

Learning opportunities
for children
up to age 4

Children want to talk

25 videoclips on
early language acquisition

www.children-4.ch



Kanton Zürich
Bildungsdirektion

About the project

How do children acquire language? How can parents and language development professionals support children on a daily basis? The “Early language acquisition” video clips provide answers to these questions. The 25 video clips, each two to three minutes in length, illustrate examples of linguistic experiences which are significant for children in the first few years of life and beyond. Using everyday situations, they show how children acquire languages and how adults can recognise and pick up opportunities for linguistic acquisition processes. As a result, language is not subject matter that needs to be conveyed, but rather a means of communication. Children try out and acquire language, and learn to communicate their feelings, ideas and experiences while interacting with others on a daily basis. The short video clips on early language acquisition show the fascination which is inherent in early childhood language acquisition, with learning opportunities from local and international families, playgroups and day-care centres.

The video clips are meant to inspire, motivate and sensitise viewers. Their clarity also allows them to be used in a variety of ways in family counselling and education. Moreover, they offer valuable support as part of education and training, or in quality work in the early childhood field. For this reason, an in-depth specialist voice-over was developed for every video clip which delves into and reflects on what is shown.

Accompanying brochure

All the specialist voice-overs are available in this accompanying brochure, which is tailored to the needs of professionals and is designed to provide them with optimum support for their analysis of the 25 video clips.

Good to know

Video clips

- All the video clips are freely available at www.kinder-4.ch, www.enfants-4.ch, www.uffants-4.ch and www.children-4.ch.
- The website contains:
 - 25 video clips on “Early language acquisition” from 2019.
 - 6 further video essays
 - 40 video clips on general learning opportunities from 2014.
- Every video clip can be played in 13 languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian, German, English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romansh, Spanish, Tamil, Tigrinya and Turkish.
- Every video clip contains a voice-over.
- There is an in-depth expert commentary in German, English, French and Italian for every video clip.
- The video clips can be played without the voice-over for use in counselling, education and training.
- The video clips are also available on a memory stick for use in counselling or educational situations.
- Every video clip can be downloaded free of charge.

Website

- The website is available in 13 languages. It also allows targeted access to the video clips by title, age of the children, place of learning, constellation of people, and pedagogical theme and principle.
- The website has been configured so it is compatible for use on a smartphone.

Resources on early language acquisition for
free download

Parents

- “Early language acquisition” flyer in several languages
- Postcard for parents in 13 languages

Professionals/Propagators

- “Children want to talk” brochure as a PDF in German, English, French and Italian
- “Early language acquisition” handout in German and English
- “Early language acquisition” flyer in German

Municipalities

- “Early language acquisition” flyer with argument in German
- There are additional resources available on the website www.children-4.ch

Framework

The educational concept “Early language acquisition”, which was developed by the Thurgau University of Teacher Training (PHTG) and the Marie Meierhofer Institut für das Kind (MMI) on behalf of the Department of Education of the Canton of Zurich, is the specialist reference point of the new “Frühe Sprachbildung 2019” (Early language acquisition 2019) video clips. It outlines the basic concept of early language acquisition, illustrates the scientific foundations and formulates central principles and specific features of successful early language acquisition. It takes the approach that language acquisition should be integrated into daily life. Language acquisition does not take place separately but rather in everyday situations, and it should be oriented towards the interests of the children.

The specialist concept expands on the orientation framework for early childhood education, care and upbringing of the Swiss Commission for UNESCO and the Swiss Childcare Network.

Expert team

The MMI (primary responsibility Dr Heidi Simoni) and the PH Thurgau (primary responsibility Prof. Dr Dieter Isler) were responsible for the specialist direction of the videos, the development of the specialist voice-overs as well as the resources for parents, professionals and municipalities.

Widespread use is the goal

The impulse programme “Early language acquisition” is tied to the learning opportunities project which, with its 40 video clips on early childhood learning in everyday life, has been successful since 2014. All the video clips are available to interested parties on the website www.children-4.ch.

- Early childhood is a strategic focus of the Education Department of the Canton of Zurich. For more detailed information, please contact: www.bildungsdirektion.zh.ch → [Early Childhood](#)

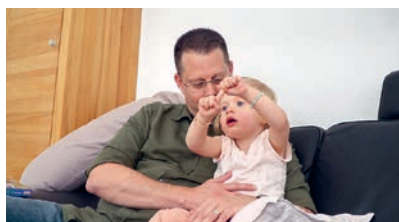
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Identify and utilize everyday opportunities for conversations



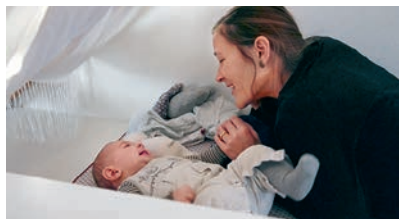
- 9 **Apricots**
Use daily life as a source of information for conversations



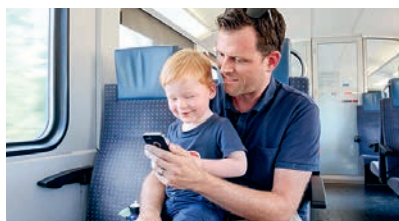
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Address children's discussion topics



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Use observations to start conversing



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Experiment with sounds



- 17 **Smartphone**
When the phone rings – explaining a switch in focus

Facilitate conversations between children



- 19 **Television**
Give children's conversations time and space to develop



- 21 **Market stall**
Develop a game while interacting

Assure the quality of interactions



- 23 **Bus trip**
Express what you have understood in words



- 25 **Film**
Discover things together



- 27 **World map**
Develop your thoughts together

Use language in many different ways



- 29 **Gorilla**
Organise picture book discussions together



- 31 **Kitten**
Express your thoughts and feelings in words



- 33 **Crocodile**
Travel through a fantasy world together using role play



- 35 **A walk**
Experience language with all your senses



- 37 **Hidden object book**
Make connections with your own experiences

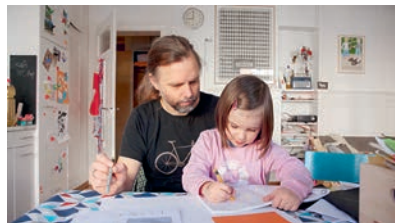
Provide access to early literacy



- 39 **Recycled glass**
Decipher the meaning of images and symbols together



- 41 **Brother John**
Explore languages through song



- 43 **Letters**
Discover the world of letters



- 45 **Dinosaurs**
Immerse yourself in a picture book together



- 47 **Table drumming**
Take an active part in songs and movement games

Value and support multilingualism



- 49 **Thorns**
Facial expressions and gestures facilitate understanding



- 51 **Family discussion**
Grow into two languages



- 53 **On the way home**
Discover the world in different languages



- 55 **Cook**
Play together in different languages



- 57 **Robot**
Learn the ambient language through games



Apricots

Inez 3 years 9 months

Ellie 4 years 4 months

Whether it is at the table, during a walk or shopping. Children want to interact with their caregivers everywhere. Let's make the most of this opportunity! Adults support children's language development when they name things and explain them, ask further questions and discuss new aspects.

Comment

Today, Inez is going shopping with her mother. Her friend Ellie is going with them too. There's a lot to talk about during a shopping trip. Without speech, many things remain unclear.

What does the delicious fruit that Ellie discovered taste like? The mother is listening. She shows interest in what Ellie and Inez say. She responds attentively to them, asks questions and provides an explanation. What number does she need to key in to print the correct label? And: does the watermelon also have to go on the scales? Everything has to be explained and discussed. There's so much language during an ordinary shopping trip! By doing so, the girls' vocabulary increases incidentally.

Using everyday situations as opportunities to engage children in conversation

Friends Inez and Ellie are allowed to go shopping with Inez' mother today. There is so much to see and to talk about! Ellie discovers a fruit that she knows and enjoys. However, she can't remember what it's called. Together they attempt to identify the name as well as the characteristics and the taste of the fruit. Ellie is allowed to pack some fruit. It is only then that it is clear that the little girl is talking about apricots and not peaches. Fortunately, Inez' mother calls the fruit by its correct name. Ellie is allowed to put the fruit on the scales and type in the corresponding number. That also provides discussion material. Inez' mother shows interest in what the children are doing and discovering. She explains and names things, and she asks questions if she doesn't understand something. At the same time, she supports Ellie by suggesting possible answers. Daily situations such as joint shopping trips provide innumerable opportunities to start a discussion with one another. In this way, language development is indirectly supported.

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Giving children space to express themselves

Inez' mother picks up on the initiatives of both girls with interest and addresses them. She wants to know exactly which fruit Ellie enjoys. And she explains to

Inez why watermelon does not need to go on the scales. In the process, she interacts with the children on an equal footing and gives them space to contribute their perspective.

It is important that children continually see that their conversation initiatives are being recognised, picked up on and valued. This is because children speak more and use more complex language when they can talk about things that interest them and when their discussion partner shows real interest in what they say.

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Discovering symbols and the alphabetic print system

After the fruit is packed, it has to be weighed. But which number do they need to press? Inez's mother involves Ellie here as well. She helps her by firstly pointing to the number and then explaining what the numbers depicted here mean. While they are weighing the food, Ellie can learn to type in the right number correctly herself. Inez' mother also helps her by asking: "What is this number?" Success: Ellie is able to attach the correct sticker to the bag. She is clearly proud of her achievement. At the same time, through this everyday activity she also learns that the symbols on the labels have a meaning and that you can find and "read" the numbers on the scale again. This "reading" of symbols is an important basis for the later use of written language.

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Comment

The story has been told. However, the conversation continues and Nina decides the direction in which it will go. Nina knows how to comfort someone who is hurt. The song also helps her Daddy. The stuck finger is a whole story in itself which Nina has to tell her Mummy straight away. Both parents are interested in what two-year-old Nina has to say. Nina can already do a lot linguistically. She can report. She can explain and ask questions.

Finger

Nina 2 years 5 months

Children need adults who really take the time to listen to them, as they want to say what they have experienced. They want to talk about what is worrying them. Then they enjoy speaking and are keen to do so at length. They need sufficient time to express what is important for them.

Giving children space to express themselves

Father and daughter have been looking at a picture book together. Now Nina has switched her attention to her surroundings again, and she notices that her mother is getting her little brother ready for an outing. "Where's Mummy going?" – Nina wants to know more, and her father answers her question immediately ("Mummy is putting Silvan in the pram so that we can go outside afterwards"). He not only says what her Mummy is doing but also explains why she is doing it. Her father successfully deploys his linguistic skills without dominating the discussion in the process. Nina sets the direction, while her Daddy follows.

As Nina closes the book and traps her father's finger between the pages, she seems to remember her own experiences. A trapped finger can hurt a lot. A comforting song can help in this case. Nina has often heard "Kiss it better" from her parents, which is why she can sing it alone without any difficulty. Nina's fascination with the stuck finger is obvious as she repeats many times "Finger stuck". She also excitedly tells her Mummy about what happened and immediately demonstrates how the finger got stuck. In the process, she switches between the language forms of "you", "he" and "I" with ease. She can say exactly whose finger was stuck and who closed the book. What an achievement! Her parents get involved in the discussion, signal their interest and encourage their daughter to remain on topic in this way

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Adapting interactions to individual children

Adults can adapt to the child and the situation in the discussion at various levels. For example, at the interaction level, the father gives two-and-a-half-year-old Nina sufficient time to put her thoughts into words and shows interest in what she is saying. At the content level, the discussion topics are decided by Nina and her father adapts what he says accordingly (Where is Mummy going and who is going with her? What's happened to the finger?). By using simple words, addressing Nina's utterances and reproducing them in his own sentences (Nina: "You also come." – Father: "Should I also come with you?"), her father adapts to the level of his daughter's specific linguistic skills.

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Focusing on understanding and supporting it with all means

For discussions to be successful, adults must also ensure that both sides understand each other. Their primary focus should not be on the correctness and complexity of the linguistic formulations, but rather on understanding children's thoughts. Nina's father does not immediately understand what she means. As the words "geklemmt" (stuck) and "gekannt" (known) sound similar in German, this causes a misunderstanding. Nina clears up the misunderstanding with words and actions. Her father listens carefully, asks questions and repeats what he has understood. He does so as long as is necessary until he understands what Nina wants to say to him: "Finger stuck!" Now they are speaking about the same thing and can continue the discussion.

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Highland cattle

Davin 2 years 2 months

If adults put what they see and are thinking into words, they help the child to understand and recognise it as well. This enables the child to also say something on the matter. This is how you start up a conversation!

Comment

Davin is able to discover the world on his mother's back. He has an overview of everything in such a high position. The two of them take notice of all the exciting things along the way using their fingers and words. Not only the words but also the pauses between them are important. They are needed to process what the two of them have seen. They also give them time to discover new things. Mother and son listen to each other closely, refer back to what the other has said, and introduce new aspects. In this way, the conversation develops harmoniously together. Step by step. Goats.

Antelopes. Or are they highland cattle?

"Highland cattle!" Another word for Davin's vocabulary chest!

Establishing and maintaining shared attention

There is a lot to look at and discover on the joint excursion. Mother and son draw each other's attention to what they see. Joint attention must be established to ensure that both of them speak about the same thing. To do so, they use different (communication) material, which they also combine. For example, Davin's mother says: "Davin, look down there. Do you see the horses?" She also looks in the direction of the horses and points to them with her finger. Davin also points to his own discoveries – with gestures and words ("This here"). Whether it is the sign, the dog leash or the hair band, his mother picks up on what Davin says and communicates her observations and thoughts to him. In the process, she summarises in words what she sees, but also puts things that are not perceivable in the here and now into words ("Perhaps they will come this way again to see whether the items are still here"). It is particularly challenging for younger children to maintain their attention in such situations. Davin's mother supports her son by taking regular breaks and accompanying the conversations with gestures.

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Jointly spinning sustained conversational threads

Davin and his mother remain on different topics and develop them further with several dialogue features. Thus, Davin points to the sign on the wayside and says: "Be careful". From experience, he has learnt

that signs often warn you about something. His mother explains what is on the sign and sums up by saying that horses may walk, but not run, on the path. Davin develops this thread further: "Not gallop," he says, showing his large vocabulary in the process. His mother repeats his words and in doing so makes it clear that she has understood him. Then she develops the topic further by explaining to her son why horses are not allowed to gallop here ("If horses gallop here, then the path will be destroyed over time"). Davin also informs his mother that he has understood her ("Path broken") and continues the topic by talking about the characteristics of the path ("stones"). There Davin discovers a dog leash, which is the starting point for a new discussion thread.

During their excursion, the two of them develop many other discussion threads. In this way, Davin can see that his initiatives are recognised and picked up by his mother. He also gets many opportunities to focus on and develop different topics over several discussion threads.

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Providing stimulating input in conversational interactions

Davin's mother continues to encourage him to expand on his contributions by using stimuli. For example, she adds to what he says when she realises that someone has lost a hair band. She also delves further into the topics that he raises by addressing new aspects ("However, sometimes men also have long hair. And they wear a hair band."). Finally, she makes references to her own experiences when she tells Davin that he has often seen her put her hair into a ponytail. Davin also encourages his mother to take on an active role as a discussion partner by asking, for example, "How do you make a ponytail? Do you know how?"

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Chatterbox

Ada 3 months

Babies are already keen on communicating and seek to be heard. The joint game with sounds and looks produces an early form of dialogue. Doing so allows language to develop.

Comment

Ada is 3 months old. She seems to have a lot to say. It's great that her mother is both interested in and excited by this. And it's even more wonderful that her mother gathers up the conversation threads and takes them further. Hägüü becomes Hägii. A fun game with sounds. Both of them get involved. To and fro with their voices, and also with their facial expressions. A lively dialogue between two people who get on well. The gazes meet and they gently clasp hands. A special type of mother-daughter dialogue!

Giving children space to express themselves

Wriggling and gurgling, Ada expresses her happiness at the exchange with her mother, who not only answers her daughter's cries with words and sounds but also with her distinctive facial expressions: wonder, laughter and agreement are all reflected in her mother's face. This helps Ada to understand her Mummy. She sees that her sounds are heard, picked up and valued. Even babies want to try out their verbal communication tools in interactions and find out what it is like to be an active partner. This encourages them to get involved and remain on track.

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Playing with and exploring language

Mother and daughter alternate in their contributions, vary the sounds and encourage each other to make further exclamations. This results in a language game – and even before Ada is old enough to express herself verbally. The joint experiment with sounds and syllables is clearly something that they both enjoy. Babies love repetition and surprises. It encourages them to take part in the exchange. In this way, Ada is able to successfully enter into dialogue with her mother at just a few months of age.

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Jointly spinning sustained conversational threads

Gazing at each other, touching each other, discovering the sounds of their voices and varying sounds – and for more than just a few minutes. This is an impressive feat for a three-month-old baby! Ada does not just take part in the discussion with her voice. She interacts with her mother with her whole body: wriggling her legs, using her hands to grab her mother's fingers and repeatedly trying to make eye contact with her mother. In this way, Ada plays a part in keeping the discussion going.

Such exciting moments together help Ada to progressively increase her attention span and develop the capacity to hold longer discussions.

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Smartphone

Davin 2 years 4 months

Smartphones and other digital devices are part of our daily life. It's important that adults use them carefully and only when necessary in the presence of children, as children need the attentive conversation to develop their linguistic skills.

Comment

Davin is on the way to visit his Great-Grandma with his father. His Daddy's sentences are important for Davin. He now knows what is happening and who is on the phone. And he also knows: My Daddy will give me his attention again soon. He needs to be patient when the adults are on the phone. Children usually only pick up fragments. Now the little boy can hear his Mummy and the conversation continues seamlessly. Shopping. Playing on a slide. Riding on a boat. The conversation is about what took place. And about what they are going to do soon. This requires language. It's impressive how Davin is already able to do so with his Mummy over a distance. "Bye!" Davin knows that you wave when you say goodbye. But his Mummy cannot see that on the smartphone. How wonderful it is that Davin's Daddy verbalises his son's gestures. Now it's clear. The short conversation is over.

Marking conversations between adults clearly and engaging in them sparingly

Davin is travelling with his father on the train to visit his great-grandmother. Then the phone rings: It's Mummy! Before Davin's father answers the phone, he explains who is on the phone and that he is going to take the call. It is important to tell Davin this as it helps him to understand what is now happening. His father turns to the discussion on the smartphone for a short time, which means that his attention is not wholly on Davin. Telephone conversations are only partially audible to those not taking part, and it is not easy to follow them. Nevertheless, Davin listens to his parents' discussion attentively – and makes it clear that he also wants to take part and has already understood a lot of what has been said ("Buy tissues and apple juice"). When discussions between adults are clearly marked and do not compete with the attention given to children, they are no problem for children. Davin also wants to take part himself and say hello to his mother. Davin's father acquiesces to his wish. The loud speaker function of the phone makes it possible for all three of them to take part in the discussion.

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Expressing inner processes verbally

“Now the phone is ringing. Let’s see who is on the phone.” Davin’s father not only verbalises what is happening (the telephone is ringing) but also talks about his intention (he wants to see who is on the phone). Their future plans (to purchase tissues and apple juice) are also the focus in the discussion with Davin’s mother on the phone. Language is essential to voice your intentions and action plans.

However, language is also needed to talk about your own feelings and preferences. Davin also learns this during the train journey. He was able to use the slide and drive the ship in the play wagon. He talks about this with his mother on the phone. “Then you’re fine,” says his mother, formulating on his behalf to say how he is doing. The little boy knows how to confirm this and says “Yes”. His mother’s linguistic support may vary according to the situation. She can support him with targeted questions or possible answers when he is coming up with his own formulations.

“Now you can say bye to Mummy,” says Daddy to Davin at the end of the telephone discussion. The little boy enjoys doing this and promptly waves into the phone. “She can only hear you; she can’t see you,” explains his father. He translates his son’s actions into words for his mother. This translation help is crucial and helpful for mutual understanding, particularly in this situation. It becomes clear to Davin that his mother can only hear and not see him on the phone, but that she can understand his actions as a result of his father’s verbal explanation.

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Television

Natan 4 years 4 months

Lisa 4 years

Children speak to each other in a particularly lively and independent way. If adults give them time and space for those aspects that connect them, they create a wonderful learning environment in which children can participate, listen to others and exchange information.

Comment

Lisa and Natan have been attending the daycare centre for some time now. They know each other well and are friends. This is an important prerequisite for them to be able to start a conversation with each other without any difficulty. Similar ages, similar experiences and similar interests – these things bring people together. Both children enjoy watching television and know the same children's programmes. This is why the role play works. They exchange information, introduce ideas, express their opinions and test their language and the effect that it has on the other. And on a level playing field. Their caregivers are nearby. They ensure that the children have room to play, are there when they are needed and hold themselves back when the children can manage on their own. In this way, the children can immerse themselves in the game and start a conversation. Lisa and Natan continue to play with each other for a long time. They pool their ideas and try out their roles. And without noticing, they are increasing their language capacity enormously through play.

Facilitate conversations between children

Ensuring regular contact with other children

Besides adult caregivers, children also play a central role in the acquisition of linguistic skills. Therefore, it is important that parents allow their children to have regular contact with other children – whether this is in a kindergarten, in a playgroup or when meeting other families. In this way, trusting relationships between children will arise. Natan and Lisa have been attending kindergarten for a long time now. They know each other well and feel comfortable with one another. They have similar experiences with regard to television consumption at home, they know the same children's programmes and share their enjoyment of role play. And although they speak different languages at home, the two of them speak their mutual language of German so well that they

can communicate with each other with ease. These are important prerequisites to being able to discuss different ideas and points of view together independently, coordinating their play and re-enacting what they have experienced in role plays. In the process, they express their wishes ("I would like to watch television now"), give instructions ("However, only three jets!"), communicate their thoughts ("I need to turn it up so that we can watch the film") and make suggestions ("Or I will sing and you watch television"). In this way, the two of them develop their play and use rich linguistic material in the process. Such an exchange on a level playing field is only possible among children and opens up different linguistic opportunities to those which arise in discussions with adults. Children communicate particularly enthusiastically and independently with other children. What a gold mine for their linguistic development!

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Temporarily supporting and encouraging conversations between children if needed

Lisa and Natan's role play functions without an adult taking an active part in their play. However, a trusted adult always needs to be nearby so that time with other children does not become overwhelming. This person must be able to assess whether they should remain in the background and when their support is needed (e.g. by moderating children's discussions in phases when a lot of negotiation is required).

Natan and Lisa can develop their role play in a safe environment. They have different exciting tools available to them, they are not distracted from what they are doing, and they have sufficient time to immerse themselves in the world of fantasy. It is the role of adults to create such favourable conditions and thus optimum prerequisites for stimulating discussions among children.

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Market stall

Nico 2 years 4 months

Mira 4 years 7 months

Children learn a lot from and with each other. Also in linguistic terms. When they are together, they want to negotiate their roles, develop their ideas and define topics. What a valuable learning opportunity!

Comment

Mira and Nico are aware that you need to consider size and price when you are buying clothes. The two children role play their daily experiences. Their roles are clear. Mira is the salesperson. Nico is the customer. Naturally, Nico – who is two years younger – is not quite as articulate as his older sister. However, due to their close relationship, her little brother is able to play along and participate without difficulty. Mamus! Mamus? Mira is aware that salespeople do not know their customers' friends. She cleverly switches roles in the game from the fictive salesperson to the real-life older sister and explains this to Nico. What a linguistic accomplishment. And quite incidental to the game. Their mother has been watching her children's game. She stays in the background. Until she can also buy something shortly before the shop closes.

Facilitate conversations between children

Making possible, protecting, and acknowledging conversations between children

A table, a few everyday objects and sufficient free time – this is all siblings Mira and Nico need to start playing together. After they clarify their roles ("Are you going shopping now, Nico?"), they can start. Mira is the salesperson and Nico is the customer. The siblings are actively interacting with one another. Their mother, who is watching what is happening, also sees this. She stays in the background and makes sure that she does not interrupt the ongoing role play. If caregivers give children the necessary security, sufficient time and stimulating materials, they create favourable conditions for the children to start talking with one another.

→ p. 22

Ensuring regular contact with other children

Joint play between children is of central importance for language development. When negotiating, keeping the game going and developing it, children use particularly rich linguistic material.

Mira is two years older than Nico and already has a broad linguistic repertoire and a great deal of experience in everyday things. She asks questions ("How old is your brother?"), makes statements ("I don't know who Mamus is") and explains important facts ("You know that people in the shop don't know who the friends are"). However, Nico is also able to play an active part in the game and engage with his sister without any difficulty. He expresses his needs ("No. I want that."), answers Mira's questions ("No. Not yet.") and introduces new aspects ("Mamus is also two years old"). In this way, the two of them employ their respective linguistic skills very deftly, communicate actively and independently and thus develop the role play further.

Play time with other children is a valuable opportunity to use language independently on a level playing field, to try it out and to develop it further. Children who grow up with siblings or attend a kindergarten automatically have contact with other children on a daily basis. If this is not the case, such contact should be actively organised (e.g. by attending a playgroup or through regular meetings with other families).

→ p. 22

Jointly spinning sustained conversational threads

In addition to adults, other children can also serve as a linguistic model. Mira has already learnt how to communicate her thoughts or give clear explanations. This is evident, for example, when she switches from the fictitious world of the salesperson to the real world of the older sister to explain to Nico that salespeople do not usually know their customers' friends. Nico listens with interest and develops his own linguistic skills in the process.

However, language development is not only facilitated by a competent discussion partner. It is also important that children have an opportunity to test their own linguistic ability and to get involved. Nico has no difficulty remaining on topic ("May I have more money?"; "That is for Mamus.") and plays his own part in keeping the conversation going. In this way, the siblings remain in active discussion with each other.

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Bus trip

Moussa 2 years 7 months

It is sometimes difficult to understand what young children say. Therefore, it's important that adults reproduce what they have understood in clear and simple language. This will clarify any misunderstandings. And allow conversations to continue.

Comment

Out and about on the bus. There's a lot to say here. Moussa is two years old and can communicate in two languages. French at home. German at day-care. Sure, his vocabulary is limited. And he doesn't always express himself clearly. But that's completely normal and is part of language acquisition. Moussa's linguistic skills will grow quickly, as his caregiver listens closely to what he says. She wants to understand Moussa. She doesn't interpret too quickly. She gives him time to put his thoughts into words. This encourages the two-year-old to spread his linguistic wings. He confirms when he is correctly understood. He expands on what has already been said. He comes up with new ideas.

Giving children space to express themselves

Moussa's language skills are impressive for a two-and-a-half-year-old. He speaks French at home and German in the kindergarten. On the joint bus trip, Moussa communicates his current observations, thus entering into discussion with his companion. In doing so, he deploys his linguistic skills with aplomb. He confirms when he has correctly understood ("Yes, be careful, or hurt"), introduces new aspects ("Afterwards there is bruise") and picks up the formulations of his discussion partner ("Afterwards, Moussa careful. Hold hands."). The kindergarten employee listens carefully, develops the dialogue with just a few words and gives Moussa time and space to formulate his thoughts. By participating in the discussion and taking Moussa seriously as a discussion partner, she motivates him to remain on topic. This allows him to take a leading role in the conversation and extend and refine his linguistic skills in the process.

→ p.20

Focusing on understanding and supporting it with all means

Moussa is clearly enjoying the conversation and is taking an active part in it. This motivated use of language must be the focal point of the communication. Accordingly, adults should not focus on the correctness of the linguistic formulations but rather on understanding what the child says and on developing the discussion. Moussa's utterances are still

made up of just a few words, and it is not always easy for his discussion partner to understand everything that he says. This is part of language learning. It is even more important that the discussion partner listens carefully and does not interpret what is being said prematurely. Furthermore, by picking up on his utterances, she reflects back what she has understood ("Yes, right. You need to be really careful in front of cars."). By putting Moussa's words into longer sentences and adding to and expanding on what he says, she provides him with new linguistic material as an added extra.

→ p. 20

Adapting interactions to individual children

The caregiver uses words that Moussa can understand and speaks in short, clear sentences ("Right. We need to be really careful when we cross the street."). In this way, she adjusts to Moussa's current linguistic skills and makes it easier for him to understand what she is saying. She also comments on Moussa's utterances and differentiates them, or reproduces them in the correct form (Moussa: "Afterwards there is bruise." Caregiver: "Then you get a bruise, right."). At the same time, she expands on his contributions and adds new information to them ("And always hold on tight to each other's hand"). In this way, she shows interest in Moussa's utterances and takes an active part in the discussion without dominating it.

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Film

Mira 4 years 4 months

Nico 2 years 1 month

Talking about experiences and passing on knowledge. We feel happy when our discussion partner shows interest in what we are saying and wants to understand us. When adults listen attentively and ask precise questions, they play a major role in the success of a conversation.

Comment

There is a lot to talk about at the lunch table with Grandpa. About Solothurn and Winterthur, for example. The phonetic unit “thur” is found in both city names. Grandpa knows this and talks about it. In doing so, he uses language to speak about language itself. However, his grand-daughter wants to tell him about her experiences with her mother – a film maker. Grandpa is interested in what happened to Mira in Winterthur. He asks questions. He repeats himself and signals whether he has understood, or not. In this way, the two of them quickly uncover the details of what happened. Nico is also listening intently. He gets involved. Both children are taking part in the conversation. To the best of their ability. And all three of them remain concentrated on the discussion at hand. The whole time!

Adapting interactions to individual children

During lunch together, everyone eats their fill and there is also an animated exchange between a grandfather and his grandchildren. Mira takes an active role in the discussion and talks animatedly about a trip to Winterthur. She remembers what happened vividly. Her grandfather was not present during this café and film visit. Therefore, it is not always easy for him to follow Mira’s train of thought. It is therefore even more important that he signals his interest in understanding exactly what is said and carefully clarifies any comprehension issues. He gives Mira time to express her thoughts without anticipating what she wants to say, maintains eye contact with her, listens closely, asks questions and repeats what he has understood. Mira herself explains, corrects and expands on what is said. In this way, the two reconstruct what they have experienced with the help of language. This makes it possible to understand and be understood.

→ p.23

Encouraging challenging language task

Mira is already proficient in giving reality-related reports. The grandfather encourages her with suitable questions to elaborate on what was said (“Why did you come from Solothurn to Winterthur?”; “Do you remember what the film is about?”). Mira

explains, reports and relates – this requires quite a high level of linguistic ability. The two of them converse for a long time and Mira experiences a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate and develop her linguistic skills.

→ p. 25

Framing and steering interactions

Nico follows the conversation with keen interest and tries to take an active part himself (“I was Mummy’s tummy”). His contribution is also appreciated and valued. His grandfather questions him with interest (“You were in Mummy’s tummy?”) and Mira expands on what was said (“Yes, everyone in the world has been in the stomach of a mummy”). In this way, Nico feels as though he belongs and is encouraged to take part in the discussion.

→ p. 23

Playing with and exploring language

Mira and Nico’s mother is a film maker and was recently involved in the Film Days festival in Solothurn. Nico knows this as well (“Solothurn”), although he and his sister have never been there. However, Mira has already been to Winterthur. How does Mira get from Solothurn to Winterthur? The grandfather notices the phonetic similarities in the city names, and he points this out to the children: “‘SoloTHURn’ and ‘WinterTHUR’ – that sounds slightly similar,” he says. In this way, he uses the opportunity spontaneously to change the perspective for a short while. Not only similar or similar-sounding sounds such as “WinterTHUR” and “SoloTHURn” encourage thought on language. Homonyms (e.g. “Bank”, which in German means both a bench and a financial institution) or funny misunderstandings can also give rise to such language games. In this way, children gain more awareness of linguistic forms and they can also be taught that it is fun to play and experiment with language.

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World map

Philipp 4 years 7 months

Leon 4 years 7 months

Noelia 3 years 7 months

Children want to take part in conversations in which they can actively speak or listen. Both are good opportunities to develop their linguistic skills. A longer conversation arises when adults are actively involved and motivate children to participate.

Comment

A world map in the playgroup. Wherever you look, there's a lot to talk about, to explain, to be amazed at and to discuss with one another. The children are encouraged to be curious by the real interest shown by their playgroup teacher. She meets the children at eye level. She doesn't know everything better. She is also amazed. She wants to know what the children think. She stays on topic. She explains and comments on things. It's wonderful that she lets the children speak, even if they sometimes make mistakes. Because communication is what matters. Correctness will develop with time. A long conversation arises from this. It is successful also due to the animated gestures and facial expressions of the playgroup teacher. The world is opening up: the big, wide world of the oceans and continents and the big, wide world of language.

Assure the quality of interactions

Providing lots of opportunities for contact with the target language

The three children and the playgroup teacher are having a lively discussion with one another. Philipp, Leon and Noelia have already been meeting up regularly in the playgroup for a while now. Although all of them speak another language at home, they have no difficulty understanding each other in their joint ambient language of German. The playgroup teacher provides the children with considerable linguistic input while they are all looking at the large world map. However, it is equally important that children have the opportunity to try out the acquired linguistic material and to develop it continuously. The three children clearly feel at home in the familiar environment and take part actively in the discussion.

Regular contact with the ambient language and time together with familiar children and adults is an important prerequisite to acquiring a new language and to feeling increasingly secure and comfortable when speaking it.

→ p. 29

Adapting interactions to individual children

The playgroup teacher knows the children well and is able to successfully adapt to their individual linguistic skills. In this way, she gives them sufficient time for their verbal contributions, listens carefully and then throws the ball back to them ("What does 'a thunner' do?"). She signals her interest in what is said with targeted questions ("You think so?") and suitable comments ("Hey, that's cool if you can swim in the water if you can swim in the water and fly in the air"). She wants to understand the children and asks questions until she is sure that all of them are talking about the same thing ("What's that?"; "A 'thunner'?" ; "What does a 'thunner' do?"; "What does it do?"; "Very strong...?"). Until she realises what they are actually talking about: "Aha, you meant thunder ('Donner'). From thunder and lightning" Now the conversation on storms can continue: a topic which is introduced by the children and which is actively picked up by the playgroup teacher. The playgroup teacher also adjusts to the language level: she uses words that the children can understand well, she does not form any long-nested sentences and she reuses the children's expressions (Child: "No, lightning!" Teacher: "Could this be lightning?").

→ p. 23

Offering new words and grammar and clarifying them

The playgroup teacher speaks animatedly and underscores what she says with facial expressions and gestures, thus making it easier for the children to understand her. She also uses different linguistic tools while she is communicating with them. She describes and names things ("They're really flat and can swim"; "That's a zeppelin."), comments on the children's utterances ("Hey, that's cool if you can swim in the water if you can swim in the water and fly in the air") and asks questions to show her interest ("You mean that's the storm up there?"). She picks up on the children's utterances and reproduces them correctly in the discussion (Child: "No, they can swim. From the sky and the water." Teacher: "You think so? Because of their wings, they can swim in water and also fly?" Child: "Up there and down there in the water." Teacher: "Hey, that's cool if you can swim in the water if you can swim in the water and fly in the air"). However, the focus is not only on the correctness of the linguistic formulations but also on understanding the children's thought processes. In this way, the children feel that they are being taken seriously and are motivated to communicate. Linguistic errors occur less and less often when children have regular contact with competent linguistic models.

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Gorilla

Group of children

aged between 3 years 5 months
and 4 years 5 months

Picture book stories are extremely valuable. They facilitate wonderful joint experiences and offer interesting topics. As a result, the children are encouraged to talk about their experiences, to tell stories themselves and to explain facts.

Comment

In the playgroup. A group of children are sitting close together and immersing themselves in the world of the picture book together with their playgroup teacher. "What is the gorilla doing with the bike?" And: "Who is sneaking along behind the zoo keeper?" Everyone is involved in what is happening – and in the conversation! They tell the story together. And also recount things from their experiences: "Who has seen a gorilla before? Who also has an elephant at home?" One word leads to another. Everyone is fully engaged in the conversation. The playgroup teacher's lively, attentive interaction with her charges ensures that the joint experience remains wonderful, stimulating and exciting. Different dialects, different languages – a wonderful opportunity to talk about it, too. This is how children learn language!

Encouraging challenging language tasks

The group of children is absorbed in the picture book. "Good night, Gorilla" is the title of the book. Soon the children discover the gorilla. But there is also a baby gorilla, a baby giraffe and a parrot. The children draw each other's attention to their discoveries, which quickly draws them into a discussion. What type of toys for the gorilla does the book contain? And, can a gorilla ride a bicycle? Together they immerse themselves in the world of the book and their imagination. They share their assumptions and ideas. In this way, the discussion remains exciting and stimulating. When one little girl says: "Once a gorilla pooped and peed", the joint picture book discussion develops in another direction. Now it is all about the children's own experiences and thus about reality. The playgroup teacher includes all the children in the discussion by asking the following questions ("Have you all seen a gorilla?"; "And Phillipe? Has he also seen a gorilla?"). And then everyone's attention returns once more to the book ("What is the gorilla doing next?").

→ p. 25

Use and enjoy picture books and other media for children

Joint picture book discussions are extremely valuable. Firstly, they offer excellent social experiences. Children can immerse themselves in a picture book together and discover numerous worlds in a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. It is also important that children have access to an age-appropriate, stimulating selection of picture books. Secondly, the children in the playgroup have the opportunity to take an active part in the discussion, in accordance with their interests and abilities. They can tell each other what they see in the picture book but also talk about their own life experiences. In this way, the children get the opportunity to develop longer strands of thought.

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Offering new words and grammar and clarifying them

The children in the playgroup have different levels of German. Some speak German at home, while others speak another language with their families. The playgroup teacher structures the picture book discussion so that all of them feel included, can follow the discussion and the story, and can take part in accordance with their abilities. She accompanies her linguistic utterances with facial expressions, gestures and a suitably pitched voice. Also, she always acts as a language model, makes precise statements on the story ("the black fur of the gorilla"), amends missing or incorrect formulations of the children and elaborates on individual terms (e.g. the word "torch" for "light"). If the children make formal errors, she corrects them incidentally by using the correct formulation in her answers ("zum Elefanten" instead of "im Elefanten").

→ p. 24

Appreciating the children's languages

Aatos throws the word "lion!" in standard German into the discussion. "A lion, right." "Leu" is the Swiss German word and "Löwe" is the standard German word for lion. The playgroup teacher says this and in doing so points out the difference between the Swiss German dialect and standard German. And then a further language comes into play: "Schabaka!" "Schabaka!" repeats Matvei several times. The playgroup teacher picks up the term uttered by the child ("Do you say 'Schabaka'?"). By doing so, she shows interest in the child's language and makes his first language visible to everyone in the group. The noticing and valuing of the different languages means the children feel that they belong and that they are being taken seriously.

→ p. 29



Kitten

Kasimir 8 months

Manu 7 years 9 months

Daily life offers countless opportunities to talk about your feelings, thoughts and plans. Adults can help children to express such internal processes by discussing them and finding words for this with the child.

Comment

Visiting a farm. Manu is allowed to stroke the kitten. Kasimir also wants to have a turn. It's meowing loudly. Why? His mother puts her observations and thoughts into words. By doing so, she helps both her boys to perceive more clearly. However, their mother is also aware of the different needs of Manu and Kasimir. Little Kasimir is not yet able to express his wish to stroke the kitten in words. His mother helps him: "You also want to touch it, don't you?" Manu, on the other hand, would really prefer to return the kitten to its mother. His mother realises what he wants. She also takes Manu's feelings seriously and finds words for this: "Are you worried he's going to hurt it?" Thanks to their mother's sensitive support, the two boys progressively develop the linguistic tools to express their thoughts, feelings and needs bit by bit. All this is necessary to understand others as well.

Name objects, activities, and characteristics

Kasimir and Manu are visiting their grandparents on the farm, along with their mother. There is so much to discover there! Their mother accompanies the two brothers on their discovery tour – also in linguistic terms. She comments, names, explains and gives her thoughts. In this way, she includes words and sentences in the current context. Kasimir sits comfortably in his mother's lap, listens to her words, and experiences the situation with all his senses. He hears the kitten meow, sees its movements and can feel the soft fur. In this way, Kasimir can connect what he hears with what he sees. This helps him not only to expand his vocabulary but also to link it. He is learning to understand what is said and also how to use the language himself at a later date.

→ p. 24

Expressing inner processes verbally

Kasimir would like to touch the kitten, but Manu is afraid that his little brother is going to hurt it. Their mother recognises her sons' differing needs

and helps them to express them in words. In the process, she considers their individual linguistic needs. Kasimir voices his wish (to touch the kitten) with his entire body. He stretches out and expresses his displeasure that Manu is stopping him from touching its soft fur. His mother interprets the sounds and gestures and provides words on Kasimir's behalf: "You want to touch it too, right?" She explains Kasimir's wish to Manu: "He also wants to feel how soft the fur is."

Manu, on the other hand, can clearly express what he wants – which is to bring the kitten back to its mother. His mother questions him to explore the reason for his concern ("Are you worried that he's going to hurt it?" ; "Would you like to take it away and protect it?"). In this way, she helps Manu to formulate what he wants to say.

Through the individual and conciliatory support of their mother, the two children learn to express their feelings and thoughts better and also to understand the emotions or intentions of their fellow human beings.

→ p. 24 f.

Temporarily supporting and encouraging conversations between children if needed

The two brothers get on well and feel comfortable with one another. This is an important prerequisite to including them and allowing them to express their own needs. Kasimir does this with sounds and with his whole body. By putting these signals into words, Manu learns to understand his brother better and recognise his wishes and needs.

At the moment, it is still difficult for the two of them to resolve their conflict of interest on their own. Their mother knows this, too. She acts as an intermediary by putting the various viewpoints into words ("He would also like to touch it"; "Are you worried that he's going to hurt it?") as well as giving Manu a tip on what he could do to ensure that Kasimir does not grab the kitten too hard ("You need to tell Kasimir how he should touch the kitten"). Manu picks up this tip and points to Kasimir's head with his own hand to demonstrate to his brother how to stroke the kitten very softly. As a matter of course, he also uses non-linguistic material to clarify what is said and make it easier for his brother to understand.

As a result of the adapted support provided by their mother, Kasimir and Manu progressively learn to raise their individual concerns, assert themselves, relent and compromise.

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Crocodile

Aatos 4 years

Yoah 3 years 7 months

Role plays encourage people to speak with each other. Who is who? What has to be done? What would happen if...? Such lively exchanges produce wonderful stories that transcend the here and now.

Comment

Jana is from the Czech Republic. She assists the playgroup teacher and is out and about with Yoah and Aatos today. The adventure gets under way on the ship. Who's the captain? And who's keeping an eye on the crocodile? Everyone is fully engaged. And it's already getting exciting. Let the ropes go! They are off into the land of fantasy. Jana really throws herself into the game. She is an active participant in the conversation. She takes up the children's ideas, contributes her own and tackles the subject in greater depth. By doing so, she encourages the two boys to develop their contributions and to participate. That requires a lot of language! Otherwise, all three of them will not be able to develop the story and also understand it. It's fun and encourages further thought: What happens when ice is heated? And then the three adventurers are back from the land of make-believe to the real world of physics.

Temporarily supporting and encouraging conversations between children if needed

The boat is being followed by a crocodile. Fortunately, it is a very nice crocodile, rather than a bad one. It is even invited for tea. What a story! Aatos, Yoah and the playgroup assistant, Jana, develop it together. Jana participates enthusiastically in the role play with the children. She moderates the discussion ("Who is the captain?"; "Can you see whether the crocodile is already on its way?"; "Are you going to get a little ice?"), contributes ideas ("We can invite it for a cup of tea") and asks thought-provoking questions ("What else does it need?"). Such active play can help children to find themselves in a game. Later, the adult caregiver can progressively step back more and more to allow the children to play and control what they do themselves as much as possible. This requires sensitive adults who can assess when children need their help and when they should step back to allow the children to work it out themselves together.

→ p. 22

Encouraging challenging language tasks

Role plays with other children – but also with adults – can play a major part in the language development of children. Discussing joint tasks, developing action plans and exchanging opinions, and developing fantasy stories together – all this requires language. More difficult linguistic material is often also required. For example, to explain why the boat has to go quickly (“Yes, because a crocodile...”), to pass on what was said (“He says that he can already see it”) or to give instructions (“Can you look there?”). Jana encourages the children to express their thoughts by asking questions (“It’s not so dangerous for us. Or do you think it is?”) and adds further explanations herself (“Ice can melt and then we will make hot water”). This provides Aatos and Yoah with an exciting play environment in which to deploy and expand their linguistic repertoire.

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Appreciating the children’s languages

Many children with different first languages come together in the playgroup. Here all of them speak German with one another. That is an important basis for learning the ambient language. It is also important that the first languages of the children are welcome and valued. The multilingualism of a playgroup can be highlighted and experienced by singing songs or telling stories in their first languages, or if the playgroup teacher signals her interest in individual words in the different languages. However, both the children and the adult caregivers are often multilingual. For example, Jana comes from Chechnya and only started learning German when she was an adult. She does not speak it perfectly but well enough that she can communicate actively and in a sophisticated manner. That is a central requirement for lively conversation with children, and is also a wonderful signal for the children and their parents: different first languages are represented and valued, also by the playgroup teachers. This can help to break down barriers and build further trust.

→ p. 29



A walk

Olívia 1 year 3 months

Doing, speaking, feeling – it's all part of it. This is how a child learns a language. Adults help children to learn language by taking time, accompanying their actions with words, and by making words and sentences perceptible with all the senses.

Comment

Mama, Olívia and Mini are walking along the river. There's a great deal to discover here. Flowers, pebbles, water ... Olívia points to everything that she finds exciting. Her Mummy understands. She crouches down and names what Olívia shows her. The little girl watches and listens. She touches and explores with her hands. These sensory experiences are helpful. In this way, Mummy's sentences take form. Does Mini like flowers? How far do the pebbles fly? Olívia wants to know. She's experimenting. It's wonderful that her Mummy takes time and gets involved. Her Mummy's gestures, her facial expressions and her touches lend support to what she is saying. In this way, Olívia can understand what's going on. And this is how the two communicate. Even though the little girl still lacks the words to do so. For now!

Using everyday situations as opportunities to engage children in conversation

The beautiful spring day invites people to take a walk along the river. Olívia, Mama and Mini have time to spare and to explore their surroundings. It is a wonderful opportunity to talk about what they see and experience. Olívia cannot yet express herself verbally with confidence. However, she can communicate well with her facial expressions, the direction of her gaze, her index finger and her entire body language. Her mother gives Olívia her full attention. She goes down to eye level with her daughter, pays attention to her signals, recognises what interests her and puts this into words ("Would you like to look at the flowers?"; "Would you like to throw some little stones into the water?"). While the two of them explore the nearby environment, a new linguistic world also opens for Olívia.

→ p. 20

Naming objects, activities, and characteristics

The verbal accompaniment of the joint activity is central for Olívia's linguistic development. Olívia's mother names things and embeds the words in what she experiences together with her daughter ("That's water. That's far away."). She also accompa-

nies Olívia's actions with words and sentences and enriches the discussion with additional information ("Mini doesn't eat flowers"). In this way, Olívia can progressively include new words in her vocabulary. Young children learn with all their senses. This also applies when learning language. Olívia explores the environment with her eyes, hands, ears and nose. Now she knows not only the names of things but also how pebbles feel, how flowers smell and how water sounds in the stream. These sensory experiences help her to understand and connect with what she hears.

→ p. 24

Establishing and maintaining shared attention

The prerequisite for mutual understanding is the establishment of joint attention. Olívia draws her mother's attention to things that interest her with her index finger: flowers, water and the long grass. Her mother follows the outstretched finger with her gaze and names what she sees ("Oh, a flower"). Using linguistic clues, she draws Olívia's attention to particular things ("Look at this here"). In this way, the two of them concentrate on the same thing and can talk about it. Her mother's touches, gestures and facial expressions underscore what she says and help Olívia to maintain her attention. In this way, Olívia's mother helps her to increase her attention span and to hold increasingly longer dialogues.

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Comment

Nico is sick. He has the flu. No play-group today. Instead he is allowed to find things in the hidden picture book with his Mummy: A red bike? Or is it a motorbike? What's the difference? The images in the hidden picture book then lead over to your own life. To what you have experienced and already know. Nico's Mummy reminds her son of their joint experiences. She asks about his own experiences. And a conversation arises out of this. Motherly support is important for Nico's linguistic development. His Mummy listens to him. She expands on what Nico says. She waits to see what he says. She asks questions. She reacts to him. How wonderful! In this way, Nico's vocabulary grows.

Use language in many different ways

Hidden object book

Nico 2 years 3 months

Images and stories encourage us to talk. This also allows us to make connections to our own experiences as well. In this way, children and adults can have long conversations. This is fun and opens up many linguistic possibilities.

Using and enjoying picture books and other children's media

Nico has a cold and is enjoying some time with his mother. They are looking at picture books together. Nico clearly signals which book he wants to look at next. It is important that his mother accepts her son's wish and allows him to select picture books that interest him. By doing so, he will be active and fully focused on the task at hand. Nico knows his hidden picture book of choice inside and out. He has looked at it many times before. He loves looking at the same books time and again and benefits from these repetitions. In this way, he can always discover more details and build up a comprehensive understanding of the content. What does a bicycle/ motorbike look like? The pictures and the discussion with his mother provide clarification.

From a motorbike to a kitten, to planes and to a helicopter: Hidden picture books – and picture books in general – provide many opportunities to start discussions and discover different worlds. Therefore, it is important that children have access to a wide variety of such books.

→ p. 26

Encouraging challenging language tasks

The pictures of the planes and helicopter in the hidden picture book remind Nico of his own experiences and encourage him to speak about them. He has already seen and heard helicopters. He tells his mother this. She picks up on his initiative and ties it to their mutual experiences ("And do you know where we have seen a helicopter?"). Linguistic tools are particularly important when talking about past or future events or experiences. The reason is that such a discussion involves matters which lie outside the immediate world of perception and are thus not visible.

Nico's mother assists him with formulating utterances and asks suitable, supportive questions that he can understand well and that help him to progress in language terms. In this way, she encourages Nico to expand on his contributions on an ongoing basis.

→ p. 25

Jointly spinning sustained conversational threads

Nico and his mother have often played the game "I spy something that you don't see". Nico likes the game and immediately asks his mother the first question. She accepts the challenge and finds the naked man. Nico and his mother are absorbed in the task at hand. In the process, the book is a joint reference object which helps the two of them to develop a longer discussion. This is initially as a result of the search game which switches the attention of the two and the dialogue to bicycles, motor-bikes and finally planes and helicopters. From here, the discussion threads are developed away from the book and around their own experiences. Now the two of them also stay on task and thus develop the topic in the process. Nico's mother keeps the discussion going and encourages him to get involved. In this way, Nico can progressively increase and extend his linguistic skills in the interactive cooperation.

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Recycled glass

Davin 2 years 2 months

Images and symbols awaken our curiosity. What does the image show? What could it mean? With the support of adults, children can progressively decipher the meaning of images and symbols. This is an important foundation for their later use of writing.

Comment

White glass, brown glass. Sometimes it clinks. Sometimes it bangs. A lot happens here. Sometimes there are shards. Sometimes the bottle remains in one piece. And all the glass has to go into the correct hole! That provides a lot of discussion material. Davin is really absorbed in the task at hand. His mother assists him both physically and linguistically. She names the colours. She comments on the sounds. She asks Davin questions, listens and encourages him. She shows interest in what he says and does. She understands him. She also gives him time. This allows the little boy to extend and connect his vocabulary. What are you allowed to do? And what are you not allowed to do? It's written on the bottle bank! It's important that Davin reads images and understands symbols, as they are stepping stones to what comes later: dealing with the alphabet. Daily life offers a great many opportunities to discover and read such signs with children.

Using everyday situations as opportunities to engage children in conversation

Today, Davin and his mother are disposing of waste glass together. It is wonderful to hear how the glass and bottles clink and smash when they fall into the bottle bank. Davin's enjoyment is evident, which motivates him to really get involved in the task at hand. This everyday situation provides the basis for a lot of conversation: Which glass belongs where? What happens when the bottles fall into the containers? What does the inside of a bottle bank look like? Davin's mother assists him during this common daily voyage of discovery: she looks closely to see what Davin is interested in, responds to it and talks about their joint task. She comments on what they are doing, explains things, asks Davin for his opinion, asks him further questions and points out interesting things. By doing so, she facilitates Davin's language development in an age-appropriate manner without expecting too much from him in the process. Davin is attentive and shows interest in what they are doing. He discovers the world around him by using all his senses and also benefits from his mother's support in linguistic terms.

→ p. 20

Name objects, activities, and characteristics

Davin's mother names the various objects ("That's white glass") as well as their joint tasks ("White glass goes in there"). In the process, she always embeds her words in a context. This enables Davin not only to extend his vocabulary but also to connect it with what he has seen and experienced. Davin lives and breathes the world around him with all his senses. He looks at the glass and feels it, lifts the bottles and different types of glass up high, and notices how heavy they are. He smells the different types of glass and listens to how they sound when they fall into the bottle bank.

→ p. 24

Discovering symbols and the alphabetic print system

While they are disposing of the waste glass together, Davin's mother draws his attention to the symbols on the container. What could they mean? And what is actually depicted here? Davin's gaze is now fully focused on the images. He discovers a light bulb. "Right, a light bulb," his mother elaborates, and she explains that you are not allowed to throw in light bulbs or broken cups here. This is indicated by the red stripes.

The meaning is clear in the pictures and symbols. There are innumerable opportunities to "read" such symbols during daily life. This is an important basis for the later use of written language. With the support of adults, children can decipher the meaning of symbols and "read" and understand what they say independently over time.

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Brother John

Anaïs 2 years 2 months

Thecla 6 years

Singing with others promotes togetherness and opens doors to other languages. Melody, rhythm and song texts encourage everyone to sing along and experiment with the language.

Comment

The family is cuddling and singing. At the beginning, Thecla doesn't want to join in; but then she starts singing with her little sister Anaïs and her mother. "Brother John." Their mother sings the well-known melody in the Kinyarwanda language. This makes the first language of the Rwandan family audible and perceptible. Thecla also knows the song in German. And in French! And then she plays around with the original text because it's so funny. Then a Rwandan song is intoned. Their father is also encouraged to sing along. Little Anaïs is also right in the thick of things, listening comfortably in her mother's lap, and taking in the special sounds and the different languages as well as asking for the next song. In this way, everyone has their place and the languages, too.

Reciting rhymes and verses and singing songs

The entire family is sitting together and singing songs in the living room. "Are you sleeping" is next on the list. Mum sings it first in Kinyarwanda, the family's first language. "Are you sleeping" – Thecla, the older daughter, also knows this song. She doesn't sing the song in Kinyarwanda but rather in German ("Bruder Jakob"), and then gets completely caught up in the language side of things. She varies the song, switches back and forth between French and German, and in doing so plays around with language, form and rhyme. "Brother John, old jacket" resounds joyfully through the living room. Thecla has often heard the song and sung it herself. Then quieter tones are heard: mother and daughter sing a Rwandan song. Dad is also encouraged to join in. And what about Anaïs, the younger daughter? She is actively following the singing and listening to the different melodies and sounds. And soon she is also singing along in the family choir.

→ p. 26

Appreciating the children's languages

Thecla and Anaïs are growing up multilingual in Kinyarwanda, French and German. That is a very special resource and opportunity for the children.

All the languages have a fixed value and place in their life. This is evident in many everyday situations. During the joint sing-along, the children can keep up all their languages. It is impressive to see just how confidently and playfully Thecla juggles the different languages and how easily she deals with her vocabulary. In an environment in which multilingualism is welcome and valued, children can build trust and continue to keep up and develop their particular linguistic skills.

→ p. 29

Playing with and exploring language

When Thecla starts to sing "Are you sleeping" and then sings the song again with varied lyrics in different languages, the focus of the activity becomes languages and rhymes. "Morning bells are ringing, old washing machine," she sings. The rhymes in the lyrics and her already well-established feeling for language help her to sing the song in different versions. Such language games enrich togetherness and sensitise children to language phenomena – how languages sound or rhymes function, for example. The younger daughter, Anaïs, follows the model of her older sister when she soon starts singing the first few words of the varied song lyrics herself.

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Letters

Mira 4 years 5 months

Children are surrounded by writing day after day. Everywhere. If they are interested in it, it's important to accompany them on their discovery tour through the world of written letters in a playful manner. This makes it exciting for them to learn letters and numbers!

Comment

Numbers and letters. Mira finds them exciting. Luckily her Daddy is here and helps her out. He gives her a model, which Mira then follows. Mira can already write a certain amount: she knows individual letters and she can match certain sounds to the letters. Which letters belong to other names? Which ones does Mira already know? Her Daddy directs and focuses Mira's gaze in a clever manner. The world of signs and symbols is just as exciting as it is challenging. Therefore, Mira really needs her father's support and encouraging words.

Discovering symbols and the alphabetic print system

"I want to write 'Mira!'" – Mira is interested in numbers and letters. Her father takes her interest seriously and helps his daughter to investigate the symbols. It is not an easy task to recognise individual sounds and different letter forms in words, and to be able to assign sounds to letters. Her father writes the requested words in large letters on a piece of paper and names the individual letters as he is doing so. In this way, Mira can gain initial experience of how handwriting can be linked to matching sounds. She already knows some letters. It is clear how proud she is of this.

It doesn't matter that the "A" and the "N" are back to front on Mira's paper. Mira's interest and pleasure in using written language is far more important. She loves to compare letters that she recognises in different names and to write them herself. Mira will very likely encounter many further opportunities in everyday life to pursue her interest in numbers and letters, such as when reading large lettering on posters, recognising names on doorbell signs or writing shopping lists together with someone. Adults can use these and other opportunities to develop children's interest in symbols and text and to explore them together.

→ p. 26

Providing stimulation input in conversational interactions

Mira's father develops her interest in the letters. By asking further questions ("Who has another 'N' in their name?") and providing further examples

("Do you want to write 'Elena' now?"), he motivates his daughter to stick to the topic. Furthermore, he delves further into the discussion on the written symbols by introducing new aspects: "Moir" turns into "Mir"! Such stimuli scaffold children and help them to pursue topics further and in greater depth.

→ p. 23

Framing and steering interactions

Mira clearly feels at ease in her father's lap in their cosy kitchen. His praise ("Well done. Bravo.") also encourages her in her efforts. Under these conditions, Mira can concentrate fully on the letters and the discussion with her father.

Nico – her younger brother – also needs something from his father. "Wait, Nico. I'll be right there." By saying this, Nico's father lets his son know that he has heard him. Nevertheless, his focus remains on Mira. Only when she has finished writing the word does he turn to Nico. When adults protect ongoing discussions and do not let themselves be prematurely distracted, they also help the child to maintain the discussion thread and remain in the exchange.

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Dinosaurs

Jan 4 years 2 months

Picture books expand children's knowledge, encourage them to think and stoke the fires of their imagination. When books are exciting and age-appropriate, they quickly grab children's attention. If adults build on this interest, there's a lot to talk about.

Comment

The name of the German picture book is "Zusammen sind wir tierisch stark". The mother tells her son about it in Albanian. They immerse themselves in the world of the picture book together. Jan already knows it well. He looks at the stories with his Mummy, Daddy and older brother again and again. Today Jan wants to look at the dinosaur pictures in particular. Glowing eggs. Good and bad dinosaurs. And the complicated names for the different types of dinosaurs. There's so much to discover! Jan offers his impressions, questions and thoughts. His mother helps him to understand what he sees. In this way, Jan increases his knowledge and his linguistic repertoire at the same time. It's easy for Jan's mother to tell the story in her family's language. The images speak for themselves. They lend themselves well to joint discussion in any language!

Provide access to early literacy

Using and enjoying picture books and other children's media

Jan has looked at the book many times – together with his brother, with his parents and also on his own. Nevertheless, he needs his mother to look at the story with him, and this is an activity he enjoys doing. By doing so, it helps him to improve his understanding of it, clarify open questions with his mother ("Who bit her on the head?"), discover new details and broaden his knowledge of dinosaurs. Children often like to hear a story time and again. In the process, they also notice even the smallest deviations from the narrative style.

At present, Jan is particularly interested in the topic of dinosaurs – it's good that he can immerse himself in it and has a book on the topic. It is important that he has access to a variety of age-appropriate books and media (e.g. audio media or films). This includes both reality-oriented factual texts as well as fictional stories about different topics.

→ p. 26 f.

Encouraging challenging language tasks

Jan and his mother are looking at the pictures in the picture book together and discussing what they see. Jan describes which eggs glow and which ones do not, for example. This also generates a discussion between them about things which are not immediately visible in the book. One example is when Jan's mother explains to him that an egg glows when the sun shines. Or also when she tells the story. She depicts the fictitious world in linguistic terms, speaks in a story-telling voice and uses typical phrases for stories ("One day..."). In this way, Jan will learn such linguistic patterns and can try them out himself over time. Jan and his mother make a great team. Together they organise their discussion.

→ p. 25

Offering new words and grammar and clarifying them

Jan's mother provides him with new linguistic material in different ways. She names objects that are depicted in the book, puts her thoughts into words ("This dinosaur, what was his name again?") and uses specific terms (e.g. for types of dinosaurs). In the process, she speaks in such a way that Jan can relate to it using his linguistic skills and simultaneously extending them.

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Table drumming

Carla 10 months

Mina 14 years 6 months

Children love verse, songs and movement games – from the start. Anything which is repetitive or stays the same encourages them to get involved and sing along. What a fun way of approaching language learning!

Comment

Daddy, Carla and her big sister are sitting at the table. It's not just a place to eat and drink – they also laugh and play there. Very tangibly! You can see that everyone is having fun. Clapping, tapping on the table with their fingers and speaking. Carla is excited. She can't get enough of the hilarious chant. Do it again! Her Daddy understands her and reacts to her signs. However, not only that. He puts Carla's request into words and immediately does what she asks as well. Her older sister also has some ideas. Sometimes they intone the verse more loudly; sometimes more softly. Again and again! Carla picks up the rhythm and movements of the song quickly. In this way, she can take part in the song fun – and without any words at all.

Reciting rhymes and verses and singing songs

Carla, her older sister Mina and her Daddy are enjoying a family snack on the balcony. Carla is clearly enjoying her sister's loud drumming: she picks up the movement with a big smile. This reminds the girls' father of a chant, which he immediately starts singing. Mina knows the song too and follows along. Now Carla is completely surrounded by their singing voices and drumming hands. She watches what they are doing attentively with absolutely fascination. Again! Now Carla is getting involved enthusiastically and clapping on the table with her hands. She shows her enjoyment and signals clearly that she would like to play the game with words and hands again and again. The chant is rhythmically structured, remains consistent and is repeated several times. Carla is having a lot of fun, and it also helps her to take part actively and make individual movements. When bonded forms of the language such as verse, rhymes or songs are used repetitively, children can take part in more demanding roles: from simply listening to taking part with specific movements, to speaking and singing independently, through to creative variation. "We could do it louder and louder," suggests Mina. Carla also thinks that is a good idea.

→ p. 26

Focusing on understanding and supporting it with all means

Ten-month-old Carla cannot yet express herself in words. Nevertheless, she clearly shows her interest and needs with every means available to her: she signals with her gaze, with her laugh, with her voice and with her cheers that she is excited about the voice-and-hand game. However, she also communicates with her body and with her gestures. For example, she claps on the table herself or signals her agreement with a nod of her head. When Carla takes her father's finger in her hand, lays it on the table and then claps on the table with her own hands, it becomes particularly clear. Carla's father understands her request and summarises it in words ("Do you want to do it again?"). He shows Carla that he is interested in what she wants to communicate and ascertains whether he has understood her correctly. Both Carla's father and her older sister clarify their utterances with facial expressions, gestures and their overall posture. By doing so, they help Carla to understand what they are saying.

→ p. 20

Framing and steering interactions

Carla sits securely between her father and big sister and clearly feels comfortable and part of the interaction. This is an important requirement to be able to participate. Her father begins the joint game ("Do you know that?"), keeps it going ("Should we sing it again"; "Do you want to sing it one more time?"), accompanies it with language ("That was loud") and finally concludes with ("Now, let's eat a bit more"). This framing helps Carla to orient herself and take part in the joint activity.

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Thorns

Group of children

aged between 2 years 7 months and
4 years 4 months

When children learn a second language, it is difficult for them to understand and express themselves at the start. Touches, looks and gestures help them to do so. In this way, children can soon find their feet and feel like they belong.

Comment

When someone goes on a trip, they have something to say. The same goes for the trip with the daycare centre. Natan has fallen down in the woods and now has two thorns stuck in his finger! Someone needs to grab the first aid kit. What a story! The caregiver tells everyone what happened in a vivid, clear manner. How interesting. Once again! The caregiver tells the story patiently – a second time. The children speak French, German and Greek at home. Not everyone is equally familiar with the everyday language in the daycare centre. Either way, it really helps them when the caregiver accompanies her story with facial expressions and gestures. By doing so, the language of the environment can be better understood and learnt more quickly. Now it is not just the story which changes. The caregiver also changes their role. Now she is no longer the storyteller but has become the listener. She shows interest by asking questions. The conversation continues and Senia is completely entranced. In this way, she tests and develops her linguistic skills.

Value and support multilingualism

Framing and steering interactions

The emergency backpack always comes along when the kindergarten group goes into the forest. Just as well: Natan has hurt himself today. It's an event which clearly fascinates the children. They want to hear what happened over and over again. The kindergarten employee patiently recounts in a lively and descriptive manner how Natan fell into a thorn bush. And not just once. She tells them what happened a second and a third time. Her gaze moves back and forth between the children. She picks up on interjections and expands on them (Georgius: "Natan fell down." Caregiver: "Yes, and he fell into the thorns with his hands like this."). She actively draws individual children into the discussion by addressing them directly ("You also saw it, didn't you, Georgius?"). In this way, she makes sure that all the children feel noticed and welcome. Georgius sits next to the caregiver on the tree stump and Moussa also joins the group and nestles trustingly into his

carer. In this way, all the children have a safe place in the group. And all of them can take part in what happens, whether it is through concentrated listening or by making their own contributions. Both are important if a child is to make linguistic progress.

→ p. 23

Ensuring participation and communication also nonverbally

The children speak different languages at home. The ambient language in the kindergarten is German. Not all are equally familiar with it yet. The caregiver enhances her story with her whole body: She uses her hands to demonstrate how Natan fell into the thorns, her facial expression reflects the pain that the thorns in his finger can cause, and with a rapid movement of her arm, she shows how she crawled under the tunnel of branches with the children. When you are learning a second language, such non-linguistic forms of expression are particularly important. They help to clarify verbal statements and support the learning process when acquiring a new language. For her part, the kindergarten employee ascertains whether she has understood the children correctly by asking targeted questions ("Do you have blue nails? Or would you like some?") and signals her interest in what is said by referring to it ("You like blue, right?"). In this way, the children are encouraged to get involved in the discussion.

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Giving children space to express themselves

The story with the thorns reminds Senia of her beloved blue-coloured fingernails. The caregiver picks up on the little girl's interjection (Senia: "Blue nails again." Caregiver: "Do you have blue nails?"), switches smoothly from the role of storyteller to listener and hands over the lead role in the discussion to Senia. By asking questions and making suitable interjections, she motivates the little girl to report on what she has experienced. Together the two remain on topic and develop it further: from real blue-painted fingernails to what it would be like to have your whole body painted blue. It is clear that they are both enjoying the discussion! And entirely incidentally, the discussion gives Senia a valuable opportunity to test and develop her linguistic skills.

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Family discussion

Ada 3 months

It's important that caregivers speak to their children in their strongest language. You can express your thoughts and feelings particularly well in a familiar language. If the adults' language is varied and stimulating, this also helps the children to expand their linguistic repertoire.

Comment

Ada's parents want her to grow up bilingual. Her mother's first language is German. Her father's first language is Italian. Here they are practising with great enthusiasm. Ada's father also grew up bilingual. He feels comfortable speaking both languages. The parents communicate with their little daughter in a sensitive, extensive and supportive way. Ada has no difficulty in understanding that the two languages co-exist. However, she needs to hear both languages repeatedly. And she needs to know who will speak what language to her, and in which situation. Her Mummy, German. And her Daddy, Italian. It's clear. That's important. In this way, Ada will always choose the language that she speaks based on the person and situation. Dimmi, Ada!

Using your own strongest language

Baby Ada's mother and father are interacting with her. Her mother speaks German; her father speaks Italian. They want Ada to grow up with both languages. Her father has also already grown up bilingual. He feels at home in both languages. German and Italian are his two strongest languages. Thoughts and feelings in particular can be better expressed in familiar languages than in less familiar ones. That is also very clear in the case of Ada's parents: both parents communicate with great feeling and with a rich vocabulary. That is crucial for Ada's language development and for building her identity.

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Using different languages in a clearly evident way

"What are you telling me, Ada?" her mother asks. "Cosa mi racconti?" (What are you telling me?), her father asks in Italian. Once in German and once in Italian. The juxtaposition of both languages will be a non-issue for Ada if she hears both languages time and again. And if she knows who is talking to her and in which situations. Her mother in German, her father in Italian. In this way, Ada will try out and use new linguistic material which functions in her surroundings. Because little children want to communicate.

→ p. 28 f.

Offering new words and grammar and clarifying them

When they are talking to Ada, her mother and father always face her and maintain eye contact with their daughter. Furthermore, they clearly accompany their linguistic utterances with emotive facial expressions and voices. Both speak a little more slowly than when they converse with adults. In this way, Ada's parents communicate their thoughts and feelings in accordance with Ada's linguistic skills. And in doing so, they support her in her language learning.

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On the way home

Jan 4 years 4 months

Children can acquire and use several languages without any difficulty whatsoever. It helps when the languages are clearly associated with different people and situations. This enables children to recognise, try out and use the different linguistic worlds.

Comment

Jan is excited. His Mummy is waiting for him. The playgroup teacher says goodbye to Jan and his mother. In German. Then they make their way home, all the while speaking Albanian. Without even noticing the switch. It is clear to Jan that this is the language they speak when he is alone with his mother. The two languages are clearly associated with situations and persons. This is how Jan orients himself in linguistic terms. Like Jan, his mother switches effortlessly from German to Albanian. She keeps the Albanian family language going. And also the German language of the environment. Both languages have their fixed value and place. A lot happens on the way home. And everything has to be looked at and discussed. It's great that the two of them are taking their time. Naming things, clarifying objects, commenting on what they see. That is also linguistic diversity!

Using different languages in a clearly evident way

Jan has spent the morning in the playgroup. There he learns the ambient language of German together with the other children and the playgroup teacher. Jan's mother grew up in Switzerland, so she also speaks Swiss German in addition to Albanian, her first language. She consistently speaks Albanian with her sons – the language with which she is most familiar. The playgroup teacher cannot speak Albanian. For this reason, the three of them speak German when they say goodbye to one another after the morning at the playgroup. Once Jan and his mother are on their way together, the conversation between them continues in Albanian.

Jan can clearly assign the use of the different languages. He speaks Albanian at home with his family, and German in the playgroup. When they are together with people who only speak German or Albanian, the family adjusts their language use accordingly. The fact that both languages are associated with different situations and people helps Jan to recognise the different linguistic forms and to use one or the other language depending on the linguistic environment. It is important that the different

languages are used consistently (attached to people and/or situations) and thus used in a manner that the child can understand. This makes it far easier to acquire several languages.

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Establishing and maintaining shared attention

There is a lot to see and talk about on the way home. Jan's mother draws his attention to exciting things – such as the large crane which is required to build the house, and the truck which brings the concrete. By making such verbal references, she enables Jan to also focus his attention on these things and thus creates a basis to start a conversation with him. Jan listens with interest and shares his own observations as well ("It broke the tree there"; "The crane is bringing something."). In this way, the walk home also becomes a valuable learning opportunity in linguistic terms.

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Using everyday situations as opportunities to engage children in conversation

Both of them take time to look at what's going on and to talk about it ("Let's go and have a look at what they are doing"). The peep holes in the barriers of the building site encourage them to stand there and look at what is happening. His mother summarises what she sees in words ("They have stored steel there"), adds new information ("First they pulled down the old house and now they are building a new house with the large crane."; "The men cannot lift it, so it has to be lifted with the crane.") and encourages Jan to talk about it by asking questions ("Can you see anything?"). This linguistic arrangement of a very common daily situation is not only fun but also supportive for Jan in his language development.

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Cook

Anaïs 2 years 2 months

Multilingualism is an opportunity for children. They can best develop their linguistic abilities when adults value what they can do and take their multilingualism seriously.

Comment

Kinyarwanda, French and German – Anaïs feels at home in all these languages. What a vocabulary! Kinyarwanda and French are spoken at home, while German is spoken in the daycare centre. At present, these three languages are part of very Anaïs' personal first language. It will take time before the little girl can consciously separate the different languages from one another. "Amata", "Hilfe" or "Pommes". All three languages have their place in the game with her mother. None of them is undervalued or even forbidden. In this way, Anaïs feels like she is being taken seriously. It's great the way that her mother gets involved in the game. She asks questions. She comments on things. She names things and expands on what Anaïs says. She guides her daughter further and – most importantly – she listens to her. In this way, the little girl learns new words playfully. She repeats her mother's statements. She listens to the sound of her words and gets involved herself. In this way, both joint play and joint conversation develop at the same time. And it could continue in this manner for a long time.

Value and support multilingualism

Using your own strongest language

Anaïs' mother grew up in Rwanda. She has been living with her family in Switzerland and learning German for some time. Anaïs attends kindergarten three days a week. Her parents speak Kinyarwanda and French with their daughters. They are languages which they feel comfortable with and in which they can express themselves effectively. Thus, Anaïs is growing up with three languages: Kinyarwanda, French and German. In the film sequence, their mother mostly speaks Kinyarwanda with Anaïs, interspersed with a few French words. She also picks up on German words uttered by her daughter ("Help", "Yes"), thus signalling that she has understood her. Many multilingual families such as this one do not use languages absolutely selectively. It is important for Anaïs' linguistic development that her parents speak their strongest language with her where possible, and only use the less strong

ambient language occasionally (such as to show that they have understood a German statement uttered by Anaïs, or in contact with German-speaking people). In this way, Anaïs experiences not only rich and stimulating language use but also the particularities of the language culture of her parents in her daily life (e.g. comforting songs, verses, particular expressions, etc.). This is extremely enriching in linguistic terms and also important for identity building.

→ p. 28

Appreciating the children's languages

At the moment, all three languages – Kinyarwanda, French and German – are part of Anaïs' very personal first language. It still makes no difference to Anaïs from which linguistic system the individual words and sounds originate. It is only later that she will learn to differentiate between the various languages with their particular words and structures. The only thing that is important for Anaïs at present is to communicate with and be understood by her nearest and dearest. She uses words from all three languages when she is playing. Her mother picks up on what she says without passing judgement. Anaïs notices that all three languages are welcome and valuable. The different languages are part of her personality. Therefore, it is important that adults do not make negative comments about the use of a language that is foreign to them and that they recognise multilingualism as an opportunity for their children.

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Name objects, activities, and characteristics

The joint role play offers Anaïs a wonderful opportunity to expand her linguistic repertoire. On the one hand, her mother serves as a linguistic model. On the other, Anaïs can use and develop her linguistic skills in the stimulating game with her mother by herself.

Her mother accompanies the game in linguistic terms: she comments ("Let's put the milk bottle here on the table"), names things ("That is juice"), asks questions ("What would you like to cook?") and expresses her own wishes ("I would like to drink some juice"). However, she does not dominate the discussion. On the contrary: she gives Anaïs time to contribute, listens attentively and picks up on what her daughter says (e.g. Anaïs: "Help"; Mother: "Should I help you to cook?"). Anaïs herself repeats individual words uttered by her mother ("spoon"), includes new aspects ("No water there") and contributes actively to keeping the discussion on track. Mother and daughter immediately incorporate what is said into the game. This helps Anaïs not only to expand her vocabulary but also to immediately experience the meaning of the words and embed them in a context.

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Robot

Philipp 4 years 7 months

Leon 4 years 7 months

Johannes 3 years 3 months

Many children grow up in a foreign language environment. They need regular contact with people who are familiar with the language of the environment. Whether this is in the playground, in the daycare centre or in the playgroup. This allows children to quickly find their feet in the new language.

Comment

Four children in the playgroup. Every one of them speaks another language at home. However, they all speak German in the playgroup. And that works! They adjust their language to suit the place and the people associated with it effortlessly. Johannes is new to Switzerland. He is still not used to a lot of things, including the language. Despite this, he is fully involved in what is going on around him. The playgroup teacher encourages him to laugh and dance. They get on well with each other. That gives him confidence. Johannes is part of the group. This is how he learns new German words and sentences. Cooperation is a skill that needs to be learnt. Conflicts cannot be solved without the use of language. What happens when the red piece is missing? And how do you ask for help? The playgroup teacher cleverly helps Philipp and Leon to communicate with each other. She encourages them when she is needed. She explains where necessary. She takes a back seat when the two boys reach the goal themselves. Success! The next picture!

Value and support multilingualism

Providing lots of opportunities for contact with the target language

The children speak Thai, German, Russian and Tamil at home. They speak German in the playgroup. While several of them already speak this language well, it is still new for others. However, everyone benefits from spending time with the other children and the playgroup teacher as linguistic material must be acquired during social interaction.

When children are together with other children and attentive adults who speak the new ambient language well, they find it far easier to learn a second language and do so more quickly. In the process, the children not only hear the new language but can also try out and develop the newly acquired linguistic material themselves. Therefore, it is important to guarantee regular contact with the target language. This can be done by visiting a playgroup or kindergarten or through private contact with families who speak the ambient language at home.

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Ensuring participation and communication also nonverbally

Johannes is three years old and can communicate effortlessly in his first language of Tamil. He has been attending the German-speaking playgroup for a short time. The linguistic material which he has learnt at home does not function here. His ability to express himself and to understand is extremely limited. This can be extremely unsettling. It requires a caregiver who will help him to show his understanding using non-linguistic means and participate in group activities even with a limited capability to express himself verbally.

When Johannes hears the title of a song that he knows, "Oppa Gangnam Style", his pleasure is evident. It's a great opportunity to get involved! The playgroup teacher picks up on his enthusiasm and encourages him to dance. In the process, she accompanies her linguistic utterances with facial expressions and gestures. Laughing and dancing, the two of them understand each other perfectly. Johannes sees that he can also be understood even with his limited language knowledge. He hears – embedded in a context and related to his interests – German words and sentences with which he will soon be familiar. In this way, he quickly finds his feet in the ambient language and feels like he belongs: an important requirement for getting involved and trying out a newly acquired means of expression. In the process, the focus is not on grammatical correctness but rather on active and stimulating communication.

→ p. 29

Temporarily supporting and encouraging conversations between children if needed

Philipp needs the red block from Leon's robot to create his Lego picture, and Leon needs Philipp's help to find the missing parts. It is a situation which requires a lot of language and the capacity to negotiate. The playgroup teacher offers him gentle support ("You need to wait until he has finished."; "Would you like to ask him?"). When she sees that the two boys are moving towards the goal on their own, she steps back. However, she remains nearby and watches proceedings so she can provide the children with support if required. In this way, the playgroup teacher ensures that the situation remains manageable and rewarding without becoming too overwhelming for Philipp and Leo. This is an important requirement for negotiating the joint activity as independently as possible and managing it – as well as for developing their linguistic skills in the process.

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