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SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

UNIDAD 3. Factores que influencian en el aprendizaje del inglés

GLOBAL CAMPUS
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Sensitive, social and cognitive development in young children

1. Basic aspects of very young children´s learning

Developmental cognitive neuroscience experiments have established that many fundamental processes which underpin thinking, reasoning and learning are present and fully functioning at birth or become available within the first 4-5 years of life (Goswami, 2008). During this period, the brain increases in size fourfold largely as a consequence of a rapid increase in the number of synaptic connections between neurons in the cerebral cortex.

Whilst there is no doubt that there are genetic and physiological differences between brains, the evidence suggests that each child's development and learning are highly dependent upon the type of physical and social environment in which they live, since these synaptic connections arise from and are selectively adapted by the child's specific experiences (Whitebread, 2013).

Children at the pre-school age are in the period of playing, discovering the world, learning to express themselves, observing the near environment and yes, they are getting ready to learn many things, also foreign languages.

Basic cognitive processes include:

- Imitation - children learning through their observations. Young children are proficient at learning through imitation from a very early age.
- Induction - A second learning process which is in place from birth is statistical or inductive learning, namely the process by which patterns and regularities in the stream of experience are identified. Inductive learning underpins the ways in which the human visual and auditory systems develop and so clearly forms the foundation of a very large part of human learning. This capacity to transfer learning or 'generalize' from one situation to another, explains how children adapt to new situations, and start to tackle new challenges and problems (Kirkham, Siemmer and Johnson, 2002).
- Executive functions - Involves not only constructing a bank of knowledge, but becoming able to use that knowledge appropriately to solve problems, to reason and plan. It is the development of the following basic executive functions which influence children's abilities to apply their knowledge in various situations, to control their cognitive, emotional and motivational processes, and to learn intentionally.

The most important executive functions include (Miyake, Friedman, Emerson, Witzki and Howerter, 2000):

- Inhibition - being able to restrain one's instinctive reactions
- Attentional flexibility in applying ideas or rules

- Working memory, the ability to hold information in mind while processing it.

Each of these functions is vital to the processes whereby children develop the metacognitive and self-regulatory abilities which enable them to become effective learners.

To sum up, there are many things we must bear in mind when planning lessons activities for very young children: psychological, emotional and physical development are essential factors. In a practical approach, we must plan activities following simple rules:

- Children cannot concentrate for a long period of time, so we need to plan short activities and change activities every five or ten minutes (average).
- Children are very enthusiastic if they like what they do, and give up quickly if they do not like what they are asked to do, so we must use our imagination and creativity and contents should be taught through stories, rhymes, songs….
- Children are very sensitive and need to show their emotions. They are also quite self-centered and love talking about themselves.
- The good capacity for imitation and some other aspects such us their spontaneity and lack of inhibition are good for learning of intonation and pronunciation, which is difficult for adults.
- They learn very quickly, but they have a short-term memory, so we need to use recycling activities and routines, since they need them both in their lives and the classroom and feel secure and protected by them.
- Multi sensorial approach is a much recommended teaching technique for young children, since they need to use more than one sense. They specially need to hear and see. At the same time they are physically very active. That's why TPR (total Physical Response approach) is the best one for being used with infants, as we will see later.

2. The importance of motivation

The word "motivation" has two meanings:

- The need or reason for doing something. What is your motivation to study English?
- Passion for doing something. ("He lacks motivation, so he´ll never speak English."). And it´s based on tow concepts:

Direction: Why someone decided to carry out an action
Intensity: How long he will sustain his interest
Motivation is directly related to our needs as human beings:

A range of empirical studies have confirmed the relationships between cognitive and motivational aspects (Schunk and Zimmerman's, 2008). Moreover, motivation seems to be

more important than other capacities, so it´s really important to motivate our students from an early stage.

The motivation on the early learners focus mainly on three aspects:

- 'self-efficacy' children's belief that they can improve their abilities through effort, leading to a 'mastery' frame-of-mind
- Interest: leading to engagement and involvement frames-of-mind
- 'self-determination': the satisfaction of children's needs for feelings of competence, autonomy and 'relatedness' (positive social relationships).

Conversely, the interest of our students in the language we teach will depend on 3 factors:

- The class itself: Activities and atmosphere of the class.
- The culture related to the language.
- The practical use of the language in the outside world (The youngest children cannot understand how important speaking English could be in their future).

Although the process of motivational awareness develops in the first 7 years, when it enables children to start to learn deliberately, it would be a mistake to delay introducing children to important ideas until this stage is reached, because important learning can take place through experience and in playful contexts in younger children, both in their own independent activity and through interaction with adults.

Young children learn from everything they do. They are naturally curious; they want to explore and discover. If their explorations bring pleasure or success, they will want to learn more. During these early years, children form attitudes about learning that will last a lifetime. Children who receive the right sort of support and encouragement during these years will be creative, adventurous learners throughout their lives. Children who do not receive this sort of support and interaction are likely to have a much different attitude about learning later in life.

When teaching a second language, we have to take into account the importance of the cultural competence to motivate our students: Speaking another language means to adopt a new culture. If you love this culture and you empathize with English speakers, you will be motivated to approach to their language.

You learn better and faster because you want to be integrated in a culture you love. As Dörney establishes (2001: 14) our desire to learn a language (our motivation) will be unavoidably affected by our attitude and perceptions of the speakers of the language and their culture. Students at infant education don´t know anything about the English culture and you´re the one bringing it to the classroom, so it´s important to relate these culture with things (cupcakes), characters (Peppa Pig) and moments (Halloween) they love.

If we want a L2 class to be successful, there are 3 kinds of language-related values we must promote:

Intrinsic values: Students interest in the interaction with the culture represented by the target language.
Integrative values: They are associated with the students' interest of the language learning process and the activities related to it.

Instrumental values: They are related to the practical use of the language in the outside world.
When working at Nursery Education, we can easily promote intrinsic and integrative values with motivational activities in which we present nice aspects of the English culture. Nevertheless, instrumental values are not so easy to work with really young children because they won´t understand that speaking English will be an important asset for them in the future.

The best way to develop this instrumental values is to show them they need to speak English to fully understand and communicate with the teacher. You can also participate in an international project with schools from other countries so children have a contact with other English speakers. For example: https://www.etwinning.net/es/pub/connect/browse_people_schools_and_pro/profile.cfm?f=2&l=es&n=33902

3. Skills and objectives in the Nursery Education period

Traditionally, the teaching of English in Spain has started much later than in other European countries. That is why students who had finished their Secondary period and even Bachillerato could not speak English at all and forgot grammar and vocabulary quite easily.

Fortunately, things have changed a lot recently and learning English is considered one of the main objectives at every level and from an early age. Although a lot of effort has been made in order to establish English at Nursery and Primary periods, there are many schools which offer English from the first year of kindergarten.

There is also a big problem concerning teaching English to very young children: in Spain pre-school teachers are not required to have a good command of English and English teachers do not have training in very young children. This is also changing nowadays. It is changing right now, while you read this. Education of pre-school teachers should be continuous.

When talking about Pre-school period objectives, we must bear in mind three areas:

1. Communication and representation.

The child in the nursery education period must be able to:

- Explain feelings and ideas orally
- Understand others' intentions and messages

- Appreciate his/her own artistic work and others
- Talk about real and imaginary situations and increase his/her communication techniques by using the different type of representations
- Use linguistic and extra linguistics means to reinforce the meaning of messages.
- Reproduce traditional rhymes, songs, stories, etc…

Regarding language learning, when babies are born they are capable of producing any human sound from any language. By the age of six months, a baby's babble takes on characteristics of the language the child hears in the immediate environment. The majority of brain development occurs within the first three years and it is in these early years that the foundations of language learning are at their best. (Cooper 2010) Regarding speech development, a child learning a second language, such as English, in the pre-school years is far more likely to speak that language with accurate sounds. So, while it is vital that a child is taught the dominant home language first (so that the social needs are met), it is also helpful to expose the child to English speech, so that correct pronunciation is developed.

2. Personal identity, Autonomy.

The child in the nursery education period has to:

- Have a positive image of him/herself and be able to identify his/her own abilities and his/her own limits
- Acquire habits about hygiene and health
- Learn his/her motor, sensitive, expressive and sensory abilities, as well as develop eye-hand coordination and acquire the coordination of his/her bodies
- Be able to show a respectful attitude towards others and be able to express his/her own feelings taking into account those of others
- Be able to cooperate with others in daily routines.

3. Social and physical environment

The child:

- Has to be able to work in groups and take others into account
- Must be aware of the social behavior rules
- Must show interest towards his/her social and physical environment, observing and exploring it and being able to establish relationships between the physical environment and the different form of life.
- Must show attitudes of respect towards the natural environment.

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Online resources

ABC Fast phonics http://www.abcfastphonics.com/ Agenda web http://www.agendaweb.org/

Anglès 365 http://www.edu365.cat/primaria/muds/angles/

BBC http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/websites/4_11/site/literacy.shtml Billy Bear 4 Kids http://www.billybear4kids.com/

CP Monreal http://cpmonreal.es/englishforinfanteducation/ Cybergrants http://www.cybergrants.com/qrisgrants/docs/2016/Resource_Guide_for_Infant_and_Toddler_Educators_and_Providers_Pilot_Version_4_2016.pdf

Earlychildhoo teacher: http://www.earlychildhoodteacher.org/teacher-tools/ Educanave http://www.educanave.com/

Eduscape: http://eduscapes.com/tap/tapearly.html

Ednet: https://www.ednet.ns.ca/educators/digital-online-resources English club: https://www.englishclub.com/babies/

Idaa America: https://ldaamerica.org/early-childhood-resource-websites-2/ Jumpstart: http://www.jumpstart.com/parents/activities/baby-activities Kidsolr: http://www.kidsolr.com/earlychildhood/

Kiz Phonics http://www.kizphonics.com/

Learn English Kids http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/ Learning Planet http://www.learningplanet.com/

Letters to Santa http://www.aletter4santa.com/ Lil' Fingers http://www.lil-fingers.com/ Literacy center http://www.literacycenter.net/ Loving 2 learn http://www.loving2learn.com/ Magic keys http://www.magickeys.com/books/ Oxfordowl https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk

Reading Planet http://www.thereadingplanet.com/

Readingrockets http://www.readingrockets.org/ Starfall http://www.starfall.com/

Storyplace https://www.storyplace.org/es

Teaching English: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-kids

Turtle Diary: www.turtlediary.com