

WHAT A CHILD LEARNS WHEN PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING

Visual referencing/ observational skills are fostered when:

- The partner's emotional responses are exaggerated and slowed down within the task.
- Language is lessened and visual referencing for the specific materials is exaggerated.
- Two items are offered but one is visually referenced in an exaggerated way.
- The location for an item is spotlighted through visual gaze as opposed to language.
- An item is taken from the child but the child's hand is held as well as the item so that the child shifts his/her visual attention up to the person.
- An item is given to the child while holding onto the child's hand so the child shifts his/her visual attention to the person.
- Yes/no questions are answered through head shakes and nods.
- Tasks are done through coordination with a partner thereby requiring the child to gather materials, start and stop, match pace and manner of movement, with his partner.

The ability to remain within an interaction is fostered when:

- The child has to work with someone else to do a task.
- Each person is given a role in doing the task.
- Roles/jobs are switched within the task.
- Challenges occur while the child is fulfilling his role.
- Roles/jobs are chained within the task and across tasks as the child works with another person.
- The child needs to emulate what the other person is doing.
- The child has to wait until the other person completes one aspect of the task before he can begin his role.
- The child has to solve problems to allow the participants to move along with the task.

Experience sharing occurs:

- While you and your child work together, talking about what you are doing.
- When something unexpected occurs, commenting on it, e.g. oh no, the floor is all wet!
- When the task has been completed, reporting about the activity to someone else.
- Expressing your feelings about doing the task, e.g. this is hard/ my hands hurt/ I like it better working with you than working alone.

Language development is fostered through:

- Developing the vocabulary related to each skill.
- Using the vocabulary in sentences (the level determined by your child's language ability) to talk about what you are doing.
- Understanding language as the language is tied to a concrete, ongoing experience.
- Using language across different communicative functions during the task: commenting, requesting, directing, comparing, exclaiming, questioning, and reporting.
- Chaining of sentences to describe the sequence of steps for the task
- Stating and experiencing causal factors within the task, e.g. oh no, I spilled the water, the floor is wet.
- Conversing about what you are doing.
- Conversing about what you have completed and talking about what you will have to do next.
- Talking about the task you are doing in comparison to a task that you had done on another day.

Vocabulary development occurs as you and your child do the task:

- Talking about what you are doing, labeling the materials you are using, the actions you are taking and the locations in which he/she is placing the item.
- Sending your child to get specific items.
- Expecting your child to ask for missing materials.
- Expecting your child to direct you to do an aspect of the task.

Awareness of cause and effect is fostered by:

- Noticing that materials change based on what you do to them (e.g. you wash a shirt and it gets wet, you leave a wet sponge out and it gets dry and hard).
- Understanding that a condition could have been caused by different actions, e.g. the table could get wet when you spilled water, juice or milk and the table got wet when you wiped it with a wet cloth.
- Understanding that actions the child takes can change the condition, e.g. if the child wipes the table it will be clean.
- Understanding that conditions change even if you did not plan for them (e.g. accidentally knocking a bucket over and the floor and your shoes get wet).

Understanding the sequencing of events is fostered by:

- Participating in tasks that are made up of steps.
- Understanding that one step logically precedes another step.
- Understanding that the steps of a sequence might change from one performance to another because of different conditions.
- Understanding that elements within a sequence can change from one performance to another (e.g. Using liquid soap one time and powdered soap another time).
- Recognizing that events that occur in the middle of a sequence may change the rest of the sequence.

- Realizing that you may plan to do a task one way but may not be able to carry through with that plan and so that the sequence of steps must be altered.
- Understanding that materials change across the sequence of steps.

Cognitive flexibility is fostered by:

- Understanding that you can use the same materials for different tasks.
- Understanding that you can use different materials for the same task.
- Understanding that you can take a long time to do the task.
- Understanding that you can take a short time to do the task if you hurry.
- Realizing that different people do the same task in different ways.
- Understanding that elements of a task may change.
- Understanding that the sequence of steps might change.
- Understanding that there can be different end points to a task.

Dynamic analysis is fostered by:

- Realizing that you may have to change the way you do the task depending on the materials you have.
- Realizing that you may have to change the way you do the task depending on the time you have allotted to do the task.
- Understanding that the task will change depending on where you have to do it.
- Understanding that the task will change if you do the task with a different person, an additional person or many people.
- Understanding that the task will change if you do the task with an adult vs a child.
- Understanding that the task will change if you do the task with a tall person as opposed to a short person.
- Recognizing that the way you do the task may change if you have lots of tasks to do that day.

Flexible problem solving is fostered by:

- Making adjustments when materials are missing.
- Making adjustments when time is short.
- Making adjustments when a mishap occurs while doing the task.
- Making adjustments to differences in conditions that were unexpectedly present at the outset of the task.
- Making adjustments when what you try does not work.
- Making adjustments when tools break.

Self-awareness is fostered through:

- Recognizing that working hard gets the task done.
- Understanding that completion of the task helps others while lack of completion hinders others.
- Recognizing that a task that is hard the first time will get easier with practice.
- Understanding that you like to use certain tools better than others.
- Recognizing that doing a task with someone else makes it easier.
- Understanding that planning the task supports efficiency.

- Recognizing that working quickly will allow for more time to do something else but working too quickly may negatively impact the quality of the outcome.
- Understanding that mistakes don't matter.
- Understanding that a mistake may help you to learn.
- Understanding that sometimes someone else might want to do the task that you like to do.
- Recognizing that pleasing/helping someone else brings pleasure to you.
- Feeling good about yourself because you can complete tasks necessary for life.
- Feeling competent because you can accomplish tasks.
- Feeling good about yourself by being an active member of the family.
- Developing a sense of pride as others appreciate what has been done.

Episodic memories can be fostered by:

- Developing joint memories with someone else as you work side by side.
- Completing a task for which you are pleased about the outcome.
- Experiencing moments within tasks that are funny or scary.
- Planning the activity and then completing it.
- Comparing one task to another.
- Sharing comments about the task with another person.

Fine motor skills are fostered when:

- The child is expected to assume a role/job in the activity.
- Specific tasks are divided into two parts so that the fine motor skill requirement is easier and the child can be successful.
- There are expectations for performance levels that the child needs to meet.
- The child is given opportunities to use basic tools (e.g. a sponge).
- The child is given opportunities to do the task repeatedly.

Basic functional science knowledge is fostered:

- When liquids must be soaked up, items have holes in them or there are changes in the temperature that affects the materials.
- When doing cleaning tasks observing the amounts involved: too much vs too little soap, ratio of water to cleaning liquid, big spills vs. little spills.
- When doing cleaning tasks re the impact of force, speed, and choice of materials on the ability to do the task successfully.
- When doing cooking and cleaning tasks, the impact of temperature change on materials and the transformation of materials from one state to another or the emulsification of one liquid within another.
- The type of spill and the corresponding method for cleaning.

Basic academic skills are reinforced:

- When the child has to get a specific number of items.
- When the child needs to recognize the labels of cleaning items.
- When the child needs to create space to put away items.
- When the child has to sort items into appropriate places.
- When the child needs to follow specific steps within directions.

- When the child has to judge if an item is empty or full, wet or dry, big or little, sticky/dirty or clean.

Sensory issues can be confronted:

- When the child learns how to make adjustments so that he/she can participate despite sensory issues, e.g. wearing rubber gloves.
- When the child becomes involved in a task and can stay in his role, despite the presence of a sensory stimuli that makes him a little uncomfortable.
- Through repeated exposure, sensory issues sometimes lessen.

In addition to the above, the child will learn the skills that will allow him/her to function in life more independently. The child will learn that he/she is a contributing member of a family unit. Others in the household will make the same observation! The more time the child spends doing functional tasks, the less time he will have to do self-stimulatory behaviors or to focus on obsessive interests.

Nancy Z. Schwartz, PhD

Communication Clinic of Connecticut, LLC