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Developing Communication Skills In Preschool Children

Michelle Ayala

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

Introduction

This capstone project was focusing on a preschooler's language and communication development. These skills are required to support and prepare them for kindergarten readiness. It is often known that children who struggle with oral language development in preschool will likely have negative consequences as they advance in their education. Like Vygotsky explains, the lines of communication and reasoning cross, and a fresh way of acting develops (DASTPAK, 2017). Communication development in children provides the groundwork for future reading ability and overall academic performance. Supporting communication development in a preschool, is by adding lessons with more songs that they can sing along with or telling a story where the educator can ask open-ended questions to involve the children in the story and having activities where they are communicating with their peers. Helping preschool students with their communication skills will help them be prepared for kindergarten and be successful in their student career. By focusing on a preschooler's communication skills through lessons that involve singing to develop vocabulary, creating a group activity that provides communication with peers, and reading a story that can create dialog with open ended questions. The tentative age group will be preschoolers ages 3 to 5 years old. Most students are Spanish speakers and there are some that do not speak English or Spanish but Triqui. Some of the students' parents work in the school district and most of the parents are migrant workers.

Needs Statement

Language and communication skills play an important role in interacting with others and developing social skills. Children attending preschool can have issues in using their language for playing with peers or engaging in classroom activities. Vygotsky also emphasized the

importance of language in a child's cognitive development since social interactions need communication. Early communication skills may have an impact on social, academic, and long-term development (Riad, et al., 2023). By applying these skills at an early age like preschool, those children struggling to communicate their needs can change many things in their life. Children from backgrounds where their first language is utilized as a second language have been shown to have differences in developing language skills (Riad, et al., 2023). These children are called Dual Language Learners and are the ones struggling with communication because of their language barrier.

Preschool children are developing in all 5 components of language: phonology, semantics, syntax, morphology, and pragmatics (which includes communication skills). Early development on language is communication, that is combining a number of cognitively acquired behaviors and abilities. By the time children go to preschool, they have learned a lot in the first four components. In preschool, they work on the pragmatic component by asking them simple questions like, “what would you like to eat today?” The child should respond with “I like pizza.” Which usually means that is what they want to eat. Another one is phonology which suggests that one may make particular sounds for particular words: speech development. When it comes to describing experiences, people, places, and things, three- to four-year-olds should use short sentences; use more precise adverbs (quietly, loudly, quickly); use more new and detailed words; and correctly use some irregular and past tense verbs (go, went, gone) (Creger, 2019). Giving teachers the tools and techniques to focus on these is essential to their effectiveness in communicating with students and with each of these standards and indicators has a unique meaning and significance inside the classroom (Creger, 2019). The last component of development is semantics, the appropriate use of language to convey particular ideas. A

persistent problem acquiring and utilizing language is known as a language disorder. According to ASHA (1993), the condition may affect any combination of the following: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and/or pragmatics, which deals with the role of language in communication. In order to facilitate or support expressive communication, certain people with language problems may need to use augmentative and alternative communication (*Language in brief*, 2024).

Language and communication skills play an important role in a preschooler's future academic achievement. When a child hears, perceives, and interprets information from other people, their understanding of communication develops even before birth, during pregnancy (Gooden & Kearns, 2012). This role also helps preschoolers to interact with others better and develop social skills. Without these skills preschoolers will not be able to make sense or communicate their understanding of a subject. According to research, responsive adult communication consists of organized, relaxed interactions that reflect the child's interests and cues. It also includes reacting in a way that builds on the child's current level of language and communication by reinforcing, modeling, and extending language and communication skills (Hood, 2023). Developing their language skills will help with understanding and make the most effective use of their academic success.

Dual language learners are developing a new language and struggle to understand what language they want to use. For this reason most students already are Spanish speakers and others only speak Triqui, which makes most students know three languages and are considered dual language learners (DLL). For young children to thrive in language, they must be regularly exposed to high-quality, play-based early learning experiences both at home and at school. This is particularly true for preschool-age dual language learners (DLLs), who are developing these

core abilities along with learning a second language (Franchino, 2019). The students I have encountered with, don't speak because they are shy or feel nervous and probably confused which language to use or don't know how to put the words together for a simple sentence. Helping these students develop more language and communication skills are important for their communication skills and have a better relationship with peers. By not having these skills developed in preschool these children can develop other problems like increased risk of social problems, anxiety, depression, attention, and behavioral problems.

By helping students improve their language and communication skills, this will provide them with a better experience in school and with peers. Children with language skills are able to comprehend and stick to the behavioral expectations of school, which helps with their social-emotional integration. By providing activities that are fun and educational will help these children communicate and socialize better. It has been demonstrated that professional development for early childhood educators that focuses on improving young children's early reading abilities has small to moderate impacts, with higher results when programming improves teacher-child interactions (Bailey, 2023).

Language and communication skills have a big part to their social emotional development that impacts their peer engagement. By providing skills of understanding, managing their emotions, and keeping peer relationships, will support those preschooler's that are in need. When developing self-awareness, children can apply communication skills to their life and realize their full potential in the classroom, while still maintaining fulfilling relationships with peers and teachers. Understanding our abilities and achieving our shortcomings is essential for communicating with society, especially for children and people in general (BİLGİZ & TUFAN, 2018). Language development and communication skills have the power to change a child's

learning experience and that's what I want to explain to others that this is something we need to improve in preschoolers' success in learning. Language development will also support a preschooler's behavioral development, by this the child will be able to listen and understand the lesson the teacher is teaching. Some of these behavioral challenges that a child might experience but not always are feeling frustrated, ignoring directions, being rude, not listening and being mute, and not participating. Behavioral difficulties are frequently a sign that the child is unhappy and not achieving well, and educators want to help. These problems might be caused by language differences, greater developmental concerns, or situational issues (*Dual Language Learners With Challenging Behaviors* / ECLKC, 2023).

Helping children with their language development and communication skills will really prepare them for kindergarten. Finding the right support to push these children to really try to use their language skills as they play and engage with their peers can really help them. When parents and educators ask open-ended questions, encourage children to explain, and concentrate on subjects that spark their interest, children appear to develop good language abilities (Cumbria County Council , 2021). Through activities such as singing to expand vocabulary, encouraging peer conversation in a group setting, and reading aloud from a story that prompts discussion with open-ended questions, preschoolers' skills in communication can be effectively reinforced.

Theory

This capstone project was impacted by Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Since communication is a vital part of social relationships, Vygotsky emphasized the importance of language in the intellectual growth of a child (Lorina, 2023). Learning occurs as a result of the ever-changing relationships that take place between educators and students, suggests this

theory (Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015). Children can learn together and as a team with peers or educators thanks to Vygotsky's idea. Also, scaffolding can form adults to support children being part of the activity with others (Mcleod, 2024). By adding an adult like the teacher or peer and using a thinking aloud approach to problem-solving, they can demonstrate to others how they think.

Vygotsky also refers to the more knowledgeable other (MKO), which is someone who understands or performs better than the learner on a certain activity, process, or topic. The more knowledgeable other principle is connected to Vygotsky's second major idea, the zone of proximal development (Mcleod, 2024). According to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, children learn from others around them (Lorina, 2023). The idea behind this theory simply explains the difference between a learner's potential while working on their own and the things they can do with an MKO. The zone consists of many activities that each learner can do under the supervision of a teacher or student (Pappas, 2023). For this reason I did my lesson in a group activity where the children must communicate with each other to get the task done.

The theory claims that between the ages three to six years old, children are supposed to begin to talk about their ideas and thoughts. The children I am working with are still having the trouble of just communicating their thoughts and ideas with others. According to Vygotsky, the progress of language connects with the development of thoughts. In other words, a child's intellectual growth—that is, how they take in information and thinking skills—plays a big part in their development (DASTPAK, 2017). To help these children learn more language skills to communicate with, I have conducted three lessons. The first lesson is for children to learn the meaning of at least six words which will develop their vocabulary. The second lesson children will be able to use language to work/play with peers, they will be provided with a task to

communicate with each other how to get it done. The third activity, children will be able to communicate about a story being read to them, by asking open ended questions that will lead them to use language they have learned. By applying Vygotsky's theory for the assessment created to help develop children's learning potential and opening to things they didn't know they knew. When adding a MKO the children can learn as they watch the other children on how they communicate and can mimic what they are doing.

Diversity

This project was implemented at the Vista Verde Preschool in Greenfield, California. The diversity in all four preschool programs in Greenfield, CA have 99.1% of hispanic children that are learning a second language. This can cause an issue with communication, learning delay, and even behavioral problems. The preschool I created my assessment around had all hispanic children who all are able to speak spanish and understand English. There are only 3 students that speak Triqui and understand both English and Spanish languages. The socioeconomic status of these children most have parents that work in the fields and others who work within the school district. I would like to say the diversity of characteristics of these parents are mostly non-educated and others who have gone to some college. The children who have parents that work in the fields can have a harder time to assist their child in improving their communication skills. Helping with their language and communication skills will in fact create an impact to their learning at the next level. By speaking their language which will be Spanish, I will be able to communicate with them to use their words in the language they know or whatever language they prefer. The activities I have provided for the children will develop the skills that will take their

learning on to a deeper level of understanding and this will encourage more communication and language development (Alanís, 2018).

Learning Outcomes

I focused on preschooler's language development in helping them to communicate and be more prepared for kindergarten. The lessons had three learning outcomes:

1. Children will become effective communicators with the vocabulary of music by listening in a controlled way and learn at least six words.
2. Children will be able to engage with peers effectively to finish a task through building blocks and by complete 5 tasks communicating together.
3. Children will be able to promote communication development through open ended questions, by reading a book to create dialog.

Method

Location and Participants

This project was conducted at Vista Verde Preschool in Greenfield, California. In this preschool classroom, five children ages three to five participated in three different learning activities. These three learning activities focused on their language development and communications skills. These five children were four boys and one girl, who all spoke and understood Spanish or both English and Spanish. For all three learning activities, the five children participated in all activities together. Because I was employed by the Greenfield Union School District I was able to get to know the children before conducting my project. By being able to get to know the children I was able to plan my learning activities that helped build rapport and create a curriculum that was developmentally appropriate.

Procedures and Materials

This project was done with three learning activities to help develop better language and communication skills and it was done over a period of six days. The first learning activity focused on a song in which the children will learn up to six words. I conducted this learning activity over a two day period during their free play and lasted about 15 to 30 minutes. On the first day I started with a song “If you're happy and you know it” (See Appendix A). I would help the children by singing and acting out the song with them. Each verse had two words they would have to remember and the song had three verses. For the second day the children sang the song on their own but with my help on starting the song with them but letting them do it on their own. The words the children should learn are: happy, you're, know, clap, hands, stomp, feet, shout, hooray.

The second learning activity centered around a group activity, where children used language and communication skills to work with peers. It was done over a two day period during their free play and lasted between 15 to 30 minutes. On the first day I provide an activity of blocks to use together and build a tower as high as they can. I explained to all five children that they must work together to make the tower. The first step I explained they will be using three different colors of blocks that will create a pattern (See Appendix B). Second step, I explained they must help each other get all the red blocks and place them together alongside (See Appendix C). Once that was done I had them get all the green blocks and place those on top of the red blocks (See Appendix D). After that I had them get all the blue blocks and place those on top of the green blocks (See Appendix E). Third step, I let them know they must work together to build the tower in the pattern I provided (See Appendix F). Finally on the second day I let them start on their own and have them work together to communicate with each other to build their tower.

For my last learning activity I read a story to the children. I showed them the book cover and identified parts of the book front cover, back cover, title, and title page (See Appendix G). I did this learning activity individually to be able to assess them properly and done in a two day period, between 15 to 30 minutes. I will be asking them some questions of what they think the story will be about based on the elements of the story. Like, what do you think the story is about? Why do you think the title is called “Brown bear, brown bear what do you see?” Then I read the book out loud and as I read (See Appendix H), I will be asking open ended questions to each child to answer (See Appendix I). Finally, this will again promote language and communication skills that will prepare the children for kindergarten.

Results

The first learning outcome was that preschool children will be able to learn up to six words. By singing the song with the children first, it gave them practice on what words we would be learning. All five children were able to learn 3 to 6 words of the 9 words in the song. Based on the amount of words needed to learn, 1 out of 5 children were able to do all nine words and 4 out of the 5 children learned 3 words. The results were partially met, I feel 3 (60%) of participants passed this LO.

The second learning outcome was to use communication to work with peers to finish tasks provided and was done in a period of two days. On the first day I provided an activity of blocks and I explained to all five children that they must work together to make the tower. Finally on the second day, I let them start on their own and have them work together to communicate with each other to build their tower on their own with the tasks provided the day before. In this assessment the children were given 5 tasks to communicate with each other to build their tower together and must complete 2 tasks with building blocks to pass assessment on

the second day. The results of this LO were fully met, all five children were able to communicate and finish the tasks. All 5 children were able to follow 2 or more tasks. For the amount of tasks provided, 3 out of 5 children were able to communicate all 5 tasks with peers.

The third learning outcome is reading a story book to children and asking open ended questions to develop communication through dialog.. This activity was done in a period of two days to give the children time to learn the book. I read to the children, “Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?” The assessment for this activity was to ask open ended questions to create dialog about what the book is about. To pass assessment they must be able to answer 4 out of 6 questions as best to their ability. The results for this LO were partially met, 1 out of the 5 children were able to answer 1 question. From the 5 children only one child was able to answer 2 questions. Only 3 out of 5 (60%) children were able to answer 4 of the 6 questions to the best of their ability.

Discussion

This capstone project was focused on development in communication skills through vocabulary, tasks, and questions. The learning outcome 1, I was to sing a song with 5 preschool participants to practice and learn at least six words from the song. I worked with the children for 2 days on this assessment between 15 to 30 minutes, that was partially met. It was partially met because I felt the children were distracted with other children around them and didn’t have their full attention. Maybe if I used a different approach for them to learn vocabulary to develop communication skills, like using “the wheels on the bus” would have been better for my participants. Being able to sing a song with peers can help with communication and as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, children learn from others around them (Lorina,

2023). The second learning outcome was fully met, they were to be able to follow 2 out of the 5 tasks recommended to pass assessment by working together to build a tower with blocks. There were 3 participants who completed all 5 tasks and were able to help their peers to complete theirs. That's where the term "more knowledgeable other" (MKO); an MKO is someone who has more understanding or skill than a learner in a particular action, procedure, or subject that comes from Vygotsky's theory and connects with the zone of proximal development, that children learn from others around them (Lorina, 2023). This lesson was the most engaging then all the other lessons. I feel it was because they felt more comfortable playing as they were able to help each other to build something that they usually always do.

My limitation of this project was maybe having more engaging lessons that were more interesting to them. Like the song I chose could have been more fun if it was something easier to learn, for example "the wheels on the bus" would have been a good song for them to all be more engaged in. Also, changing my last learning outcome lesson, where I read a story to the children and asked open ended questions. I felt like instead of reading a book maybe we could have come up with a story or they can tell me a story about themselves and make it easier to create some dialog that allows them to participate better. With that said, just having more time with the children could have had a better outcome.

Even though my project was not as successful as I hoped for, I believe that having better lesson plans and just having more time with preschoolers could have had a better impact on them. Just changing lessons to activities that they are more interested in but using the same approach with vocabulary, tasks, and questions. I feel like my lessons were good for all diversities this preschool had. Letting the children use any language as they did the lesson helped

so much and glad it did help in a way to get them out of their shell to communicate though the song, to their peers, or simply answering a question.

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Appendix A: Song

If You're Happy and You Know It

If you're happy and you know it, Clap your hands
 If you're happy and you know it, Clap your hands
 If you're happy and you know it, Then your face will surely show it
 If you're happy and you know it, Clap your hands.



If you're happy and you know it, Stomp your feet
 If you're happy and you know it, Stomp your feet
 If you're happy and you know it, Then your face will surely show it
 If you're happy and you know it, Stomp your feet.

If you're happy and you know it, Shout "Hurray!"
 If you're happy and you know it, Shout "Hurray!"
 If you're happy and you know it, Then your face will surely show it
 If you're happy and you know it, Shout "Hurray!"



If you're happy and you know it, Do all three
 If you're happy and you know it, Do all three
 If you're happy and you know it, Then your face will surely show it
 If you're happy and you know it, Do all three.



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Appendix B: Block Building 1



Appendix C: Block Building 2



Appendix D: Block Building 3

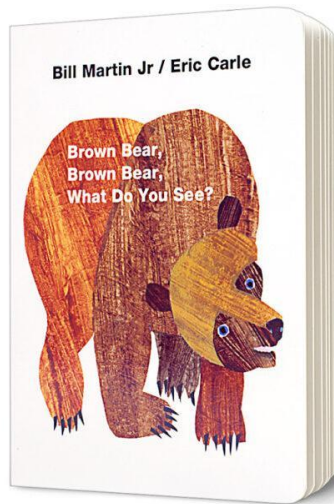


Appendix E: Block Building 4



Appendix F: Block Building 5

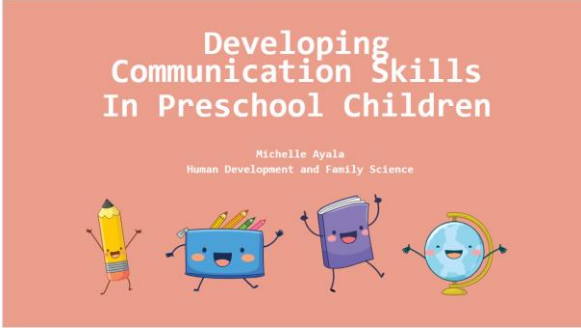


Appendix G: Book**Appendix H: Inside Book****Appendix I: Questions English & Spanish**

1. What do you think this story will be about?///¿De qué crees que se trata esta historia?
2. What kind of animals do you think Brown Bear will see?///¿Qué clase de animales crees que verá Oso Brown?

3. Have you ever heard of a blue horse before? Why do you think the horse is blue?///¿Has oído hablar de un caballo azul antes? ¿Por qué crees que el caballo es azul?
4. Where can you go to see these animals?///¿Dónde puedes ir a ver a estos animales?
5. What did you like about the book?///¿Qué te gustó del libro?
6. What is your favorite color? What other colors are there, besides the different colors of the animals in the book?///¿Cuál es tu color favorito? ¿Qué otros colores hay, además de los diferentes colores de los animales en el libro?

Appendix J: Capstone Festival Presentation





Developing Communication Skills In Preschool Children

Michelle Ayala
Human Development and Family Science

Introduction

- Focusing on preschooler's communication development.
- Providing groundwork for academic success to be able to communicate their needs.
- Communicating effectively allows children to form strong bonds with teachers and peers.





Needs Statement


Language and communication skills play an important role

- This role helps with interacting with others better and develop social skills.
- Language development is important for Dual Language Learners (DLL) children learning a new language

Children with language skills are able to comprehend and stick to the behavioral expectations of school

- Which helps with their social-emotional integration.
- Will be able to listen and understand the lesson the teacher is teaching.

Theory



Lev Vygotsky

- Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory was based on his belief that children learned through the social, language, and cultural interactions in their experiences.
- Vygotsky also believed that the way in which we communicate with others influences the way in which we learn.
- The main principles of Vygotsky's work: the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The Project Learning Outcomes



Children will become effective communicators with vocabulary of music by listening in a controlled way.



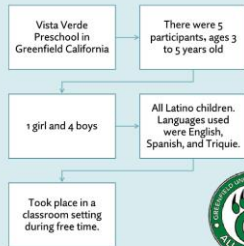
Children will be able to engage with peers effectively to finish a task.



Children will be able to promote communication development through open ended questions.



Method: Location & Participants



Method: Procedures & Materials



Three learning activities done in a period of six days, between 15 to 30 minutes

1

Singing together to offer vocabulary and learn six words from song.

2

Centering a group activity to use communication to work with peers.

3

Reading a story book to children and ask open ended questions to give dialog.

Assessment Results for LO 1

LO1

- Singing together to offer vocabulary and learn up to six words

Assessment

- Children sang "If you're happy and you know it" as a group.
- The child will learn at least six words from the song, being: **happy, you're, know, clap, hands, stomp, feet, shout, hooray.**

Results: LO1 was partially met

- All 5 children were able to learn 3 to 6 words
- 1 out of 5 children were able to do six words and more.

Assessment Results for LO 2

LO2

- Centering a group activity to use communication to work with peers

Assessment

- All 5 children were given 5 tasks each to communicate together with block building.
- Must be able to follow at least 2 tasks to complete assessment.

Results: LO2 was fully met

- All children were able to communicate and finish the tasks.
- 5 out of 5 children were able to follow 2 or more tasks.
- 3 children were able to communicate all 5 tasks with peers.

Assessment Results for LO 3

LO3

- Reading a story book to children and asking open ended questions to give dialog.

Assessment

- I read out loud "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?"
- I asked open ended questions for understanding of the story and must be able to answer 4 out of 6 questions.

Results: LO3 partially met

- 2 children were not able to answer 1 or 2 questions
- 3 out of 5 children were able to answer 4 questions

Discussion: Success of Project



- Project was focused on development in communication skills through vocabulary, tasks, and questions.
- Learning outcomes were met to an extent in their ability to communicate.
- Continuing these lesson will support them to expand their vocabulary and understanding.

Discussion

Limitations/Challenges:

- Trying to making the lessons fun to help with children's engagement.
- Not always being able to tell me they don't understand.
- Having more time with children

Future Direction:

- Instead of reading a story, they could make up a story they can tell me.

