

**LANGUAGE INTERVENTIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN LIVING IN LOW  
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ENVIRONMENTS**

**HONORS THESIS**

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## Introduction

### Call for action

In his *State of the Union Address* (2013), President Barack Obama announced details of his plan to radically expand preschool and other early childhood education programs across the United States of America. “In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children...studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let’s do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind” (Obama, 2013). Some of President Obama’s plans include providing high quality early childhood education for all low and moderate-income level four-year-old children. Furthermore, President Obama wants to enhance the promises made by Head Start to give infants through three-year-olds high quality care. Obama plans to initiate this through grants supporting agencies to increase the accessibility of Head Start and to childcare providers who can meet the highest standards of quality for infants and toddlers. He further desires to enlarge evidence-based home visiting programs for infants and toddlers (Obama, 2013). Obama notes home visiting initiatives are critical for making long-lasting, positive impacts on parenting skills, a children’s cognitive, language, and social-emotional development, and school readiness. Clearly, President Obama is calling for action in the area of early childhood education as he realizes the critical correlation between children under the age of four living in low socioeconomic status environments who lack quality educational experiences and the impact these environments have on school readiness and later academic and life achievements.

### **Socioeconomic status makes a difference**

One can take what Obama has stated and speculate what occurs in a young child's environment that may have such monumental impact for their future. In the Book *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*, Betty Hart and Todd Risley (1995) detail their study of the environments of young children to discover reasons behind certain delays, interventions for these delays and implications of a child's future if these delays are not remediated or prevented early in life. Hart and Risley learned that certain things do not matter. For instance, race of a child is immaterial; a child's sex is immaterial; and whether a child is first born or not is immaterial. What is critical and significant is relative economic advantage (Hart & Risley, 1995).

### **Factors Influencing Kindergarten Readiness**

Current research suggests that kindergartners who have been exposed to multiple family and social risk factors such as being born into poverty, parents with low educational backgrounds, and single parent households, do poorly in assessments of early reading and math skills and general knowledge especially when compared to children experiencing fewer risk factors (Zill & West, 2001). Kindergarten teachers also rate children from families with higher levels of risk as being less socially adept and more aggressive as compared to children from families experiencing lower levels of risk (Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark, & Howes, 2010). "Furthermore, children who enter school without the necessary academic or socio-emotional skills exhibit greater academic and behavioral difficulties during kindergarten and beyond as compared to their more 'school ready' peer" (Mistry et al., 2010, p. 432). Research has shown that ultimately the

higher a parents income the more ready their child enters kindergarten and therefore is more likely to succeed later in life. (Mistry et al., 2010). However, one must question the reasons behind the impact of the child's socioeconomic status (SES) environment.

### **Language delay**

Language delay is one area that can be examined with regard to socioeconomic status (Hart & Risley, 1995). It is first important to recognize that not all language delays are products of a child's environment. Some language delays/disorders have been shown to arise from brain damage or hearing loss, but most delays/disorders have both physical and environmental factors at play (Waldron-Soler, Martella, Marchand-Martella, Tso, Warner, & Miller, 2002). Hart and Risley (1995) followed 42 families for approximately two years to examine why there is such a large difference in the age that children start to learn language and how quickly their language develops. One aspect that is significant with regard to when and how fast children learn language is the economic status of the family (Hart & Risley, 1995).

### **Different language interactions based on status**

By three, children living in poverty have acquired less than one third of the vocabulary, an important aspect of language, than their same age peers living in high socioeconomic status environments/families (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002). Even though all children had comparable encounters with language, the number of these encounters vastly differed. A child living in a high SES family hears 2,153 words as opposed to a child living in a low SES family who only hears 616 (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002). In addition, in a typical hour professional parents not only presented more words to their children, but more diverse words, multi-clause sentences, past and future verb tense,

declaratives, and more questions (Hart & Risley, 1995). This is critical when one realizes that “oral language skills, both receptive and expressive, have been repeatedly shown to play a vital role in a child’s progress through school” (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002, p. 76). Therefore, the more prepared children are to enter school with these skills, the more likely they are to succeed (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002).

### **Improvement through intervention**

Currently more than 13 million children are living in households with incomes below or at the federal poverty threshold (Mistry et al., 2010). This suggests large populations of children are currently at risk or already have a language delay that can be ascribed to the environmental effects of the households and area in which they live. Hart and Risley (1995) discovered that by the age of four, interventions might not compensate for the negative impact of growing up in poverty or low SES environments. However, “children with language deficits have shown gains in oral language...even though procedures and programs have differed a great deal” (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002, p. 76). This supports Hart and Risley’s (1995) assertions that the theoretical type or program type is of little importance when great improvements are seen in the area of language. These improvements were not only observed in the preschool, but in the home life of the children as well.

## **Language Interventions**

### **Language for Learning**

As Waldron-Soler et al. (2002) note, there are various effective language interventions for preschoolers used in early childhood development centers.

The Language for Learning program is one effective intervention that was studied by

Walder-Soler et al. (2002). Language for Learning is a direct instruction approach that uses guided and independent practice. Language for Learning consists of a placement test for learners as well as a teacher's guide with daily lessons, workbook activities, stories, and poems that are written specifically for the program. A Language for Learning lesson begins with an exercise that is teacher-directed and scripted. Once this is finished, the teacher moves to an exercise with pictures, such as object identification. The children then do an activity in their workbook. At the end of a lesson the teacher reads appealing stories and poems that are related to the lesson (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002). The most note-worthy results in the 15-week implementation of the Language for Learning program by Waldron-Soler et al. (2002) showed a significant increase in receptive language and the social interaction skills of preschoolers. Improvements in expressive language as well as the decrease in problem behaviors were also evidenced. Children with developmental delays and children without developmental delays were evaluated separately to determine the effects of the intervention. For children with developmental delays, direct language instruction was found to lead to more skill gains when contrasted with no explicit language instruction. More importantly, no direct language instruction can lead to reduction in child performance when contrasted with children in the control group (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002). This finding emphasizes the importance of direct and explicit language instruction for children with language delays in order to combat further decline and to see improvements. Waldron-Soler et al. (2002) found that that the children with developmental delays were not the only ones to improve, but just as significantly the children without delays made vast improvements that were educationally significant (a change in performance by a standard deviation of .25).

### **Babytalk Home Visiting**

The Babytalk Home Visiting (BTHV) program is another example of an effective speech and language intervention in the area of early childhood education that may lead to vast improvements for the child's future (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). The BTHV service was created as a part of the Sure Start program by Clare Smith and Deborah Gibbard in Port Smith, UK and was publically funded by the UK government. Sure Start is a multi-agency program whose goal is to support parents and children, especially those living in poverty, in order to reduce the effects of growing up in that environment. "It was hypothesized that by giving parents information about language development and how this can be facilitated at home through a preventative advice giving service, parents would increase their knowledge and skills in this area and would adapt their parenting environment to facilitate language development in their child" (Smith & Gibbard, 2011, p. 71). It was also conjectured that this intervention would lead to an increase in the language level of the parents.

### **Goals of Babytalk Home Visiting**

The goals of BTHV service were to first increase the parents understanding of language development, specifically developmental milestones. Another goal was to communicate to the parent why it is vital to encourage language in their children. An additional goal was to demonstrate ways that language can be increased through interaction and parenting activities. Lastly, BTHV aimed to provide support in obtaining speech and language therapy when necessary. The BTHV services were delivered by a speech and language therapist (SLT) and assistant (SLTA) who were hired by Sure Start (although 90 percent of the services were administered by the SLTA once they were

signed off as competent by the SLT).

### **Babytalk Home Visiting method**

The intervention was advertised to all parents in the community through baby clinics and other parent groups, and referrals were taken from Health Visitors. When the child was 6-months-old, the SLTA would visit the parents. The baby did not have to be present. If the baby was present, then the SLTA would demonstrate activities with the baby. Advice was given to the parent. The advice included typical language development for infants to toddlers, “covering eye contact, non-verbal communication, turn-taking, cooing and babbling, comprehension of language and expressive language;” (Smith & Gibbard, 2011, p. 72). It also improved the parents supporting language, such as improved vocabulary, improved attention and listening, narrative development and educational and social improvements. Furthermore families were informed with regard to providing interaction, such as following the child’s lead, mimicking babbling, special time, talking through routines and child-directed speech (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). Parents were given a CD of nursery rhymes, books and informative leaflets in order to aid the services already given. Furthermore, parents were supplied with the whereabouts of local parent and baby groups. Finally, families were provided with the SLT contact information (Smith & Gibbard, 2011).

### **Results of the Babytalk Home Visiting service**

The efficacy of BTHV was assessed through two methods, parental feedback questionnaires and language measures with additional questions (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). Parents would receive the questionnaire at the end of the visit. Parents were asked questions such as whether they would do anything differently based on the visit, whether



they felt they knew more about language and how to facilitate it. There were also open sections that allowed parents to respond to themes about talking to their child, singing nursery rhymes, looking at books, etc. (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). The second measure, called the Revised Sure Start Language Measure, is another report filled out by the parents on their child's language when the child nears the age of two. Questions about the parents' concerns were included, as well as questions regarding the language development of their children. A list of fifty developmentally appropriate words is provided and parents report on whether or not their children can say those words (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). Method one showed that 91 percent of the parents rated their satisfaction level at a five out of five, where five is the most satisfied. Method two, the SSLM-R reports additional questions given to 135 families. Of these 135 families, 46 families had received the BTHV service (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). Parents of families who received the intervention reported a significantly higher word count by their children than parents who did not receive the BTHV service. These results provide a strong case for facilitating language through supporting the home environment of the child.

### **Shared Storybook Reading**

Shared Storybook Reading is another early childhood intervention that can be used in the home by parents as well as speech and language pathologists to significantly improve preschoolers' language development as well as promote emergent literacy (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002). Shared storybook reading specifically impacts a preschool child's vocabulary, morpho-syntactic abilities, conversation, and emergent literacy knowledge. These skills may predict a child's later reading ability. Students with limited vocabulary skills are at an increased danger of experiencing difficulties with early and

conventional reading success (National Reading Panel, 2000). Emergent literacy is the reading and writing ability of children who are not yet conventionally literate. In the past educators believed that all reading and print knowledge was learned through formal instruction. Therefore, literacy development was not a worry of early childhood educators (Justice, 2002). However, research has shown that children acquire a substantial amount of knowledge about the written word from birth to the age six (Justice, 2002). Children gain knowledge about reading and writing through observation and experiencing informal literacy events. Children can gain vital literacy prerequisites such as print awareness, phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and vocabulary used to describe literacy constructs, just by being a part of informal literacy events such as storybook reading. Children who are strong in these areas become better readers and writers than children who exhibit deficits in these areas (Justice, 2002). Research suggests that this intervention is a strong tool for improving linguistic achievement in young children (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002).

Shared Storybook Reading was based on the premise that interactions between children and adults during reading, specifically storybook reading, should be dynamic, reciprocal and moderated by a child's linguistic capabilities (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002). Great stress is placed on tailoring adult-child interactions to promote linguistic achievement to its utmost in a context that is most appealing to the child. It is important that shared storybook reading be appealing to the child as children with disabilities may not be as actively engaged in interactions when reading storybooks as compared to their peers without disabilities (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002). This is due to a variety of reasons. For children with disabilities and/or impaired language skills shared storybook reading

can be overwhelming. Furthermore, the communication aspect of this task may be more demanding than that of dramatic or pretend play (Justice, 2002). However, Shared Storybook Reading is a favorite of many speech language pathologists as the flexibility of this strategy allows it to be tailored to a child's specific language disability, areas of weakness and strengths, or specific Individualized Education Program goals (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002).

### **Elements of Shared Storybook Reading**

Shared reading seems like a simple concept at first glance, however, multiple elements must be in place for a shared storybook experience to be effective (Ezell & Justice, 2005). To begin, one important and vital aspect of shared reading is that both the child and adult are equal contributors in the shared experience. They sit in comfortable locations where both of them can easily see the book. Next, the atmosphere is relaxed and encouraging with frequent praise being given by the adult (Ezell & Justice, 2005). Furthermore, while the adult reads, language should be focused on characters, events, future events, illustrations, words, print, and various print concepts. The adult should vary his or her voice to create a strong interest in the child. This time should be a positive experience for the child during which they will gain maximum knowledge while also setting the occasion for the next shared story (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

### **Physical arrangement**

Five essential elements are vital when using shared storybook reading as an effective intervention for promoting language and emergent literacy. These are as follows: a) the physical arrangement, b) social involvement, c) materials selected, and d) reading style and conversation (Ezell & Justice, 2005). The most important part of the

seating arrangement is ensuring that the child has visual and physical access to the book. In Laura Justice's article *Using Shared Storybook Reading to Promote Emergent Literacy* (2002), Justice discusses letting the child pick the reading location to further increase the benefits of shared storybook reading. Children like to read in different settings such as on the stairs, on the floor, or in a certain chair. No matter where the shared story experience takes place, it is important the child and adult are seated side by side in a quiet environment so that both child and adult feel that they are active participants. Both the child and the adult should be allowed to handle the pages together (Ezell & Justice, 2005). However, with three or more children, it is advised that adults use a large book that is designed for big groups or to begin by showing the children how the book will be displayed. This will reduce problem behaviors and children fighting to get in the best spot (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

### **Social environment**

Whenever children and adults are interacting, a social situation is created, thus an adult reading a book to a child is a social situation (Ezell & Justice, 2005). A positive social experience is important because it will make the child much more likely to want to engage in a shared reading again in the future. It is vital that storybook reading be fun and interesting to the child. This can be accomplished in many ways. First, allow children various opportunities to take conversational turns during the reading. This not only allows children to work on their language but to build a relationship with the adult. Next, praise children for their participation, especially when they ask questions, comment or attempt to answer questions. "When adults praise and acknowledge children's contributions to shared-reading interactions, children understand that they are valued

members in the exchange and their contributions are welcome” (Ezell & Justice, 2005, p. 25). Lastly, warmth and affection, which can be displayed through laughter, winks, smiles, pats on the back, and terms of endearment, are important aspects that adults should incorporate into the shared storybook experience.

### **Materials selected**

Selecting engaging books is an important part of ensuring a successful shared reading experience as well. Ezell and Justice (2005) suggest choosing books that have an appealing story, colorful and attractive illustrations, and only a few words per page (Ezell & Justice, 2005). When choosing a book for a specific child, consider his or her interests. You can determine the interests of a certain child by letting him or her choose a book at story time. When considering illustrations, steer clear of those that are conceptual or unclear as these may confuse the child. Consider a child’s attention span and age when choosing the length of a book, as younger children and children with shorter attention spans will need shorter books or they may become disengaged. However, any book may be divided into sections. Lastly, repeated readings can be an invaluable tool for promoting emergent literacy and language. This can take place in one reading session or over multiple sessions. As children participate in repeated readings they begin to take a more active role in retelling and making predictions in the story, allowing them to be actively and positively engaged (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

### **Reading style**

Expression may be used as a valuable tool in encouraging a child’s interest in the story (Ezell & Justice, 2005). It makes the story seem real. There are various techniques that can enhance a child’s interest in a story. Changing the pace of one’s reading is an

important tool that creates suspense while reading. Second, varying each character's pitch and vocal characteristics can make the book come alive (Ezell & Justice, 2005). For example, if you are portraying a tiny mouse, speaking with a squeaky high-pitched voice will make the character seem more real to the child. Finally, varying your volume to express each character's emotions or the personalities of the characters is another useful technique (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

### **Conversation**

Conversation is an aspect that many adults do not understand, as they are familiar with the method of the adult reading the words in the text and the child quietly listening. However, the words in the book should be thought of as a base to build on rather than the only words that are spoken through out the entire reading process. When children are able to pose questions, comment, answer questions, opportunities for learning occur and thus an active role for the child is created that enhances a child's shared storybook experience (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

Shared reading uses print, illustrations and speech to tell a story and encourage conversation and learning opportunities. If conversation is not allowed to flourish then these opportunities will be missed. Once adults understand the value that conversation holds in the process, they are able to give children a more active role and thus enhance the shared reading process. When adults read to children, three naturally occurring reading styles happen (Reese & Cox, 1999). These styles are "performance oriented", "describer" and lastly, "comprehender". Each one of these utilizes comprehension differently. A performance-oriented style uses conversation before and after the book reading occurs with conversation focusing on lower level thinking such as character

names and settings and advanced thinking such as reasoning. The describer contains conversation throughout the text. This conversation is thought of as low-demand by describing events and pictures in the book. The comprehender includes conversation throughout the book that involves high demand reasoning, predicting and inferring. The important point is not that one style is better than another, but that multiple styles can be utilized and adapted. Every child is different and one child may prefer a certain style versus another. One child may not like to be interrupted while this may not matter to another child. In this case one can see that emergent literacy skills can be developed through the performance-oriented approach, which allows the child the comfort of not being interrupted as often (Reese & Cox, 1999).

Conversation should be as balanced as possible, although either the child or the adult may direct it. Conversation should not completely overtake a shared storybook session but compliment it. “Young children may comment on events or characters depicted in the illustrations, raise questions about words or ideas that are unfamiliar to them, or focus on a related issue that is foremost in their minds” (Ezell & Justice, 2005, p. 31). Adults may choose to make language or print topics of conversation during the shared reading experience. If they make language a topic of discussion, they will probe for a child’s understating of word meaning and provide models for sound production. If print becomes the topic, the adult may point out that words are read from left to right and the sound of individual letters. There are many more possible topics that can be discussed during shared storybook reading between adults and child (Ezell & Justice, 2005). In conclusion, shared storybook reading is most successful when the physical space, social participation, choice of materials, method of reading and conversation are addressed and

approached with the utmost concern. Consideration and modification of these aspects of the shared reading experience is to ensure that the child is engaged and enjoying it to the highest extent possible, thus improving their emergent literacy skills and language development (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

### **Related research**

Lots of discussion has amassed on the emergent literacy and language development benefits of shared storybook reading, however without research to back up this discussion one cannot go in to the field with the assurance that these practices will work. Some research has attempted to quantify dissimilarities between children in the number of shared book reading experiences. One study found the frequency of literacy events in lower SES preschool children's homes to average one per hour. However, the storybook reading or sharing was not a common literary event. Events could be any activity that involved print such as writing a note, looking at a book, reading a card (Purcell-Gates, 1999). Of all the events that occurred shared reading occurred .09 times per hour on average. This leads one to wonder if this is a factor in why children growing in low SES environments have language delays and enter kindergarten behind, and typically stay behind.

The quantity of shared story book reading is not the only contributing factor of language delays that has been researched, the quality of shared story book reading is also a contributing factor that has been readily researched. Although discussed earlier is the fact that the amount and richness of the words that children hear early in life can greatly impact their language development (Hart & Risley, 1995,) some studies suggest that quantity is not as important as past research has made it appear in the area of shared



storybook reading. There is disagreement in the field on the effects these shared storybook experiences have on children's later abilities (Ezell & Justice, 2005). On the one hand there is the opinion that children who have less experience early in life with books were at high risk for reading difficulties later in life as compared to children who had more experiences earlier in life (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Similarly, studies done with children between the ages of one and three-years-of-age who listened to stories were positively rated on oral language skills at the age of five (Wells, 1985). However, another study argues that storybook reading may not be as important to a child's emergent literacy and language development as previously advocated (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). They concluded that only 8 percent variance could be noted in a child's literacy achievement from quantity of storybook reading early in life. This left 92 percent variability in a child's reading to be explained by other causes.

Currently, "best estimates suggest that the quantity of preschool shared-reading experiences explains about 7%-10% of the variance in children's primary grade reading and language achievements when considering the direct relationship between these variable" (Ezell and Justice, 2005, p. 11). Even though this 7 to 10 percent influence may seem limiting, adults can influence this percent drastically by techniques they employ in the shared reading experience and by how often they employ shared reading.

### **Research on engagement and quality**

Research on shared reading shows that adults are often controlling and direct in the shared reading experience. For instance, adults tend to choose the topic, control the pace, ask closed end questions and do not pause long enough (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002). However, studies show that teachers, who elicit active engagement in shared

reading by asking questions, praising and allowing children to lead with topics, are tools to building emergent literacy and language (Whitehurst, Crone, Zevenbergen, Schultz, Velting, & Fischel, 1999). A more active and responsive interaction promotes development within the book reading context and in the interaction itself. Another study that was done on children's vocabulary skills and the socio-emotional quality of parents reading showed that quality of reading correlate to vocabulary skills of 4 and 7 year olds (Leseman & de Jong, 1998).

### **Research on labeling versus questioning**

A more specific result that can shed more light on shared storybook reading is the vocabulary and word production that results after this intervention. "There is a growing body of research indicating that children's novel word learning during incidental encounters provided by shared storybook reading may be mediated by how adults introduce or use novel words in this context" (Justice, 2002, p. 89). Therefore, research shows that adults play a vital and instrumental role in encouraging vocabulary and word learning in young children, if they foster the shared learning experience in a certain way. Ewer and Browson (1999) discovered that receptive language for novel words in children especially increased when adults asked more questions such as what and where than when adults used labels. This is because asking questions engages the child more and involves the child actively versus labeling an object in a book, which is a very passive way to introduce a vocabulary word. This finding has been supported by further research by Senechal (1997) who discovered the positive effects adult questioning had on the expressive communication of novel words of preschoolers when compared to preschoolers who had passive experiences. This leads one to comprehend the importance

of active engagement of learning with novel words, through teaching strategies such as questioning a child about a novel word versus the passive learning that occurs by merely labeling the word for the child. This research also illustrates that when adults implement the shared storybook reading intervention with the quality described, children benefit by being actively engaged and thus are likely to benefit in terms of emergent literacy and language acquisition.

## **Conclusion**

### **Call for action**

In conclusion, there is a call to action in the area of early childhood development because our President understands the importance that early childhood intervention plays in the lives of children, especially children growing up in disadvantaged environments (Obama, 2013). This is a call for preschool for all children, not just those able to afford it or because it is required on their Individual and Family Service Plan. This call is asking for competitive grants for programs such as Head Start and a call to enlarge Home Visiting programs for infants and toddlers. President Obama recognizes the importance of the early years in making a child school ready (Obama, 2013).

### **Low socioeconomic effects**

Obama (2013) stresses children growing up in lower class families in his *State of the Union Address*, because studies have shown that children growing up in lower SES families enter school far behind their same age peers who grew up in middle class or upper class families (Mistry et al., 2010). Hart and Risley (1995) conducted extensive studies that showed that many children growing up in low SES environments enter school with language delays and are at risk for future academic failure, because there are factors

in their environment that aid and abet their delay. Some of these factors include the fact that they hear on average one third of the amount of words per day than a child who comes from a professional family hears. Not only do they hear less words, but the quality of the words and conversation is less than that of the professional family. However, Hart and Risely (1995) did find that intervention can be a huge factor when combating and preventing language delay.

### **Effective interventions**

This leads one to the importance that intervention can play in a child's life and determining their future. One intervention discussed is the Language for Learning program by Waldron-Soler et al. (2002), which showed a most significant increase in receptive language and social interactive skills of preschoolers. Another intervention, the Babytalk Home Visiting service, improved language by giving parents information about language development. This enables parents to increase their knowledge and skills in this area and adapt the environment in which they raise their children (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). Lastly, Shared Storybook Reading is a language intervention that teaches children many important skills such as emergent literacy skills, language skills, conversational skills and so on. It builds off of the notion that children need to be active participants in the shared reading experience with adults (Ezell & Justice, 2005). There are various methods to making the shared storybook experience engaging and meaningful to the child, such as pausing often during the reading, letting the child pick where they want to read, letting the child hold the book, matching the interaction to the child's interest and asking the child to read to you (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002).

### **Comments on Babytalk Home Visiting service**

First, research suggests that intervention needs to happen early. Hart and Risley (1995) noted that after the age of four, intervention comes too late. The Babytalk Home Visiting service is a validated intervention that shows the importance of starting early, starting in the homes, and starting with the parents (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). The delays that these children from low SES environments demonstrate at school entry are largely in part due to the deficiency in the amount and quality of words that they hear from their parents and caregivers every day; it only makes sense to start interventions in the home (Hart & Risley, 1995). The Babytalk Home Visiting service has many great components to their intervention that can be implemented in many early childhood development programs. Parents, especially from lower SES environments, need to be informed on typical language development for their infants and toddlers. They need to be made aware of the advantages of supporting language, such as improved vocabulary, attention and listening, narrative development, and educational and social improvements. Parents need to know how to correctly provide interaction, such as following the child's lead, mimicking babbling, creating special time, and talking through routines and child-directed speech. These skills are important to the development of a child's speech and language (Smith & Gibbard, 2011). However, more needs to be done for parents in a home-based intervention than merely giving them information and expecting that they can use that information in a meaningful way to change the course of their child's language development. Only if the baby was present during this intervention did the SLPA model activities that the parent could do with the child to facilitate language. This leads one to believe that the BTHV service placed more of an emphasis on providing information than on directly teaching and modeling the skills they wanted the parents to

use with their children. However, in special education, we know that the best teaching methods are direct instruction. Direct instruction is systematic and explicit with many opportunities for practice and error correction. If our goal is to remediate language delays or prevent language delay should we not be using the same type of teaching methods with parents to ensure that they have successfully learned the material that we want them to use in their homes? I propose that research be done with parents being taught in the same manner that research validates as most effective. I believe explicit instruction for parents will prove to be effective in transferring knowledge from practitioners in to the home. Parents should be directly taught, given guided practice with their children and then given opportunities for independent practice. The intervention should be observed by the SLPA who will provide feedback. Once effective practices are occurring reliably in the home, they need to be taught to practitioners in early childhood development programs.

### **Comments on Language for Learning**

The Language for Learning and Shared Storybook Reading are two interventions that can be guides for effective practices to be used by, in, and outside the classroom to promote language. Language for Learning is more of a direct approach to learning that utilizes a placement test for learners as well as a teacher book with daily lessons, workbook activities, stories, and poems that are written specifically for the program (Waldron-Soler et al., 2002). While direct instruction is an important and empirically validated approach to improving learning (especially for children with special needs) as Justice (2002) states, it is important to consider the child's interest when teaching literacy and reading. The only possible flaw to consider with Language for Learning is that does not taking in to consideration the child's interest. The curriculum is already pre-

determined. This can be dangerous with students who have language delays and thus may already have negative connotations with reading and literature. In *Shared Storybook Reading as an Intervention Context: Practices and Potential Pitfalls*, Kaderavek and Justice (2002) discuss the “broccoli effect” that can occur from forcing a child to engage in reading experience that is not especially pleasant to them. This can be especially harmful to their future emergent literacy development and yet it is practiced all the time in preschool and early childhood development programs. Children are forced to listen to books that they are not interested in at circle time or respond to a story during work center. It is therefore important to keep a child’s interest in mind when setting up specific interventions.

### **Comments on Shared Storybook Reading**

The more you incorporate a child’s interests in to the intervention the more willing of a participant a child is going to be in that intervention. Shared Storybook Reading has demonstrated this fact. Furthermore, teachers and parents need to remember to involve their students in the reading process as much as possible. The child should have equal control in the shared experience in order to gain as much from the experience. After all, shared reading should be more of a conversation. Conversations are not one sided. They are reciprocal with both partners having equal control and participation. Teachers and parents can learn from the Shared Storybook Reading intervention with regard to language intervention. The foundation of Shared Storybook Reading, a dynamic, reciprocal conversation based on child interests, can be applied to other language interventions. By making minor adaptations and applying these language intervention strategies in and outside the home, as well as in early childhood development

programs, children with language delays growing up in low SES environments may gain in language performance.

### **Questions to consider**

Even though research has made great strides in area of language and early childhood development (especially with regard to children growing up in low SES environments) there are still many questions that have yet to be answered. First, in the home environment there is more to be studied with regard to effective interventions. For instance, we need more knowledge about interventions that can be done with parents and caregivers. This is especially true since environments with low levels of adult child interaction may be a primary reason for children entering school with delays. One question that needs to be investigated is whether or not we can explicitly teach our parents to talk to their children in a way that facilitates language development. Can we teach parents to have better quality conversations with their children? What would that teaching look like? Would it involve direct instruction with “I do, we do, you do” teaching practices and high rates of feedback? Furthermore, can we hold parents accountable if they choose to not implement the changes in the environment after intervention? At what point and at what age can we provide children with early childhood education programs full time? There is a lot of debate about the benefits and risks of taking children out of the home too young and putting them in center based programs versus giving them home-based interventions. However, if an infant or toddler is receiving a few hours of home-based services versus half day preschool, but his home environment is impeding upon his development, at what point does the center based program supersede the supposed benefits of home life? How much should we be taking



the child out of low SES environments for interventions? Do we offer the parent a home intervention first and monitor whether they can implement these interventions and try to hold them accountable? A controversial question may be, “If these homes are detrimental places to a child’s educational development, do we have an ethical right to take a child out of the home as early as infancy or when they are toddlers for an extended part of the day and place the child in early childhood development centers for education?”

Furthermore, how do we even measure or help parents be accountable? These are some things to consider when we know that the first four years of life are so crucial to a child and his future. Early environments may determine whether a child enters kindergarten ready to learn; reads at grade reading level in third grade; passes high school; enters welfare, or goes to prison, etc. We have come a long way in our research but there is still a lot to learn about our children, especially in their first few years of life. We have always known that the quality of education is of vital importance, but we can no longer disregard the utmost importance of the environment and the effects it has on a child’s entire future.

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