6 Principles of Language Learning:

1. **Children learn what they hear most.**
   - Amount matters (Hart & Risley, 1995)
   - Amount of speech is important for statistical learning (Saffran et al., 1996)
   - Amount of speech is important for speed of processing (Fernald, 2009; Weisleder & Fernald, 2013)

2. **Children learn words for things and events that interest them.**
   - L. Bloom’s Principle of Relevance
   - Babies attach labels to interesting not boring objects (Pruden, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff & Hennon, 2006)
   - Evidence from babies and toddlers in joint attention (Akhtar, Dunham & Dunham (1991); Tomasello & Farrar (1986))

3. **Interactive and responsive environments build language learning.**
   - Talking with not talking at
   - Expanding on what the child says and does
   - Noticing what the child finds interesting and commenting
   - Using a label that goes with what you are looking at
   - Asking questions rather than just making demands
   - See Tamis LeMonda et al. (2014)

4. **Children learn best in meaningful contexts.**
   - Studies on shape learning with 4-year-olds (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Newcombe & Golinkoff, 2013)
   - Spatial language through block play with 4-year-olds (Ferrara, Hirsh-Pasek, Newcombe, Golinkoff, & Lam, 2011)
5. **Children needs to hear diverse examples of words and language structures.**

- Amount and diversity of verbal stimulation (and gesture-gesture/gesture word combinations) fosters early and rich language outcomes (Beebe, Jaffee & Lachman (1992); Snow (1986); Tamis-LeMonda & Song (2012); Rowe (2012); Goldin-Meadow et al. (2014))
- Children’s vocabulary performance in kindergarten and later in second grade related to occurrence of sophisticated lexical items at age 5, predicted 50% of the variance in children’s second grade vocabulary (Weizman & Snow (2000); Huttenlocher et al. (2002))

6. **Vocabulary and grammatical development are reciprocal processes.**

- Words and grammar are “developing in synchrony across the first few years of life” (Conboy & Thal, 2006; p.209)
- In a bilingual sample, the amount of English words predicts English grammar and amount of Spanish words predicts the onset of Spanish grammar (Conboy & Thal, 2006)
- There is a reciprocal relationship between words and grammar: sometimes grammar allows children to learn words (Naigles, 1990; Gillette, Gleitman, Gleitman & Lederer, 1999; Imai, Li, Haryu, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, & Shigematsu, 2008; Fisher & Song, 2006)

**The bottom line?**

If we build a strong foundation in language, by using the 6 principles in our classrooms, our homes, and in our communities, we can 1). Reduce the 30-million word gap, 2.) Help children be ready to read by age 5, 3). Increase the quality of the nation’s preschools, and 4). We can measure our progress!

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