Theoretical Perspectives in Relation to Speech, Language and Communication Development in Children

Innateness perspective – this perspective suggests speech, language and communication (SLC) is developed without conscious thoughts and that it is a natural process as it is inborn. Noam Chomsky was a theorist that argued that people are wired to learn language and they are born with most basic rules of language. Although some theorist believes that language SLC is influenced by environment, Chomsky believed our brains are already equipped with the ability to gain language at a certain stage in children's development.

Chomsky developed the theory of universal grammar he believed children's language follow a similar rule and pattern when it comes to grammar, he suggested children are born with an understanding of the rules of grammar as they have the natural predilection to learn and use the rules. Chomsky proposed the optimal learning age was between 3 and 10 years old and that children do not need a trigger to learn language, as it happens on their own because innate learning enables children to work out language for themselves.

Behaviourist perspective – believe children learn SLC through the reward system. They believe if a baby is babbling and an adult responds to that baby by smiling or by giving the baby some attention, it will encourage the baby to do more babbling.

Skinner was a theorist that was associated with the behaviourist perspective. He suggested that babies are like a blank slate that is filled up by knowledge gained through experiences, he also linked language to cognitive behaviours (Traxler 2012). Skinner's theory on operant conditioning suggested children learn language through trail and error and will use this method until they get it right with the support of reinforcement and shaping which is provided by adults, as children get pleasure from adult's positive response.

Constructivist perspective – they believe language was developed through the cognitive process. this perspective suggest that children learn from action and by exploring their own environment and children are active in their learning.

A key theorist for constructivism was Jean Piaget, he studied children for a number of years and discovered children answers followed a logic pattern based on their own experience, Piaget called this pattern 'schemas'. Schemas are adapted as children learn new experiences, the process are called assimilation (when a child realizes something is used in a similar way to something he has used before) and accommodation (a child realizes their schema does not work and they find another way for it to work based on their experience). Piaget believed children did not only learn SLC from developing and adapting their schemas, he believed they had to pass through four stages of development,

Sociological perspective – this perspective believes children learn language because it is linked to their social development. This perspective also suggests that children's SLC is reinforced by adult-adult interaction and adult-child interaction and the perspective stresses that the two interactions are different.

Vygotsky was a key theorist in sociological perspective he believed there is a link between language and cognitive development, Vygotsky thought children aged 2 or 3 used language to help control their behaviour and thoughts. He thought children were active in their learning and although he thought there was a great link to the language and cognitive process he thought the social process was just as important. He believed children's SLC will be improved with the support of an adult. Vygotsky worked on Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in this he suggested that children have an unlock potential and it was for the adult to discover it. ZPD is usually described as the gap between what children already know and what they have the potential to do with the gentle influence of an adult.

Speech, language and communication skills support learning development because they help a child to understand what is being seen or provide a way that afterwards the child can communicate what they have seen. A child can ask questions and we can then pass on information verbally that helps them make connections and understand concepts. Speech, language and communication skills support emotional development because controlling emotions is a large part of emotional development and if children become frustrated, angry or jealous and can't communicate their feelings they may have a tantrum. But as their skills develop they can name their emotions and find other ways of expressing them. Speech, language and communication skills support behaviour because once a child understands language they can begin to understand the consequences of their actions and start to think things through, becoming less impulsive. Speech, language and communication skills support social development as children can start to recognise how others feel by watching their body language and listening to what they say and learn to adjust their behaviour accordingly. Children also start to understand social codes and how to behave appropriately.

If a child has speech, language and communication difficulties, it would have an impact on their development currently because they may not follow the expected pattern of development for their communication. The child may find it difficult to communicate with their carers and peers and they may become frustrated and show negative behaviour. The children may have social problems because they may struggle to communicate with their peers and their peers may find it hard to understand them, which could leave the child feeling upset and cause a low self esteem. This could also effect their behaviour by showing through anger and frustration e.g. lashing out at their peers. They may not want to join in with certain activities which could currently and in the long term cause a lack of confidence. The child may want to play on their own because others don't understand them which will effect their social development. In the long term it can cause continued communication problems. When the child reaches a school age they may be bullied which gives children low self esteem. Also, it can cause behavioural problems such as when children have ADHD.