



Supporting Literacy From Birth to Age Eight:

Where are the Gaps? Where are the Connections?

Florence Nelson
US ED 2010 Reading Institute
Anaheim, CA
July 20, 2010

Relationships are central to infants' language and literacy learning



Brain development and connections stimulated by back and forth of reciprocal parent-infant dialogue

Language in social interaction stimulates a baby's mastery of one or more languages

Reading and other literacy experiences in infancy expose babies to language patterns as well as to concepts, vocabulary, and reading conventions

Literacy experiences in the early years predict language and reading achievement in elementary school

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Relational experiences build literacy...



...and also build other important school readiness skills:

- curiosity
- motivation
- social-emotional development and self-regulation
- persistence
- self-concept and confidence as a learner

Can't separate literacy from other domains of growth and learning

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Caring and learning experiences in the early years



- **More than 12 million infants and toddlers in the U.S.**
- **56% of mothers of infants and toddlers are employed**
- **Nearly half of U.S. infants and toddlers are cared for by someone other than a parent for part of every week**
- **Concerns about the stability and quality of care arrangements**

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Many infants and toddlers face challenges

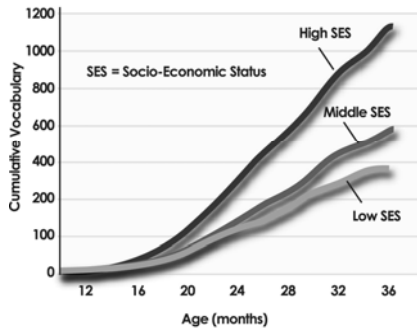


44% live in poverty or low-income families
 Many low-income children live with parents who have less than high school education
 One-third face at least one risk that could compromise their development and school readiness, and one in 10 faces multiple risks
 One in four young children lives in an immigrant family
 Many immigrant families have at least one parent who speaks English well, but 26% of immigrant children over 5 years have limited English proficiency

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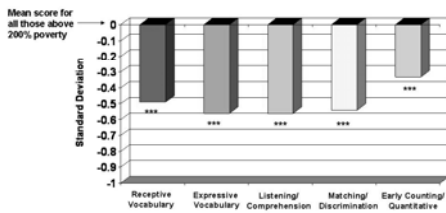
Differences emerge early



Source: Hart & Risley (1995)
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Figure 3: Disparities in Mastery of Language and Cognitive Skills between Higher- and Lower-Income Toddlers at 24 Months



Child Trends & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010

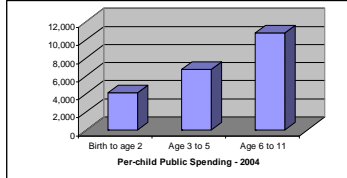
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Early investment has great returns...



Total federal, state and local investment in child development and education for infants and toddlers is 9 cents for every dollar invested in school-age children. Most public spending on children birth to 2 is for health and nutrition.



Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution, 2009

Elements of a high-quality early learning environment for birth -3



- ✓ language-rich environment
- ✓ lots of social interaction with peers & adults
- ✓ teachers seek to stimulate and capitalize on children's interests
- ✓ small group size and high adult-child ratios
- ✓ warm, responsive adult-child interactions
- ✓ stable staff

When adults or communities expect young children to master skills for which the necessary brain circuits have not yet formed, they waste time and resources, and may even impair healthy brain development by inducing excessive stress in the child.

– National Scientific Council on the Developing Child Working Paper #5, p.4

Some mechanisms for improving quality



- Early Learning Guidelines – 19 states and territories
- Core Knowledge and Competencies for teachers of children birth to five – 36 states
- Infant/toddler specialist networks – 22 states
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems – 18 states

A Look at Early Learning Guidelines



Within the birth-to-5 age period, we have to adapt experiences to the child's age and developmental competencies.

Link early experiences to later experiences.

Early experiences are essential and foundational. More sophisticated experiences are provided at a time when maturing brain circuits can build on them.

Infant/toddler and preschool language and literacy standards align with each other in a way that shows how "later experiences build on earlier experiences."

Peter Mangione, WestEd

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Expressive Language Standards at 5 Different Ages during Early Childhood



<p>At around 8 months children experiment with sounds, and use sounds or gestures to communicate needs, wants, or interests.</p>	<p>At around 18 months children say a few words and use conventional gestures to tell others about their needs, wants, and interests.</p>	<p>At around 36 months children combine words into simple sentences and demonstrate the ability to follow some grammatical rules of the home language.</p>	<p>At around 48 months children use increasingly complex and longer sentences that combine two phrases or two or three concepts to communicate ideas.</p>	<p>At around 60 months children use increasingly complex and longer sentences, including sentences that combine two to three phrases or three to four concepts to communicate ideas.</p>
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Adapted from the California Infant/Toddler Learning & Development Foundations and the California Preschool Learning Foundations.

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Fostering Language and Literacy Development of Infants and Toddlers



Focusing on emotionally positive teacher-child relationships IS supporting literacy.

Staff need awareness of early childhood development, along with each child's temperament, competencies, interests, inclinations, needs, family experiences, home language(s), and cultural experiences.

Provide daily opportunities to create and share meaning through stories, conversation, songs, and more

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Opportunities to Build a Qualified Infant-Toddler Workforce



- Core Knowledge and Competencies for teachers of children birth to five
 - 36 states
- Infant/Toddler Specialist Networks
 - 22 states
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems including infant-toddler programs
 - 18 states

Building Professional Development Systems



- Professional standards
- Career Pathways
- Articulation
- Advisory Structure
- Data
- Financing

NAEYC – Workforce Designs

Professional Standards




Head Start/Early Head Start

- Improving the qualifications of infant-toddler teachers and home visitors

Virginia

- Unified training for home visitors



Building Career Pathways

Region 1

- Training for Infant-Toddler Consultants

Colorado


- Social Emotional Learning Certificate

California

- Early Learning System Design

New Jersey

- Linking Infant-Toddler Credential to college credit



Challenges in Building a System

Status of the workforce


- Create opportunities for infant-toddler caregivers to improve qualifications

Need to build awareness of the roots of literacy

- Increase knowledge and resources in institutions of higher education and among professional development providers

Need to know what works

- Link professional development to outcomes



For more information:
www.zerotothree.org/policy
fnelson@zerotothree.org

The related webinar is posted at:
www.zerotothree.org/literacywebinar

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