Fact sheet 1.8 Impact of atypical language development on children's holistic learning

Learning aim D3 Theories linked to language development

Children with any delay or atypical development need to be assessed and supported as atypical development may affect children's learning in a variety of ways.

- Social development – children learn by being with others. Not being able to understand what others are saying or struggling to communicate will affect children's opportunities to play with others.
- Cognition – children with atypical language development may find it harder to learn and need longer to think through ideas and problems.
- Mathematics – mathematics requires children to think in the abstract. While they may cope with simple problems children with atypical language development are likely to find mathematics increasingly difficult as they move on to more advanced ideas.
- Literacy – fluent language is needed so that children can start to read and write, so it is essential to identify any atypical language early on. A child whose language is significantly atypical may not be able to access the skills needed for literacy.

Multi-language acquisition is where a child might acquire two languages at the same time: their home language at home with parents and another in their nursery setting. Bilingual children switch between two languages and you may find at times they mix them when speaking. This is called 'code switching'.

It is important that early years professionals adopt a number of strategies in supporting bilingual children with language delay including:

- collaborating with parents and using key words from home and translating in the setting
- labelling items with pictures and using both languages, e.g. 'toilet', 'role play area'
- using different modes of and modelling speech including speaking clearly, slowly and giving children additional time to process what has been said.

Further resources can be found here:

Bilingualism in the early years: Early Years Alliance mini-guide

Development Matters: English as an additional language, page 22

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