ORAL LANGUAGE AND
SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

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One of the most pressing problems for schools today is the gap in achievement between children from poor families and those from more financially advantaged ones.
PUBLIC POLICY

• The gap is largely the result of public policies we have (or do not have) that contribute to unemployment, low wages, residential segregation, discriminatory hiring practices, an unequal justice system, low quality schools, etc., etc.
PRESCHOOL: A STRATEGY TO AMELIORATE THE GAP

• The gap begins early.

• Research shows benefits.

• Evidence for language focus:
  • Major developmental step.
  • Preschoolers primed to learn language.
  • Primary form of communication.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>School</strong></th>
<th><strong>Home</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Spanish/Black English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decontextualized language</td>
<td>Conversational language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large vocabulary</td>
<td>Small vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language as social control</td>
<td>Physical prowess as social control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in formal literacy</td>
<td>Interest in non-literacy activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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CAUSES OF SCHOOL/HOME LANGUAGE DIFFERENCE

1. Developmental compromise
   Biological factors
   Environmental stress

2. Limited opportunity to learn school language

3. Low motivation to learn school language

4. Cultural differences in the use of language
WHAT SHOULD CHILDREN LEARN

1. Home language
2. Conventions of school speech
3. Usages for speech
4. Vocabulary
5. Standard English grammar
## USING PLAY TO TEACH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of play</th>
<th>Natural use</th>
<th>Structured Use: EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Relieve affect</td>
<td>Play therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play with rules</td>
<td>Social and cognitive control</td>
<td>Games: board games, lotto, dominos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Jumping, running, bouncing balls Tracing, puzzles, cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio dramatic</td>
<td>Practice real life roles and skills</td>
<td>Directed play: enact stories, build and operate stores</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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HOW SHOULD TEACHERS TEACH?

• Developmentally appropriate practices: methods tied to children’s interests and capabilities designed to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable.

• Principle: Children learn best if they have meaningful relationship with the teacher.

• Principle: Children who play with ideas learn better.
Curricula should:

- Deepen children’s knowledge and understanding of language.

- Introduce other forms of representational and symbolic thought.

- Promote understanding of the world around them, including the social world.
WHAT SHOULD CHILDREN TALK ABOUT?

• SCIENCE
• MATH
• LITERACY
• FANTASY
• INFORMATION
• IDEAS
  • EVERYTHING
POLICY CHANGES

• Focus on education

• Desegregation of Head Start

• Encouragement of Title 1 preschool programs

• Outreach to families