

Analysing the adult child conversation education essay



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In just a few years every normal child acquires a language (Cadwell, 1997). Children begin to learn about their language from the moment that words are spoken to them and till the age of four or five, they have effectively become adults in their abilities to produce and understand endlessly many sentences in a variety of conversational contexts (Makin, Campbell, & Jones Diaz, 1995). According to the famous linguist Noam Chomsky, the main task of linguistics is to explain how children bridge the gap - Chomsky call is a 'chasm' - between what children ultimately know, and what they could have learned from experience, even given optimistic assumptions about their cognitive abilities (Neuman & Roskos, 1993).

Adults play vital role in the oral language acquisition of young children. Through observation and interaction with adult, children learn how conversations work. Such interactions not only educate children about social aspect of conversation, for instance taking turns and attending to the conversational partner, but they also learn grammar and vocabulary.

This article analyse how one child actively participates in a communication session by examining a particular occasion of adult-child interaction during mealtimes conducted in a community-run pre-school setting.

The Data

The conversation between child (aged 5 years) and adult/researcher was audiotaped in the afternoon during mealtime at the backside lawn of the preschool. Written permission was taken in the form of letter to parent of the child and school administrator. The data for this writeup has taken from an adult/author-child conversation that occurred in the afternoon at a

community preschool. The conversation has been transcribed to produce a representation of the talk, and it is to this text that my analysis is referred (see appendix for full transcript). Name of the child has not been mentioned to ensure confidentiality.

The preschool teacher introduced me with the child and she sit downed with us but she was not part of our conversation. We shaked hands and told our names to each other. Before the child would have spoken anything, I explained him that what I will do together with him. Pauses were left so that the child has chance to respond which gave him confidence. In the beginning child was shy and had a hard time interacting with the adult, he might be feeling insecure or unsure of himself. But after giving him a confidence boost and assured him that adult is like his friend and feel free to discuss anything and be comfortable with him. During conversation the child was supported and encouraged to express his views openly.

This conversation contains expressions quite often happen when a child during mealtimes: the adult asks the child about his choice food (lines 3-4, 8-13 & 18-19), the adult explains to the child about healthiness (lines 14-17), the adult questions child about the different use of vegetables (lines 20-26), and further discussion about the growth of plants (lines 27-30).

The purpose of analytic study of this conversation transcript is to look much deeply at how the talk was organised by the participants to understand that how child give meanings to his choice and connect it to his living in the world. This more detailed analysis allows us to show more precisely what speakers did in the talk, and how they did it. This, in turn, brings us much

closer to understanding communication as social activity and developing/enhancing vocabulary of the children.

Analysing the adult-child conversation

The quality and amount of adult talk seem to be key in appropriately developing children's oral language skills. A child's full potential development is hard without quality adult-child interaction (Fleer, 1995).

Children are competent thinkers

In the conversation, the adult artfully and collaboratively constructs 'the competent pre-school child' (Leiminer & Baker, 2000) by inviting the child as experienced speaker and showed belief and trustworthiness and reliability on his views. Line 9 and 23 are significant silence (of the child) in the course of the conversation. Within and during this silence the adult could self-select and continue speaking. However, she chooses not to. This action of the adult shows her confidence that the child is a competent thinker and has the ability to express his views about the subject matter under discussion.

According to Vygotsky pointing gestures so prevalent in many cultures as an important form of communication (Fleer, 1995), therefore, in the interaction the child (without necessarily coached for pointation) in lines 28, 30 with arms movements pointed towards lawn and gardener for strengthening his point of view. Over time the child learns how to make the association between the action (arm movements towards lawn and gardener) with the social activity (plant cultivation and their watering). Resultantly the child understands and uses the pointing gesture as a way of communicating.

In the words of Vygotsky this learning of pointing gesture illustrates not only how children are socialized into their culture, but demonstrate that learning is a social process which children learn through such interaction (Fleer, 1995). What is significant here is the importance of adult-child interaction in mediating the social traditions in ways which are appropriate for the child. The quality interaction is the key to promote curiosity and facilitating thinking and learning.

However, Vygotsky also argued that children participate in social activities without necessarily understanding what they mean (Fleer, 1995). For example the child has washed his hands before eating but he may not necessarily fully understand what this action means. Vygotsky termed this social behaviour as occurring at an interpsychological level of functioning – at a social level of activity without understanding (Fleer, 1995). Learning occurs when the child moves from one level of psychological functioning to another. For instance the adult explains to the child the purpose of washing hands that develops his understanding about washing hands before eating.

Development and vocabulary enhancement

Adult-child interactions are often within the context of activities which are beyond children's present level, but with appropriate adult support to facilitate learning. Vygotsky termed this aspect of a child's potential the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It is the child's potential rather than the actual developmental level that is being considered. Vygotsky argued that, in order to stimulate curiosity and develop children's thinking, adults need to interact with children at their potential level of development and not their actual level of development – their ZPD. Children with the support of an adult

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work at levels above their actual development level (Fleer, 1995). For example the adult explains in line 17 that how one can remain healthy (by eating well and exercising regularly). Likewise in last line of conversation, the child himself connects human being food requirements with plant nurturing requirements.

Vocabulary has also been enhanced when the adult used rare vocabulary words and developed linguistic concepts. For example the adult remarked that milk is a dairy product, in which dairy is a rare word. Similarly the adult mentioned that germs are present on unclean hands therefore we wash hands before eating - where germs is a less common word. Through explaining and questioning this conversation was extended about vegetables, their use and plantation. This exercise provided a good opportunity to the child to engage in conversation with adult and further to develop his expressive language skills.

Features of the adult language and child's language acquisition

The way to get the child engaged in conversation was to ask the right question, therefore the adult focused on interlinked open-ended questions. The adult wants to know more about the child's opinion, feeling or activity therefore he begins open-ended questions with what, when, where, who, which or how to keep conversation going. A good example of an open-ended question is " Your mom makes lots of great food. Which food is your favorite?"

During the grammar composition, child's sentences were getting not only longer but more complex- for instance, there were not clear boundaries in grammar: exhausted in a sentence like I am exhausted (line 2) is both verb-like and also adjective-like. In the sentence exhausted is in a verb position and has a verb ending -ed also it can take a modifier like very (I am very exhausted) as do other adjectives (as in very large) but not verbs (as in very eat).

The child began to talk in sentences that were sometimes grammatically incorrect such as " our teacher say" (line 13) instead of teacher -says.

Similarly there were little clarity in justifying the limits where the vowel /o/ begins and vowel /u/ ends.

The conversation has extended the child thinking for instance in providing an explanation when connected his choice food (vegetable rice) with plants nurturing requirements and when watering by gardener. Likewise, when the child pointed towards lawn for explaining vegetables plantation in the soil.

Conclusion

The aim of conversation with a child is to know more about the child.

Effective use of language is key of intellectual development and is the main tool by which the children would be able to develop their thought processes (Leiminer & Baker, 2000). Therefore, the information gathered from conversation can help in providing appropriate guidance for making plans for quality adult-child interaction. Our tone of voice and nonverbal expression can misinterpret the conversations with children, for that reason our

conversation should encourage children to be comfortable in talking to us about important issues, concerns, and problems.

A reasonable conclusion is that children do not have any solid, permanent attitude about language as they obtain it; they do not give the impression what they look for, or what to avoid- though some of this knowledge clearly improves over the period of time.