such complex sentences of their home language. Children at a very early age start communicating flawlessly in the languages that are spoken in their homes. They are effortlessly able to express what they feel, they are curious to know how things happen, they have the ability to question and they know how to reason and analyze situations without any kind of formal education. Language is not only a means of communication but it helps in building up of other cognitive abilities in the child. Therefore, it is important to understand the process by which language evolves in the child.

Having human brains, we have a natural instinct to communicate our thoughts and our first breath itself generates vibrancy. When a child is born she cries and the process of language starts. That cry is itself an indicator that a child has an urge to express!

Upto a point of time, children express what they feel only through crying. They cry when they are hungry, the tone of that cry is different from the cry when they are not feeling well or are uncomfortable. The cry in pain is different from the cry when they are playing.

As and when children grow, they start showing other ways of communicating, For instance, they smile and they also laugh and this process of communicating feelings goes to the next level. Gradually they start picking up words from the environment, although initially they are only able to utter some sounds like mum, baba, hummm.... and children enjoy repeating these sounds invariably in different ways and tones.


As the linguist, Noam Chomsky states, "children have an innate ability to learn languages, because there is a Language acquisition device in the brain, which

gets activated upon receiving the input from the environment, both in terms of language and other signals like touch and feeling. All these signals get noticed and recorded and those inputs take time to settle in the brain, and become intake. This is a gradual and natural process. These intakes are further translated into expressions: that is, the home language I, which children start speaking naturally and start using as a tool to put forth their thoughts."

This entire process from the time the child is born to the time the child starts to communicate takes at least two years of input from the environment. Likewise, when the child comes across the target language or the language of the classroom, she needs the same input-rich environment, where the child is listening to that target language, understanding it, registering it and then speaking it accordingly. By and large in our formal setting we want our children to immediately start understanding the language of the school and begin to speak it, but we forget that they have not had the exposure of the target language.

Children first use language for themselves, for talking to themselves. On observing small kids one can see that they speak the word they come across many times. They use these words for themselves first. Talking to oneself is a meaning-making process for the child, which gets registered in the mind of the child in some form and the child uses that wherever needed in future.

As children further use language for socialising, therefore children need to understand how it is being used and understood by others. For that they have to understand certain structures, which they understand by the process of language acquisition. It happens unconsciously when they are in that environment. In the process they are bound to make some grammatical errors, which should be ignored.



For example: The poems and words that they use while playing may sometimes not be used correctly or may have wrong grammar. This is a process and therefore, they shouldn't be discouraged or corrected.

The home language flourishes through language-rich input and the abstract experiences. Hence, the home language is an effective resource that should be used in the classroom situation when the children come to school in the initial years of their life until the time they are acquainted to the language used in the school. But mostly the prior knowledge of the child (language) and the meaning-making process through the known language is ignored in the real classroom situations.

Therefore, it is important to keep the home language environment as the basis of teaching language in the classroom situations, though there are other factors which supplement the teaching process.

The home language plays a vital role in building an understanding of the second or the third language. Children call 'spoon' as 'chamach' in their home language (Hindi) and they have a fair understanding of its purpose, what it looks like and what all can be done with it. The moment the object 'chamach' is mentioned, the brain starts making connection. And this understanding is extended to second language or the target language. Ignoring child's language in school may result in leading the child to feel de-motivated and discourage her to come to school when she is beginning formal education.

Every word could be put into action and spoken in the child's contextual language as well as the target language. Words without action and contact remain lifeless for the child therefore, it is important to create an environment which permits children to make continuous attempts to link the use of language with life's experience and objects.

The method of experiential learning work wonders because children are in contact with the concrete form of a particular object. The things in and around the school vicinity should be used as a meaningful resource for children. This personal contact with particular things helps children to register in a better manner. They are able to feel and based on their experience are able to talk about it whenever needed.

Another important point to be noticed in small kids is that they keep talking to themselves while doing any activity: it doesn't matter even if they are alone. This mannerism shows that they are trying to figure out and build an understanding for self and they also sustain interest while they are murmuring. This is called a commentary from them. Therefore, when children are doing some activity in the class and are talking to themselves, as teachers we should allow them and give them that space and not take it as noise.

As the concentration span of a child is very short, it becomes important for teachers to use the play-way method where children are doing all sorts of activities. For example, while reciting poetry, children could be asked to enact the poetry along with the teachers.

Putting everything in actions becomes necessary for children because children have a lot of energy and they want to vent. If their energy is suppressed, they become very restless and lose interest in that particular activity.

In the early ages of life many concepts can be introduced through story-telling sessions and these sessions could be so designed that children are asked to become the characters of that story and they could do role play. Further, the stories could be made to draw, those illustrations could be pasted on the walls of the classes, while some words of the story could be used in both the child's contextual language as well as the target language so that the child is able to register fully what has been learnt.

Teachers should not pressurize children to write accurately; rather they should be lenient with them on written tasks in the early years their focus should be more on the verbal and listening activities and let them write as they feel comfortable. Children also form a pattern of scribbling so giving them space on this aspect as this would be beneficial for the child.

Love, individual attention and fear-free environment are the doors that allow children to breathe and nurture in them the traits like creativity and imagination.

Children are very curious and have the ability to question and understand things themselves, therefore they should be given a platform to express these questions from the moment they enter the schools. Likewise, they have an innate ability to

acquire language. They should be given a language rich environment of the target language and take the language acquisition process to the classrooms that is, an informal setting rather than a formal one.

Hence, the home language environment spreads its wings for building an understanding of the target language and broadening the spectrum of expression for the child!



References

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