

Maia: Oh yeah, I read about learning videos. The baby watches a short film with some basic vocabulary, maths and science, and they learn as they watch – that's the idea. Certainly, babies will pay attention to videos for long periods of time.

Daniel: Yeah, but there's been research to show that babies [1] effectively from screens. Actually, they learn by interacting with their parents and other caregivers – that's the best approach.

Maia: Mmm, it's interesting. Another issue with learning videos is that babies ought to have [2]

Daniel: You mean in a group?

Maia: Not necessarily, it can be alone, actually. But what's important is that they [3] their own environment. They should examine the objects around them and experiment. So they discover information for themselves. And they don't get that sitting in front of a film.

Daniel: That's a good point. Then, I also thought I'd write about the 'present research' in my assignment.

Maia: Oh yeah, I read a bit about the present research. And it's true, isn't it? When you give a baby a present or gift, some of them are [4] interested in the wrapping [5] than the present itself.

Daniel: But it's not some of them. The research shows that [6] baby prefers the paper to the present, whether male or female – it's just a human characteristic.

Maia: Really? I'd thought there'd be more exceptions.

Daniel: Apparently not. It seems that playing with the paper, or ribbons, or box, stimulates the baby's [7]. They touch everything, climb into the box, put the ribbon into their mouths. And brain scans have shown that sight, sound, touch, smell and taste are all stimulated in this way.

Maia: It's amazing the research has produced so much specific information, just from studying presents! I hadn't expected that. The results cover so many different aspects of baby behaviour.

Daniel: Yeah, exactly. But it shows us that babies learn by playing.

Maia: So we shouldn't stop wrapping up babies' presents.

Daniel: No, definitely not!

Maia: Then I also read about babies and [8]. There was a really interesting bilingual experiment in Spain. They tried teaching English to a group of 280 Spanish children in different preschools.

Daniel: So the research subjects were in different schools?

Maia: Yes, but the researchers deliberately selected teachers who all had the same education. They'd been trained to use a style that focused on [9] and social interaction. So because of that, the experiment was standardised across all the schools, that's really important.

Daniel: Yeah, I agree, that was a great idea.

Maia: The subjects were aged between 7 months and 3 years old. And the children were given a one-hour English lesson for 18 weeks.

Daniel: Did they seem to enjoy the lessons?

Maia: I [10] information on that. But at the end of the experiment, each child could produce an average of 74 English words or phrases.

Daniel: But did they remember them?

Maia: Well, follow up testing showed that the classes had a [11] benefit, yes.

Daniel: Wow, that's remarkable, especially considering some of the children were so young.

Maia: I think so too. It really shows how babies and small children can learn through playing.

Daniel: Yeah, I wonder if other schools will try the same thing in future.

Maia: It'll be interesting to see what happens.

Daniel: So, Maia, let's discuss some more ideas about how babies learn. What other research have you read about?

Maia: Well, I read about Dr Pritchard's study. In her experiment, babies were given toys to play with. And their caregivers sometimes ⁽¹²⁾ the same movements as the baby, and sometimes did something ⁽¹³⁾ . And Dr Pritchard monitored the baby's electrical brain activity. The results showed that babies were ⁽¹⁴⁾ when parents or caregivers ⁽¹⁵⁾ their behaviour.

Daniel: Maybe that could be used as a teaching tool?

Maia: Yeah, absolutely.

Daniel: Then I read about a study of 3-year-olds. This was interesting. The researchers experimented by doing things like dropping a pen or knocking something off a desk.

Maia: And did the children do the same thing?

Daniel: No, what they often did though, was ⁽¹⁶⁾ the pen. They wanted to give someone assistance if they could, if they thought someone else had a problem. So I think that shows how babies are more likely to learn by working with caregivers and teachers, rather than in isolation.

Maia: Then have you heard of Professor Michelson?

Daniel: Is he a ⁽¹⁷⁾ ?

Maia: You're thinking of someone else. Professor Michelson did a study where babies had to push buttons. Some buttons switched on a light and some didn't. And after a little experimentation, the babies ⁽¹⁸⁾ pushed a button that switched on a light.

Daniel: You mean, they knew the light would come on?

Maia: Professor Michelson thinks so. He believes they recognised that a certain thing would happen, as a result of a certain action. So maybe that has implications for learning.

Daniel: Interesting. I also looked at a study in the United States. This showed that babies as young as 16 months have some knowledge of how language is structured. In a simple sense, they ⁽¹⁹⁾ to know the ⁽²⁰⁾ of nouns and verbs. And the researchers believe this is linked to the way they learn the meaning of new words.

Maia: Oh, really? Amazing they start so young. I'd like to read about that...