

Case Study

Importance of Play in the Development of Language and Social Skills - A Case Study on Twins

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ABSTRACT

Play fosters language development in young children in which an effective language-learning environment is established to facilitate language. Language deficits in twins tend to persist through the early years of life. The present case study focussed on the relationship between language, social skills and play in a pair of twins diagnosed with language delay. A set of identical twins aged 3 years was evaluated for their speech and language skills. A detailed pre and post therapy evaluation was carried out formally and informally. Individual therapy and group therapy were provided to facilitate language through symbolic and associative play. A notable improvement was observed in language and social communication skills. Increased spontaneity of communication, social reciprocity, commenting, use of questions and use of linguistic markers were also observed. The study concludes that play facilitates language skills in children with language disorders.

Keywords: Play, Twins, Language, Social skills

INTRODUCTION

Language is crucial for a child's development and is an essential key for learning, communicating and building relationships with others. Language facilitation occurs when children interact with adults and peers in a playful manner, suggesting that play can make contributions to some aspects of language development. ^[1] According to Ginsburg (2007) play enhances children's development and incorporates many social and cognitive elements vital for language learning. ^[2] Among children aged 1-6 years, those who scored higher on a test of symbolic play showed better receptive and expressive language skills. ^[3] Play and linguistic communication share a representational character; hence play provides children with

opportunities to practice forming symbolic relationships. ^[4] Play with adults and peers bolsters language development because it encourages greater language use. As the symbolic play progresses, infants become more capable of combining mental representations of such relationships into sequences or organizing them into a hierarchical manner. Ferrera et.al (2011) reported increased use of spatial language while children and their parents played with block in which parents scaffolded the interaction where the child's lead was encouraged. ^[5] Language delay in twins persists through early school years and has been reported particularly in males. This could lead to decreased academic performance and less emotional well-being as a long-term consequence. Earlier studies

reported by Luria & Yudovich (1971) documented language delay in twins who also presented with poor play and social skills.^[6] Language delay in twins is related to social experiences in the child’s social environment during the early years of life. As language delay is evident in twins, similar to a singleton with a language delay, individual therapy program is required. Long term therapy resulted in better verbal communication skills, leading to better play and social skills.^[7]

The present case study has examined the positive effects of play development on language skills and social interaction. The purpose of the present study was to study the relationship between language, social skills and play in a pair of twins diagnosed with language delay.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A pair of identical twins, Twin A and Twin B aged 3 years old born of a consanguineous marriage third degree were brought by the parents with concerns regarding their communication and social interaction skills. No significant medical history was reported.

The following tools were used during pre and post-therapy evaluation to establish

baseline and for re-evaluation to document the progress.

1. Communication-Developmental Eclectic Approach to Language Learning (Com-DEALL) Developmental checklist.^[8]
2. A Scale for Assessing Children’s play.^[9]
3. Informal observation included free play-sessions and semi-structured observations. Both the twins were diagnosed as having mixed receptive and expressive language disorder.

The study was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, emphasis was on semantic language and to establish basic communication skills. In the second phase, emphasis was on pragmatic aspects of language skills by incorporating symbolic and associative play.

In the first phase a structured intervention program was planned for 15 sessions once a week and was followed up for a period of 6 months and the children were re-evaluated at 3.9 years of age. The first two sessions were used to set the baseline performance for the goals (Table1). The play skills were also assessed and the results are mentioned in Table 2.

Table 1: Baseline performance of developmental skills using Com-DEALL Developmental checklist

Developmental Age in Months		Gross motor	Fine motor	Activities of daily living	Receptive language	Expressive language	Cognitive skills	Social skills	Emotional skills
Baseline- 3 years of age	Twin A	Age adequate			18-24	12-18	24-30	18-24	18-24
	Twin B				18-24	12-18	24-30	18-24	18-24

Table 2: Baseline performance of play skills using Westby (2000): A Scale for Assessing Development of Children’s play

Baseline-36 months of age	Twin A	Pre-symbolic level II: 13-17 months
	Twin B	Pre-symbolic level II: 13-17 months

Child-centered approaches also known as indirect language stimulation approaches were used primarily for language stimulation. In the second phase, the children were rescheduled for individual as well as group therapy once a week and had attended 16 sessions totally. Focused stimulation approaches and child directed approaches were used. In order to facilitate

language through play, activities which incorporated pre-symbolic schemes were carried out to improve the child’s thematic content to represent everyday activities, short isolated schemas which include single pretend actions, relating to self and others, use of language for directive functions such as requesting, commanding, and labeling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to facilitate language skills through play in the participants. The results of the study are documented in two phases a) Phase 1 - the focus was on to improve the semantic aspects and early communication skills b) Phase 2 – the focus was on to facilitate pragmatic aspects of language including social communication skills by incorporating symbolic and associative play.

Phase 1 - To improve the semantic aspects and early communication skills

Goals were targeted to improve communication intent, pre-linguistic skills such as eye contact during communication acts, joint attention during play, imitation skills (verbal and motor), use of vocabulary

in terms of needs and common objects of use, and to facilitate use of two word combinations for expressing needs.

An increase in frequency of communication acts, consistent eye contact during communication acts, social referencing during joint attention acts, increase in vocabulary and imitation skills, and use of meaningful spontaneous 2 word utterances to communicate needs were the improvements observed in both twins. Due to personal difficulties, the participants could not continue with regular therapy, hence home program was provided. The results of the re-evaluation carried out at 3.9 years of age following 15 sessions of therapy and home program is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Re-evaluation done at 3.9 years of age using Developmental checklist

Developmental Age in Months		Gross motor	Fine motor	Activities of daily living	Receptive language	Expressive language	Cognitive skills	Social skills	Emotional skills
Re-evaluation- 3years 9 months of age	Twin A	Age adequate			24-30	18-24	24-30	18-24	18-24
	Twin B				24-30	18-24	24-30	18-24	18-24

Phase 2 – To facilitate pragmatic language including social communication skills by incorporating symbolic and associative play.

In the second phase, the children were rescheduled for individual as well as group therapy once a week and had attended 16 sessions totally. Primary focus was to improve the pragmatic skills to improve reciprocal communications and to use language for various purposes. Both the sessions primarily focused on improving morpho-syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of language to improve the overall communication abilities of the participants. Group therapy was purposefully initiated to improve sibling interaction among themselves and also better social skills with other children to achieve pragmatic language skills such as greeting, requesting and turn taking skills

Activities to improve morpho-syntactic aspects such as use of tense markers, pronouns, semantic aspects to improve use of ‘wh’ questions (‘what’ and ‘where), pragmatic skills such as indirect requesting, role play and narration skills through pre-symbolic schemes, symbolic play and associative play. Focused stimulation approaches and child directed approaches were used. In order to facilitate language through play, activities which incorporated pre-symbolic schemes were carried out to improve the child’s thematic content to represent everyday activities, short isolated schemas which include single pretend actions, relating to self and others, use of language for directive functions such as requesting, commanding and labeling. A post therapy re-evaluation was done at 4.4 years of age and the results are given in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4: Re-evaluation done at 4.4 years of age using Developmental checklist

Developmental Age in Months			Gross motor	Fine motor	Activities of daily living	Receptive language	Expressive language	Cognitive skills	Social skills	Emotional skills
Progress-therapy evaluation	Post Re-	Twin A	Age adequate			36-42	30-36	36-42	30-36	30-36
		Twin B				36-42	30-36	36-42	30-36	

Table 5: Re-evaluation done at 4.4 years for play

Progress- Post therapy Re-evaluation 16 sessions 54 months of age	Twin A	Symbolic level VI: 3 to 3.6 years
	Twin B	Symbolic level VI: 3 to 3.6 years

The clinician interacted in a way to scaffold learning skills initiated by the children. The activities were primarily led by the children based on their interests. A post therapy re-evaluation was done at 4.4 years of age and the results

On formal evaluation, both children showed an improvement in the overall language skills. There was an increase in the social interaction of these children and improved spontaneity during communication acts. The children were able to use language for a variety of purposes such as commenting, protesting, requesting, sharing, using indirect requests, emergence of role-play with each other, emerging of narrative skills. They could also intentionally interact and communicate with various partners such as family members, peers and also at school for a variety of reasons. They could play and interact with others for increasing periods of time, initiate social interactions with peers and adults spontaneously and also respond to the social initiation of others, developed an expanding interest in a variety of toys or objects. Use of questions, pronouns, phrases were observed.

Play constitutes a crucial component in developing language, cognitive and social skills. Studies also reveal that the connection between play and language development may rely on the shared symbolic nature of both activities and the social interaction during the many types of play help in language development. [10] Ojoundo (2015) reported that when children are provided with different types of play materials and

opportunities, they learn through manipulation and are able to acquire skills of speaking, listening and also reading and writing. [11] Speech and language intervention has enabled the children to develop their communication skills effectively as the clinician is able to skillfully interact with the children more purposefully and sensitively, thus providing much precise models of effective language use which is of prime importance for rapid language learning.

CONCLUSION

The present study has shown that incorporating play skills in speech and language therapy will further enhance language learning which is vital for communication skills. This is an important guideline especially during early intervention of children who present with language disorders. As language delay is evident in twins, similar to a singleton with a language delay, specialized individualized program is required.

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Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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