

Helping Make Home a Language-Rich Environment:

Supporting families as language partners with their children

Buffett Early Childhood Institute
PD for All
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What Do Parents Do All Day?

Caregivers of Infants

Parents of Toddlers

Adults with
Preschoolers

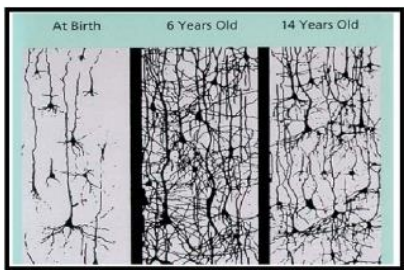


What Just Happened?

- What happens to children's language between birth and age 5
- And **HOW?**



Oh the Brain Synapses!



Families!



Children learn language by observing and interacting with skilled language users in meaningful interactions



Impact of language skills...

in social and family life?

In school?



“Oral Language

is arguably the most crucial area of academic focus during the pre-kindergarten years. Oral language is the primary means by which children gain knowledge about the world, and it is the vital foundation for children’s literacy development.”

(Hart & Risley, 2003)



Correlations Between Kindergarten Predictors and Grade Seven Reading & Oral Vocabulary

from Dickinson & Tabors, Beginning Literacy with Language, Brookes Publishing

	Comprehension 7 th Grade (n = 51)	Decoding 7 th Grade (n = 51)
Receptive Voc. (K)	.69	.58
Early Lit. (K)	.62	.54

Language Skills Shape Impulse Control

Children with lower language skills had less “self-directed speech” and were less able to self-regulate in tasks requiring impulse control

“The children who are less exposed to language are more likely to go on to develop later behavior problems”

Petersen, 2014

Self-directed speech

Children talk out loud to themselves, typically between ages 2 and 7

Used for behavioral self-regulation and emotion regulation

Ex – “no, I can’t touch” (imposing rules on themselves) or “it’s okay honey, you’ll be alright” (mimicking parent’s comforting speech)

Good Wikipedia article at “Private Speech”

(Note: goes underground in elementary school)

What We Need to Know to Support Families

Language Development

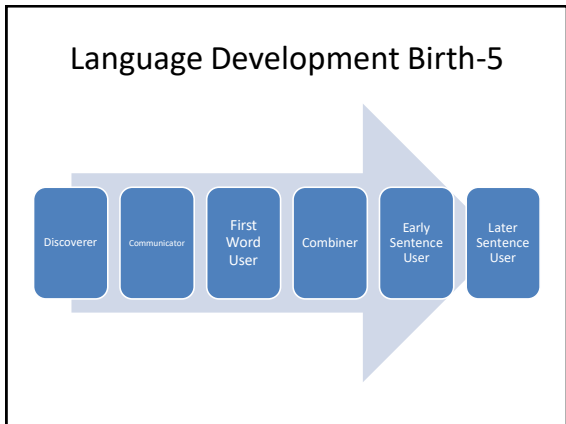
Powerful Home Language Practices

Partnering With Families





LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT



Discoverer

- Birth – 8 months
- Interested in others
- Not yet know how to intentionally send messages to others
- Expresses feelings and desires *that adults interpret as messages*
- Babbling – learning sounds



Communicator

8 – 13 months

Send messages with gestures, sounds, eye gaze

Joint attention

Turns

Babbling – learning sounds of Home language



First Word User



Up!

- 12-18 months
- 10 to 50 words
- Usually 1 word phrases
- Here and now
- Persevere, repair strategies
- Understand more than can say

Combiners

- 18-24 months
- 50-200 words
- Combine words into 2 word phrases
- Negatives w/ "no" at beginning: "no bye bye"
- Intonations for questions: "go bye bye?"
- More turns
- Here-and-now, some past, future

- "Mommy car" could mean...
- "That's mommy's car"
- "I want to go in Mommy's car."
- "I went to the grocery in Mommy's car."



Early Sentence Users

- Ages 24-36 months
- 2-5 word sentences
- Increase grammatical correctness
- Short conversations, esp on topics initiated by child, familiar topics
- "Why" questions
- Tell stories, follow story plot
- Express feelings



Later Sentence Users

Ages 3-5 years

Long, complex sentences

Extended conversations, taking turns, details, fixing up for listeners

Planning future events, reporting on past events



Link sentences with "because, but, so" etc

Grammar continues to become more standard

Vocabulary up to 5,000 words!

Developmental Sequence for Young Children Learning English as a Second Language

Home Language Use

Nonverbal Period

Telegraphic and Formulaic Speech

Productive Language Use

Gap Continues to Widen

...by the end of Grade 2...whereas average children have acquired around 6,000 root word meanings, children in the lowest quartile acquired around 4,000 root words, and those in the highest quartile acquired around 8,000 root words...A gap of 2,000 root word meanings is roughly equal to two grade levels. This gap persists throughout the elementary years

Biemiller and Boote, 2006

Extended Discourse Skills

- Extended discourse includes...
- Extended (multi-turn) conversations
 - Non-present discourse
 - Ability to monitor own and partner's comprehension and to fix errors

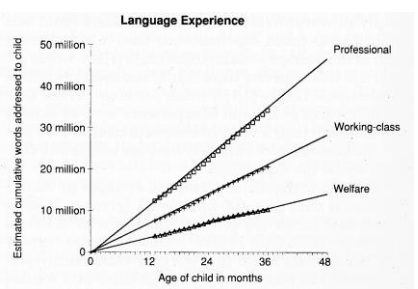
On Kindergarten entry, 75th percentile is 1 year ahead of average, 25th percentile 1 year behind average.
Bankson, 1977

Why The Gap?

Why do some children's language skills grow so much more rapidly than others?

What are the differences that account for this?

Quantity of Words



Conversations or *Interaction*

“Adult-child conversations are at least as important as adult language input”

“Teaching By Listening: The importance of Adult-Child Conversations to Language Development”

Zimmerman et al, Pediatrics



POWERFUL HOME LANGUAGE PRACTICES

If we had a magic wand...

...and could sprinkle magic language dust, what would you want to see families do to promote language?



Give new language to children

and

*encourage children to use
the language they have*

Answer the Banana When It Rings

“It’s not just about shoving words in,” Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek, a professor of psychology at Temple University and lead author of the study, told [The New York Times](#). “It’s about having these fluid conversations around shared rituals and objects, like pretending to have morning coffee together or using the banana as a phone. That is the stuff from which language is made.”

The Three T’s

Thirty Million Words, Suskind



Tune In



Talk More



Take Turns

Tune In

Being *present* mentally

Joining the child

Noticing the child's cues and responding

"Observe, Interpret, Act"

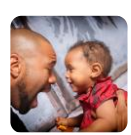


Talk More

Talk!

Use RICH language!

Self and parallel talk



Take Turns

Back and forth "serve and return"

Interpret infants' gestures, expressions and sounds as communication and respond!

No quiz questions! Instead, open-ended

"Strive for Five"



Taking Turns Birth-5

- Discoverer at diapering
- First Word User at mealtime
- Later Sentence User who got a new backpack

The Science of Taking Turns

MIT cognitive scientists have now found that conversation between an adult and a child appears to change the child's brain, and that this back-and-forth conversation is actually more critical to language development than the word gap. In a study of children between the ages of 4 and 6, they found that differences in the number of "conversational turns" accounted for a large portion of the differences in brain physiology and language skills that they found among the children. This finding applied to children regardless of parental income or education

Across All Incomes

While children from higher-income families were exposed to more language on average, children from lower-income families who experienced a high number of conversational turns had language skills and Broca's area brain activity similar to those of children who came from higher-income families.

Family Conversations Grow Language...and Brains

“The really novel thing about our paper is that it provides the first evidence that family conversation at home is associated with brain development in children. *It’s almost magical how parental conversation appears to influence the biological growth of the brain*”

Talk *with* Your Child

“The important thing is not just to talk to your child, but to talk with your child. It’s not just about dumping language into your child’s brain, but to actually carry on a conversation with them,”

<http://news.mit.edu/2018/conversation-boost-childrens-brain-response-language-0214>

Noticing Effective Adult Language Practices

Read the conversation between Kimani and her mother.

Can you find....

- Tuning in
- Talking more
- Taking turns

What Do Families Do

Think of families you have observed or work with.

What do you see?

- Tuning in
- Talk more
- Taking turns

3 Year Old coming home after a weekend at Grandma's:

Jeremy's parent: "Were you a good boy? You listen to your grandma?"

If we are going to assist families we need to understand..

Why?

Language Happens In Relationships

Parents don't see it as their *goal* to teach language

Instead, they use language as a tool in their relationship with their child

The characteristics of the language are related to the characteristics of the relationship

"Parent attitudes based on their own experiences as children and their current life situations can be major barriers in being able to tune in and listen to their children to pick up the cues about child needs and interests. Some parents have never experienced this themselves..."

Glen Palm

Attachment

Some children (now adults) learned from the earliest ages that they would be noticed, listened to and their needs would be met

Other children (now adults) learned that perhaps they would be responded to or perhaps not. Or that they would not be. Or that other people were dangerous.

Tuning In or Connecting in Families

Think about parents and caregivers you work with

What do you know about how “tuning in” or “connecting” has or hasn’t happened in their life history and current relationships?

They may have given you hints in their stories, in what you observe, or in how they interact with their children and you

Interrupted Connections

- Some parents have had their own connections interrupted throughout their lives.
- They may not be confident or skillful at connecting with their own child, or perhaps with you.
- It may even feel risky, scary, vulnerable to try

If this is true...what is our role?

Family Support – An Opportunity for New Relationships

...home visitors can provide these experiences and that may be more important as an initial step to being able to tune in and take turns. Parent-child relationships can be an opportunity for parents to learn new ways of doing relationships and communicating with their child which is a benefit to both of them. The relationship of the home visitor to the parent is a key to and a model for positive parent-child relationships.

Glen Palm

What Matters Most?

If we can help parents create a space where they are truly connected with their child – present, listening, valuing – all the learning we want becomes possible



Helping Families Learn to Connect

How can we help families develop skills and habits and attitudes of connecting?

Strengths-Based

A strengths-based perspective searches for competence.



Not “Positives” or “Good Jobs”

So much more than focusing on the positive...

Identifying moments of effectiveness in order to replicate them with increased consciousness.



Articulation

Articulation results in greater intentionality.

*the what
and the why*

Notice Moments of Connecting, Moments of Effectiveness

I notice that you ...
This helps your child...



Sharing an Effective Moment with a Caregiver



“Finding those tiny little moments”

“We’re only looking for places where they’re doing the interaction that we’re hoping to encourage...”

It’s just finding those tiny little moments and bringing attention to them. So it’s completely a strength-based program.”

Power of Moments of Effectiveness

- How might articulating the moments when the parent is effective make a difference in their parenting?
- How might they feel?
- How about your relationship with the parent?

Practice: "I notice that you..."
"This helps your child..."



"I Notice Statements" for Language

Take out the conversation between Kimani and Mom again



Compose an "I notice statement" that you could share with Mom.

Your Families' Moments of Effectiveness

Involve parents in seeing what we see

Use "Instant replay" with video, photos, notes, or just your memory!

Think of a recent interaction with a parent. Recall something he/she did that was an effective parent action.

How could you have shared that with the parent?

Train Your Brain

A strengths-based perspective searches for competencies. Train your brain to notice effectiveness as you move through the day



Interactions: The Ripple Effects



Keep in touch!



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Kimani returns home from an overnight visit at Grandma's

Mother: Well hey grandma! And welcome home Kimani! It's so good to have you back home, can I have a hug?

(hug)

Kimani: I got a new hat.

Mom: You got a new hat, let me see! Oh, my you did! Tell me about that hat!

Kimani: We got it at the Dollar Store. And Grandma said I can wear it in bed if I want to.

Mom: You wear it in bed? Did you wear it in bed last night?

Kimani: Uh huh!

Mom: And you purchased it at the Dollar Store! Did Aunt Jean go with you?

Kimani: Uh huh, Aunt Jean goed too. Her car got broken.

Mom: Oh, you went with Aunt Jean! But her car was broken. Hmm, how did you get to the Dollar Store?

Kimani: We goed on the bus. And I gotta sit with Aunt Jean!

Mom: You went on the bus and sat next to Aunt Jean! That's exciting!

Kimani: We just sittid.

Mom. Oh. And you were separate from Grandma. She sat by herself! Was Grandma sad?

Kimani: No, she didn't get sad. She's a grandma.