Facilitation of Child Language Development through Using Finger Plays in Toddler's Age

Summary

Introduction

Toddler's age is a period which includes children development from 1 to 3 years of age. This is a period when a child needs a lot of support from parents and understanding from caregivers. It is also a period when coordination of fine movements and language develops. The main factor facilitating the process is a positive communication between the child and an adult. Therefore one of the most successful means ensuring both positive communication with an adult and the development of the language is finger plays or a folk-song-game from the Latvian folklore. The experience coming from other nations also emphasizes the significance of the finger games in the development of children's language.

Aim of the study

To analyze the influence of finger plays to the development of language in toddler's age (1 – 3 years).

Materials and methods

Latvian folk songs constituting the part of the folklore of the toddler age have been analysed in the research. Also, research on Latvian children's folklore has been done. Research on finger plays in English has been also done, and the features characteristic to both Latvian and English culture have been analysed.

Results

The development of speech is a highly important indicator in the child's development. It seems that the above issue has been topical many centuries ago too as we can find so many wonderful finger plays in folklore that have attracted children's attention for centuries. As one can find very scarce information on finger plays in literature, the major way enabling generations to pass this national treasure on to the next generation is verbal communication.

While playing finger plays the development of children's communication skills are encouraged. The foundation for successful development of interaction is being laid when the child has to cooperate not only with the immediate family but also peers. Speaking skills and the development of interaction are closely linked as successful interaction is not possible without well-developed language skills and other children might not understand their playmate and thus communication barriers may emerge.

Toddler's folklore mostly consists of folksongs introducing the child with its nearest and more distant surroundings. That is extremely important for enlarging the lexicon of the child as this is exactly the age when the stock of words grows very rapidly due to the development of cognitive processes, and many of the words from the passive knowledge are now actively used.

Finger plays is a gratifying means that can be included into various activities of the daily regime at a preschool institution. It will be useful both during the morning hours when you meet the children as well as during the time when you work with a child individually. There are no space related restrictions for using the play as well as no auxiliary materials required.

Through using finger plays in toddler's age a child is successfully prepared for the next stage in its development: preschool age where one of the most important preconditions for success is well-developed language. Despite the fact that children's shops offer the most various toys aimed at encouraging children's development from the very first months of their lives, one should not forget about the children's development means known and proven through centuries as they possess one important quality: they have to be played together with relatives, and that, in turn, develops the child's emotional sphere and activates language much more successfully than any toy bought in a shop.

Conclusions

The impact of finger plays on the development of a child is very manifold. The following aspects are being developed:

- *child's speech as well as other cognitive processes: thinking, memory, imagination, attention, perception;*
- *interaction skills;*
- *coordination of finger movements;*
- *feeling of safety.*

Key words: *finger plays, toddler's age, speech.*

Introduction

Toddler's age is a period of time that covers children's development aged from 1 to 3 years. This is a period when a child needs a lot of support from the parents and understanding from its caregivers. It is also a period when coordination of fine movements and language skills develop. The main factor facilitating the process is positive communication between the child and its caregivers – parents, grandparents, pre-school teachers and babysitters. Therefore one of the most successful means ensuring both positive communication with an adult and the development of the language is finger plays or folk-song-games coming from the Latvian folklore.

There is almost no research in Latvian available on the influence of finger plays on the child's development. Vilma Greble is one of the researchers who has investigated this phenomenon. The findings can be found in her anthology "Latvian Children's Folklore" (Latviešu bērnu folklore 1973). Also J. Vītoliņš (Vītoliņš 1971, 171), V. Kārklīņa and A. Studente (Kārklīņa, Studente 1990) have carried out a research on children's folk songs telling about their eating habits. A very important research about the application of finger plays in the pre-school settings (Tautasdziesmas – rotaļiņas kā bērnu aktivitātes veicinātājas bērnudārzā 1990) was done at the beginning of the third Latvian independence period.

Aim of the study

To analyze the influence of finger plays in the development of language in toddler's age (1 – 3 years).

Materials and methods

The study analyses Latvian folk songs and research in Latvian children's folklore. It also explores finger plays in English and tries to analyze the common traits uniting Latvian and English cultures.

The development of speech is a highly important indicator in the child's development. It seems that the above issue has been topical many centuries ago too as we can find so many wonderful finger plays in folklore that have attracted children's attention for centuries. As one can find very scarce information on finger plays in literature, the major way enabling generations to pass this national treasure on to the next generation is verbal communication. Caregivers play a very important role in the child's development and that is why mothers and grandmothers having good knowledge of children's folklore can facilitate the development of their offsprings more successfully. The main problem of today is family traditions – usually new families live separately from their parents and that is why children meet their grandparents not as often as it was in the last century. Under Latvian tradition of children's upbringing it is usually the mother and grandmothers who take care of children, and in most cases they are also better folklore experts than fathers and grandfathers. Another problem is that young mothers know folklore not so well as their mothers and grandmothers did. These are the reasons why finger plays are not used in children's everyday life as often as they were many years ago. This is the reason why this knowledge becomes highly important for caregivers in pre-school settings and "baby schools" because the above institutions are working successfully not only with children but also with parents. It would be one of the ways how to give knowledge to new parents about children development and also Latvian folklore.

Results and Discussion

Finger plays are part of toddlers' folklore. There are folk songs about childcare, children's upbringing and teaching, songs about caregivers and children's songs. Latvian researcher Vilma Greble emphasizes that the richest resources in toddlers' folklore is for folk songs about how to feed children, about children's food and food preparation (Greble 1950). The most popular food for children in toddler's age several centuries ago was porridge. During the meal a very important condition is the emotional atmosphere and traditions. Finger plays is really an excellent tool that can be used in order to help the child to calm down and wait while the porridge out of "three or five grains" is being prepared. The caregiver can "prepare the porridge" in the child's hand by certain movements and say that those children who are not patient and are crying cannot get a meal. It is in accordance with old traditions in the Latvian folklore.

Viru, viru putriņu

Trīs milti katlā.

Šim dos, tam dos,

Tam nedos, tas brēca "ī".

One of the main characters in toddler's age is a mouse which takes an active part in children's life.

Maļu, maļu pelīte,

Te pelīte tecēja,

Te kūra uguntiņu,

Te putriņu vārīja.

Caregivers can use finger plays during the waiting time while the meal is being prepared and at the same time they can develop the child's language skills. J. Vītoliņš has mentioned that a very important part in finger plays is the expression of astonishment, for example, "Pauks!" (Vītoliņš 1971, 171). This is a good way of attracting attention of a young child; moreover, it also raises the interest in the ongoing activities. Finger plays are rhythmical. They help to develop fine motor coordination and at the same time facilitate the development of cognitive processes – memory, thinking, language, attention, imagination, perception. Another important aspect is that finger plays foster the feeling of security in children. They help to develop a safe base because during the play a child is together with the most important persons and it helps to develop child's emotional world. Finger plays are cheerful and joyous; they facilitate child's activities because they include repeated movements that are very important aspect in the child's development. That is why sounds, syllables and words are also repeated in finger plays.

Viri, viri putriņa,

Pieci milti katlā.

Finger plays also help to develop children's communication skills. During that period the base is formed for good relationships between the child and adults, and later peers. There is a close link between the language and interaction skills – one cannot become a successful communicator without well-developed language skills because other playmates will not be able to understand their partner and this would lead to communication problems.

Folklore for toddlers mostly includes folk songs which introduce the child to its local environment. It is very important for the child's vocabulary development as during that age child's vocabulary has a tendency to expand due to the development of the cognitive processes when a very large part of the passive vocabulary transfers to the active vocabulary. A significant part of Latvian folk songs are related to hands. V. Greble emphasizes that folk songs about child's fingers and the names of the fingers are related to the most important aspects in the child's environment facilitating its activities (Greble 1950, 119). There are many folk songs about hands and fingers because they kindle child's interest very early. There are many finger plays also in English about using hands:

Fingers up and fingers down,

All the way to London Town.

Now let's make them faster go,

With a merry Ho, Hi, Ho (Labensohn 2008).

It is interesting to explore fingers for the child already at the infant age but during the toddler's years it continues by adding appropriate names to each finger. Each of the five fingers has many names in Latvian folklore. It means that these folk songs have been of great importance in the facilitation of the child's development. These names are attractive to the child and they can be used during finger plays. There are also different names for each finger in English finger plays – Thumbkin, Pointer, Middleman, Ringman, Baby. It means that also other cultures evaluate finger plays as an important tool in the child's language development.

Where is Thumbkin

Here I am

How are you today, sir?

Very well, I thank you

Run away, run away (Labensohn 2008).

Fingers help children to learn the names of the family members. It is common both in the Latvian as well as English culture.

This is the father, kind and true;

This is the mother who cares for you;

This is the brother so big and tall;

This is the sister who plays with her ball;

This is the baby, pet of them all.

See the whole family, big and small (Labensohn 2008).

Latvian folklore also offers attractive finger plays with clapping hands. Usually these finger plays are about making bread and eating it. Clapping hands develops the child's fine motor coordination and it makes influence to the brain development and facilitates pronunciation of sounds in the native language. That is why finger plays are widely used in the work of speech therapists with the child in order to facilitate pronunciation of certain sounds.

Latvian children folklore is rich with different jokes. It helps to attract children's attention to finger plays. See, for example, this folk song about eating hedgehogs.

Sitam, kaujam mazos ežus,

Metam podā izvārām.

Tēvam gaļa, mātei gaļa,

Bērnām zupa blodiņā.

Finger plays are easy to use in day care centres in everyday life with children. They can be used in the morning when the child arrives at the day care centre and also in individual work with children. Finger plays need neither certain premises nor specially prepared materials. It is necessary to have only the teacher who knows how to play finger plays well and who has willingness to be together with a child. Finger plays can be used very well during the period of adaptation at the day care centre when the child feels unsecure and if there is a difficulty for a child to see its parents leaving. Then the teacher can use finger plays in order to make positive communication with the child and this is a good way to develop the feeling of security. The child feels that day care centre is a place where everyone is happy and at the same time the child becomes interested in the surroundings. Finger plays create a need for cooperation and during the play situation children's language skills develop faster.

Investigation carried out at the beginning of the third independence period in Latvia on application of finger plays in the pre-school settings emphasizes that those children whose caregivers have used finger plays in the family and day care centre demonstrates higher level of play skills development in comparison with the rest of children (Tautasdziesmas – rotaļiņas kā bērnu aktivitātes veicinātājas bērnodārzā 1990, 7). It needs to be emphasized that communication during finger plays positively affects children's willingness to speak as well as the intonation of speech. It helps to develop skills to talk with a partner which is very important in pre-school years when children are playing role plays (Tautasdziesmas – rotaļiņas kā bērnu aktivitātes veicinātājas bērnodārzā 1990).

Conclusions

Finger plays help to develop fine motor coordination and at the same time facilitate the development of cognitive processes – memory, thinking, language, attention, imagination, perception.

Finger plays promote the feeling of security in children, their base of safety as during the play the child is together with its most important persons – caregivers therefore the game helps to develop the child's emotional world.

Finger plays help to develop children's communication skills. During the toddler's age the base for good relationships between the child and adults, and later peers forms. There is a close link between the language and interaction skills – one cannot become a good communicator without well-developed language skills.

Finger plays is an excellent tool for developing children's vocabulary in the toddler's age.

There are many possibilities to use toys in order to facilitate the development of children's cognitive processes; however, finger plays is also a very important tool in children's development because they facilitate development of children's emotional world and helps in the language development more successfully than any toy bought as it is necessary to communicate with the adult during the game.

There are some common traits in Latvian and English finger plays. In both cultures fingers are a very important part in forming child's perception about the world. Each of five fingers has a special name in finger plays in order to attract the child's attention and enrich its vocabulary.

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