Bridging the Word Gap: The Importance of Early Language

Power-Up Summit
The Blueprint for Early Childhood Conference
Lawrence, Kansas
April 1, 2015

Judith Carta, Dale Walker, & Charles Greenwood
Co-Directors.
Bridging the Word Gap National Research Network
Juniper Gardens Children’s Project
University of Kansas
100 nationally recognized researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders creating a coordinated research agenda addressing the Word Gap.
Some persistent, troubling facts:

- Children who are poor readers by the end of first grade almost never acquire average-level reading skills by the end of elementary school.
  - Joseph Torgeson, 2004

- On average, children from low-income families enter kindergarten more than one year below national norms in pre-reading and language skills.
  - Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010
Some things that we know about poverty and child outcomes

1. The first signs of lower outcomes for children from low-income families is seen between 9 and 18 months of age.
2. The differences only grow larger as children get older.
3. While the gap can be reduced in the later grades, it’s much more difficult than preventing it in the first place.
Something is happening in children’s early experience before they reach the school house door to prepare them for school.

We cannot wait until kindergarten to be sure children are on the road to becoming successful readers.
What’s important for the discussion today

- This gap begins very early—long before children enter the school house door.
- We know a lot about what contributes to it.
- We can prevent the gap but it is important to start early.
Some of the most important research on this issue came from this community.
Betty Hart – Turner Preschool—KCK—in 1968
Word Gap: The Number of Words Addressed to Young Children Differs Greatly by Income Group.

![Graph showing estimated cumulative differences in language experience by age and income group.]

Figure 19. Estimated cumulative differences in language experience by 4 years of age. (See Appendix B for a detailed explanation of this figure.)

Hart & Risley, 1995
Disparities in Early Vocabulary Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child's Age (Months)</th>
<th>Cumulative Vocabulary (Words)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 mos.</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 mos.</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 mos.</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

College Educated Parents
Working Class Parents
Lowest Income Parents

A Startling Statistic

By the age of 3, high-income children have double the vocabulary of low-income children.
Followed children from kindergarten through 3rd grade
Children’s language interactions before age 3 predicted children’s school readiness and their language, cognitive and reading skills through 3rd grade
Good news—those differences between low- and high-income children are things we can do something about.

We know what it takes to bridge the word gap—Key ingredients are Talking, Reading and Playing with children in the earliest years.

These are activities all parents/caregivers can do!
Bad News

- The word hasn’t gotten out how important these things are.
- Children who would most benefit from Talking, Reading and Playing are getting the least.
Who will describe some evidence-based approaches for promoting children’s communication?
After seeing how early language at home affected child outcomes at age 3 and when children entered school

- We measured the language learning experiences of 50 infants and toddlers in community-based child care
- Looked at the amount and quality of talk between teachers and infants and toddlers
Arranging the Environment
Following Child’s Lead
Commenting, Labeling
Imitating, Expanding
Open-Ended Questions
Time-delay
Positive Attention
Providing Choices

(Derived from Responsive, Milieu teaching Intervention)
Using Intervention in Daily Activities

- Incorporate into family and classroom goals
- Home visitors embed in daily activities and across routines: Play, Books, Daily Routines
- Individualize to families’ needs and preferences
- Share graphs with parents and/or teachers
- Use Intervention Self-Checks to self-monitor, prompt strategy use, promote discussion
Mom labels colors during play and meal time.

Mom catches John asking for more and praises him.

I really wanted to work on tantrums at dinnertime, so I mostly focused on thanking him for using his words.
Children’s Services
Home Visitation Note

Child’s Name: JACK P.  Date: 11/5/10

Updated Observation/Assessment

- He now asks “Why Mommy?”, “Where we going?”
- He will say his name when Mom asks him
- He says, “Let’s count, Mommy” when they are outside.
  Likes to count the stairs and trees

“you play this”
“got one”
“my baby” (about baby sister)
“you help me”
“looking for new place to live”

Plan

- Laine from Juniper Gardens is coming out to do his
  30 min. assessments on Friday at 11:00 am
- To call 501 about appts for 891 mtg. √
- Bring other things outside to count (blocks, crayons)
- continue/praising for correct counting!!
Randomly assigned 100 infants and toddlers to two groups

- One group received professional development and coaching in use of strategies
- Observed and measured teachers’ intervention use
- Child Talk from 6 - 36 months
Model Demonstration Center for Promoting Language and Readiness in Early Childhood

- Build the capacity of parents and educators to promote infants’ and toddlers’ communication skills

- Document intervention implementation and impact on children’s communication and early literacy

- Children whose parents used the intervention with higher fidelity had higher rates of communication and beginning literacy at 48 months.
Children whose parents used the Strategies more frequently had higher significantly rates of communication compared to children whose parents used them less frequently.

Parent Strategy use predicted child communication as measured on ECI.
Children who received higher rates of the Strategies more likely to have increases in PLS standard scores over time compared to children receiving lower rates.
Examine the impact of text messaging on

- Parent use of Promoting Communication strategies with their infant/toddler served in rural and urban EHS and Part C programs in a randomized study with over 140 children
- Examine language outcomes as a function of parent intervention use
- Parent engagement in home visiting intervention delivery in general

http://fox4kc.com/2015/03/24/why-talking-to-your-baby-matters/#oid=slhTq2dDpwkr5jhDqjIEufPvYqpsKscQZ
Text Messages to Support Engagement in Intervention

- Families receive 5 text messages per week, and a brief phone call
- Home Visitors and coaches send messages focused on supporting parents’ use of the Promoting Communication intervention and engagement in home visiting
  - Prompts/reminders about using the intervention strategies
  - Tips/community resources

http://fox4kc.com/2015/03/24/why-talking-to-your-baby-matters/
Properties that May Contribute to Sustained Intervention Use

- Flexible implementation process; easy to adapt
- Family-friendly materials
- Use of methods that help parents, teachers and interventionists reflect on what they do daily or weekly
- Measurement of intervention implementation and child outcomes to document progress
- Require commitment and resources to support parent and program use
We acknowledge our research staff, Part C and Part B early intervention providers, parents, child care teachers, and children. This work was supported by the USDE, OSEP Grant #H326MO70005 and through the Kansas Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, NIH Grant # HD002528, Schiefelbusch Institute for Life Span Studies, University of Kansas. This presentation was supported in part through the HRSA Bridging the Word Gap Research Network.
Dale introduces Judy
How can we finally “Move the Needle” on the Word Gap?

- We need to bring together the variety of stakeholders and disciplines that can move the needle on this word gap problem.
- We need interventions at many levels:
  - Nationwide and city-wide public awareness campaigns
  - Variety of community agencies that can provide parents and caregivers with more information
  - Home visiting, early care and education, and early intervention programs who can work with parents
Bipartisan Call to Bridge the Word Gap
What’s Exciting: Growing National Momentum about HOW To Bridge the Word Gap
Welcome, parents and caregivers!

Your child may still be tiny, but big things are going on in that little head. Kids learn about the world around them all the time. You can make every moment of these important early years count—and have lots of fun doing it!

Your child’s brain starts forming before he’s even born. Children learn best when they do things with someone they love—like you! You have the power to shape your child’s learning by sharing everyday loving moments together. Babble back and forth. Read a story while cuddling. Sing a lullaby at bedtime. These activities can help your child learn language skills.

Sesame Workshop and Too Small to Fail created this guide to help you fill each day with words, stories, songs…and love.

Inside are tips and activities around:

- talking—speaking and listening with your child,
- reading—reading books and stories
Too Small To Fail has begun a national campaign and find other Word Gap Campaigns.
Georgia Statewide Campaign: “Talk with Me Baby”

Talk with your baby.

The more words you speak, sing or read to your baby the faster they will learn to talk and read.

Learn more at dph.georgia.gov/talkwithmebaby.
In KC, we have the Talk Read Play CityWide Campaign

- A community-wide messaging campaign: Talk, Read, Play with your child every day.
- Specific strategies that can be taught to parents describing how they can TALK, READ, and PLAY with their infant, toddler, or preschooler.
Talking, Reading and Playing can be done for free—it just takes a mom or dad or grandma or good friend some time, planning about how and when to do it.

Great thing: almost anyone can do it.

These activities can be used almost anytime.
Talk to your child every day... this helps your child learn words.

Read to your child every day... this helps your child enjoy learning.

Play with your child every day... this helps your child get along with others.

Help Your Child Be Ready for School ... Right From the Start

Please dial 211 for referrals to services that are specific to your needs.

For more parenting tips or information: www.TheFamilyConservancy.org

The printing of this flier was made possible by funds provided by the Shumaker Family Foundation.
Infants
Beginning to learn words

Talk Every Day
- Say your baby’s name often.
- Take turns making the same sounds as your baby. Babies learn that people react when they make sounds.
- Talk to your baby during bath time, play time, diaper changing, and feeding time. This is how your baby will learn the daily routine.
- Talking to your baby will help your baby learn to talk.

Read Every Day
- Look at books together. This gives you a chance to hold and cuddle your baby.
- Point to pictures in books and talk about what you see. This gives your baby a chance to hear new words and learn to enjoy books.
- Read before nap time and bedtime. This routine can calm your baby.

Play Every Day
- Give your baby time to move and play with you.
- Look and smile at your baby. Let your baby watch your face and follow your movements.
- Play with your baby using rattles, toys, and games like peek-a-boo.
- Talk to your baby during these activities.

Toddlers
Starting to use words

Talk Every Day
- Help your child learn to talk by adding words. If your child says, “Milk,” you say, “Do you want some milk?”
- Help your child learn new words by explaining what is happening during the day. “You are using your spoon to eat your peas.”
- Name your toddler’s feelings, such as happy, sad, mad, and scared.
- Sing simple songs. Use lots of rhyming words. Play children’s music at home or in the car.

Read Every Day
- Sit close to or hold your toddler when looking at books together.
- Let your toddler choose a book, turn the pages and point to pictures and words.
- Read your child’s favorite books over and over again. Children learn words when they hear them often.
- Visit the library to find new books. Keep books, newspapers, and magazines in your home.

Play Every Day
- Children learn when they play.
- Give your child time to explore new objects, places, and people. Play outside often.
- Play make-believe with your child. Use dress-up clothes, puppets, boxes, pots and pans.

Preschoolers
Putting more words together

Talk Every Day
- Talk to your child about his or her day. Ask questions that begin with who, what and why.
- Talk about what happens during the day.
- Use complete sentences to describe what is happening around you and your child.
- Ask children “what if” or “I wonder” questions. “I wonder what will happen if we leave the ice cube on the kitchen counter.”

Read Every Day
- Have fun while you are reading books and looking at pictures with your child. Use silly voices. Point out words and pictures on the page and ask questions.
- Retell stories in your own words. Listen to your child retell stories.
- Point out words inside and outside of your home. Point out written words on doors, traffic signs, billboards, boxes, cans, and buses.

Play Every Day
- Play with toys and create things using blocks, crayons, play dough, sandbox and playgrounds.
- Follow what your child is interested in when playing together.
- Describe what your child is doing.
- Pretend to cook, clean, care for babies, dress up and go to work.

These tips provide information and resources to parents and those serving young children and families about how to help children develop and be ready for school. Please give to everyone you know so that children throughout the Kansas City Metropolitan area have opportunities to talk, read, and play every day.

Thank you! Talk Read Play Kansas City, The Children’s Campus of Kansas City, The Family Conservancy, Project EAGLE and Connections, Johnson & Johnson Children’s Project and community partners.
In KCMO, Mayor’s Community Conversation about TRP resulted in commitments from more than 50 Agencies throughout the city to spread the word:

- City vehicles will carry TRP bumper stickers
- Health department and local hospitals will distribute TRP materials and spread the word
- Public utilities will include TRP message in electric and water bills
- Clergy will disseminate toolkits of TRP materials
- School districts will promote TRP in preschools and in Parents-as-Teachers programs
Our goal is to reach every family with young children several times each year.

We want families to hear the message and use it daily.

Soon when a health worker or home visitor or librarian starts to explain TRP we want parents to say, “Yes, we know about that. Let us tell you what we do.”
Moving Beyond Awareness to Coaching Parents on How to Bridge The Word Gap

- Providence Talks—A Bridging the Word Gap Campaign led by Mayor Angel Taveras.
  - Home Visiting with focus on promoting language;
  - Tracking number of words and language interaction turns with LENA—language pedometer
  - Feedback to parents on how much they are talking with their child
  - Strategies for promoting more interactions
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_sT8XNpJwo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_sT8XNpJwo)
- LENA Start: intervention using individual feedback and group parenting intervention
Conclusions

- We have a gap:
  - In achievement outcomes,
  - Amount of parent talk to children,
  - Awareness about the important role that adult talk plays in bridging the gap.

- We have promising strategies for bridging the gap: Talking, Reading and Playing.

- Now we have a responsibility to change business as usual.
What Can We Do About Bridging the Word Gap in Kansas
How Can We Build a Movement to Bridge the Word Gap in Kansas?

- What are ways that we can build a statewide coalition?
- How can we get mayors or county leaders to use their influence?
- What major organizations can help spread the word?
How can you make a difference?

- If you’re a parent or a caregiver:
  - Think about ways you can talk and use new words with your child—even if they are too young to talk.
  - Read books, talk about the pictures, or share stories with children.

- If you work with parents or caregivers:
  - Help families understand the importance of talking, reading, and playing with their children EVERY DAY. Send home suggestions.

- If you work in health care: Include the message about Talk, Read and Play in well-child visits.
If you’re in the faith-community, or social services—help to get the word out to families and find ways to give them support to do this.

If you’re in the business community or philanthropic community—realize that an investment in campaigns to bridge the word gap could result in huge returns later—better prepared workforce.
Welcome!

On this page, you'll find resources designed to help you tackle the word gap and support early learning and brain development. Our resources include the Community Campaign Guide, with lessons learned from our "Talking is Teaching: Talk, Read, Sing" campaigns in Tulsa and Oakland. You'll also find creative assets...
Each one of us can make a difference in preparing the next generation of children for success.
Contact Information

- Judith Carta
  - carta@ku.edu

- Charles Greenwood
  - greenwood@ku.edu

- Dale Walker
  - walkerd@ku.edu

www.bwgresnet.ku.edu
You can also follow us on Twitter @BWGResNet and like us on Facebook at Bridging the Word Gap Research Network