

A Language and Literacy Development Journey

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Toddler Years-Language and Literacy Interactions

Leah Hines has been developing very well. By age 3, Michael and Emily decided to transition Leah from at home care to preschool care. This transition was instrumental for the Hines family because it would be the first time that Leah was cared for outside of the comfort of their home. It would also be the first time that Leah had a teacher, a daily progress report, and goals set for her learning. The Hines family chose a premier early learning academy that has been known for their positive parent reviews. The academy stands strong by their ABEKA curriculum and collaboration with Pensacola Christian College to develop students.

Children are introduced to standards and learning goals approximately 1 to 1.5 years ahead of their public-school counterparts. The advanced curriculum introduces concepts to students early and builds upon their knowledge as they reach higher grade levels. The children also learn at a more aggressive pace than most general public school students. Michael and Emily felt that their choice of Leah's school was excellent, especially since Leah has been receiving at home instruction and care prior to her enrollment in school. The Hines' were confident that Leah would fit right in.

Leah's first day at her new school was exciting. Her parents took first day pictures and hung around the school for at least 40 minutes after she was dropped off; just in case the school needed to call them. Leah also showed initial interest the first day of school. She seemed just as engaged as the other students with toys, singing songs, and the routine of the day. Leah had moments of interaction with the other students that included playing with blocks, opening books, playing with puzzles, and jumping off of the cushion blocks to the cushion mat. By the end of the first day, Leah had made a finger paint first day of school picture that could be kept as a memento for her parents.

Leah's next few days were similar to her first. The teachers were getting to know Leah. They spent a lot of time observing her behaviors, how she interacted with others, and most importantly how she communicated her needs. Towards the end of her first week, Leah started showing signs of homesickness. Upon drop off she cried uncontrollably. The teachers took turns consoling her and talking to her. They shared with her how they were happy to have her at school. They had other classmates try to play alongside of her to make her feel comfortable. The teachers also held and rocked Leah to help her know that her new school was a place of comfort.

The director of the school let Leah's parents know that the transition time and Leah's reactions were normal; especially for a child who comes from an at home environment. The director let the Hines family know that children are taking the atmosphere in for the first few days, but after they realize that their new classroom is the new norm, and they have to return everyday, they tend to show regression and desire to be at home. The director assured Michael and Emily that Leah would soon gain comfort and the crying and homesickness would soon end. She advised Leah's parents to continue to talk positively about the school transition; referring to the classroom and the teachers in regular conversation. The director felt that this type of communication would help Leah to know that her parents are comfortable with the environment as well.

The director was right by the fourth week of school, Leah showed positive signs of attending school, and didn't cry uncontrollably anymore. Leah could even be heard saying her teacher's names at home while she played with her favorite stuffed animal. Thankfully, her transition seemed to move in a positive direction.

One of the assessment strategies that the school implores is to assess students every nine weeks or quarterly. The school understands that children develop at different stages and at different times. Turnbull & Justice (2017) state that phonological achievements are more noticeable in toddlerhood than in infancy. They use an age specific developmental continuum to assess toddlers and infants. The school moves to a standards based analysis once they move to kindergarten and grade school. The parents are given the continuum results through parent conferences during the Fall and Spring, and through mail during the Winter and End of Year.

Leah Hines' initial continuum scores were somewhat disheartening for the Hines family. The records showed that Leah's physical and social emotional development were right in line with the mean of the other 3 year olds. On the contrary, her language and cognitive skills were functioning as a beginning 2-year-old. During their conference, the teacher communicated that toddlers between the ages of 2 to 3 years are able to have a word for most items, use two to three word phrases to discuss what's on their mind, effectively say the letters k, g, f, t, d, and n alone and within words, speak in a way that is understood by family, and ask for objects by name. Turnbull & Justice (2017).

Ms. Oliver, Leah's lead teacher, described that Leah's language functions are more consistent with toddlers that are aged 1 to 2 years old. Leah uses one to two word questions as opposed to phrases. Leah uses consonant sounds at the beginning of words, but not always the complete word. Leah does a lot of pointing to pictures in books and around the room as opposed to saying their names. Leah also follows and understands simple commands as opposed to complex commands and directions. Ms. Oliver assured the Hines family that although Leah is overall not showing developmental readiness for her age, since this is her first assessment, and

her first time in school, she is confident that Leah will have a learning curve and in time, be able to function at the developmental appropriate levels just as her peers.

Toddler Years-Language and Literacy Materials

Leah's parents took that advice to heart and settled to change their approach on how they interact with Leah at home. The Hines purchased a Birth to 5 years informational book, that helped them to understand the milestones physically, emotionally, cognitively, and linguistically that Leah should show. They also began a journal in each domain to help keep track of the milestones and actions that she displayed. They researched what kinds of materials, manipulatives, and toys that Leah should use to help her develop cognitive and linguistically.

The Hines were also somewhat reassured in that several of the students in Leah's class had older brothers and sisters. This fact helped them understand that they had children models other than their parents to talk and interact with them in language. Therefore, Emily called her sister in laws and intentionally arranged family play dates, outside of their normal interactions, so that Leah could play and communicate with her older school aged cousins. Even though the changes would be subtle, Emily was inspired to provide these opportunities for Leah.

Other than investing time in interacting with other children, playing with language toys and manipulatives, The Hines finally decided to let Leah have a toddler tablet so that they could download language learning apps such as ABC mouse and Starfall. Ms. Oliver, Leah's teacher stated that she was only communicating in one to two word phrases. These apps had several instructional pages that helped teach young learners words to sentences. They also had a vast amount of learning letter songs to help her learn the consonant letters that she hadn't quite mastered. Lastly, the Hines made sure they intentionally spoke in long sentences to help Leah develop sentence structure. When Leah said milk, or juice, they responded with "Can I have

some juice or milk please?” Leah’s parents knew that area was one where they hadn’t paid attention to before. They were comfortable with using parentese. Music (2017) describes parentese as a type of conversation where adults use higher pitch, longer pauses and more repetitions than in normal language when talking to babies. Leah’s parents were accustomed to when Leah said milk or juice, they would respond by doubling it up and saying “juju” or “milky milky.” They now know that for Leah to develop language they had to develop it by changing their styles.

Conclusion

Leah’s initial toddler development seemed to take a slight curve downward as she approached her toddler years, they did not align with other toddlers at this general age. In some cases, her parents inhibited it by not speaking to her in full sentences. It could have been supported by her having more interactions with older children. Her language acquisition skills were developing, but not quite where other children her age were.

Leah’s environment was conducive to learning, however since other children tend to attend school early on in infancy, their exposure to deep levels of language happened at a faster and earlier rate than Leah’s. Leah’s physical, social, and emotional development was in line with others. It was her cognitive, language acquisition and development, that were not quite in alignment with other children her age. Leah’s parents made conscious choices to help reverse the limitations that Leah showed.

References

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