Learning Leads Development

Heidi S. Roibal, M.S. IMH (II)
April 2017

NMAIMH competencies addressed
Area of Expertise
- Direct Service Skills: developmental guidance
- Working with others: coaching and mentoring

“Learning leads development”~ Vygotsky

Learning and development are two different processes that are complexly related to each other. Vygotsky and Piaget, both theorists of cognitive development help us understand that learning occurs as children construct knowledge from experiences, that development occurs within a social context and that language plays a central role in cognitive development (Bedrova & Leong, 2007). Learning occurs best within trusting, responsive relationships. Home visitors have the unique opportunity to help parents understand their role as teachers while supporting developmental parenting.

Parents are a child’s first and most important teacher (Brazelton, 1994; Tronick & Beeghly, 2001) and through play with their parents, children develop social competence, motivation, persistence and an overall love of learning (Dunst, Bruder, Trivette, & Hamby, 2006; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzze, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Development of these skills are key components to success in school.

Parents can encourage positive attitudes about learning through play by singing songs, telling stories, reading books and engaging in conversations with children. Positive parent-child relationships provide the foundation for children’s learning and when parents and caregivers provide sensitive, responsive and predictable care, young children develop the skills they need to succeed in life. Positive parent-child
relationships have powerful effects on children’s emotional well-being (Dawson, & Ashman, 2000) and later relationship building.

How does encouraging learning through play support the CYFD Long-Term Outcomes for home visiting? We communicate to parents that playing with their child in the first five years of life helps build a loving, trustful and responsive relationship. Play supports the development of essential skills important to school-readiness such as social-emotional skills, language skills, executive functions (reasoning, decision making, problem solving) and gross and fine motor skills. For our babies and toddlers, play is their “work,” as they learn and practice new skills, gain competence, achieve mastery and begin anew with a different interest.

Everyday routines that may seem “routine” to parents and caregivers can be full of learning and adventure to a child. For example, think about grocery shopping. Fourteen-month old Scarlett sits in the grocery shopping cart and sees new colors, new faces and a variety of new objects. She feels the bumpy texture of the oranges that her mother gives her to hold and she can smell the citrusy scent. Next, she observes her father pick up several boxes of cereal and she sees the pictures on the front of the box and listens to her parents discuss words such as, “yummy, eat, breakfast, and healthy.” Scarlett’s ears perk up at the word, “yummy,” She recognizes this word! As they move throughout the grocery story, Scarlett is observing and taking in more information, and communicating with her parents by pointing at objects and using one-word sentences. Her parents respond to her inquiries through language and by letting her hold and observe objects. Later that evening, Scarlett and her parents eat dinner together and Scarlett gets to taste the orange she was holding earlier. Her parents connect this experience with grocery shopping earlier in the day and tell her, “Remember we went grocery shopping and you were holding this orange? We peeled the orange and now, you can taste the orange. Does it taste sweet? It’s juicy and sticky”. Presto! An everyday routine can become an experiential learning opportunity.

Questions to encourage discussion and reflection…

For home visitors:
- How does the home visitor support the view that parents and caregivers are the child’s first and most important teachers?
- How are home visitors and parents working together to plan and choose appropriate materials for home visits and socialization experiences?
- How does the home visitor support families in identifying safe and age-appropriate learning materials for infants, toddlers and preschoolers?
- How does the program support cultural diversity and home language acquisition using materials and supplies from the home environment?

For parents:
- What delights you about your child?
- How does your child learn best? (observing, doing/hands-on, singing?)
- Do you have any concerns about your child’s development?
What is important for me to know about your family traditions, celebrations, cultural beliefs?  (Appendix A.2, Joyful Engagement Book)

References/Additional Resources
Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/family.html