

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

www.shankerinstitute.org/issue-areas/early-childhood-education

Early childhood education has been one of the Albert Shanker Institute's priority issues since its inception, reflecting Al Shanker's conviction that the nation's capacity to deliver a quality public education for all depends, at least in part, on its ability to reduce inequities at the beginning of life.

Research demonstrates, for example, that young children's language and vocabulary development have important, long-term implications for their future academic success. Before they ever enter elementary school, profound differences in word learning and content knowledge already exist between children living in poverty and those from economically advantaged homes, with more affluent children knowing as many as 15,000 more words than their less advantaged peers.

But words are just the tip of the iceberg. The vocabulary gap is what we see, but what's underneath is a gap in children's opportunities to acquire knowledge. These early differences can set children up for other all too familiar gaps, such as achievement gaps, graduation gaps, and multi-generational opportunity gap. So, what can be done to prevent these gaps from developing?

Over a decade ago, the Albert Shanker Institute began working to spread the word about simple, practical steps that parents and teachers can take to provide every child with a good head start. We hosted conversations where parent representatives, educators, policymakers, and community leaders could talk face-to-face with leading researchers – and each other – about developing a common agenda; we synthesized the research about effective, age-appropriate ways to accelerate academic learning during the pre-k years, making it accessible to parents and practitioners alike; we translated this research into professional development trainings for early childhood educators in oral language development, pre-literacy, mathematics, and science; and we worked with a mid-sized urban district to implement a districtwide professional development program for early childhood educators that integrates oral language development and content-rich instruction. Working with others, we are currently seeking to develop and disseminate more materials for parents and educators and to make them available through an online resource hub.

ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

The Albert Shanker Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization established in 1997 by the American Federation of Teachers to honor the life and legacy of its late president Albert Shanker. The Institute's mission is to promote democracy by supporting two fundamental principles: the right of every child to quality public education and the right of every worker to a voice on the job.

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Early Childhood Education
Building a Strong Foundation



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555 New Jersey Ave, NW | Washington, DC 20001
Tel: 202.879.4401 | shankerinstitute.org



RESOURCES

PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM: What's In It For Children & Teachers

www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/preschool-curriculum

This publication offers an accessible synthesis of the research on how and how much young children learn in the academic domains of oral language, literacy, mathematics, and science, as well information on how to incorporate developmentally appropriate learning into the classroom.

LITERACY LADDERS

www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/literacy-ladders

This is a virtual volume of some of the past decade's best articles by researchers on oral language, background knowledge, and early literacy development in the pre-k and primary grades, with a new introductory article by reading scholar Marilyn Jager Adams.

LET'S TALK VIDEO

www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/video-lets-talk

This six-minute video explores the "30 million word gap" between rich and poor children and encourages parents and educators to take some simple steps to help prevent it.

WORDS REFLECT KNOWLEDGE VIDEO

www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/video-early-language-gap-about-more-words

This is an animation explaining why the vocabulary gap between rich and poor children is about more than just words. Words are only the tip of the iceberg.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER IN EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT

<http://www.shankerinstitute.org/audio-visual/how-relationships-matter-educational-improvement>

This presentation explains shortcomings of mainstream education reform and offers an alternative framework to advance educational progress.

ORAL LANGUAGE PROJECT IN ST. LOUIS

www.shankerinstitute.org/audio-visual/how-relationships-matter-educational-improvement

This paper, from NYU's Steinhardt School, describes a Shanker Institute-sponsored pilot project designed to help pre-K teachers in the St. Louis Public Schools increase the oral language development of their students.

A CALL FOR COMMON CONTENT

www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/call-common-content

This consensus statement discusses the development of early word & knowledge gaps, and encourages policymakers to face questions we have avoided for generations.

ORAL LANGUAGE BROCHURE

www.shankerinstitute.org/resource/tips-early-language

This joint Shanker Institute-AFT product, provides tips for supporting oral language learning in the classroom.

ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

PEERS ASSESSMENT

www.shankerinstitute.org/program/preschool-educational-environment-rating-system

This classroom observation tool and aligned snapshot of student performance provide a way to quickly assess classroom progress and student needs on measures of the classroom environment, student background knowledge, and curriculum enhancements.

TRAINING RESOURCES

LET'S TALK MODULE SERIES:

<http://www.shankerinstitute.org/program/let's-talk-modules>

The highest rate of vocabulary development (and corresponding acquisition of background knowledge) occurs during the preschool years. This makes preschool a crucial time for effective, content-rich instruction. Accordingly, the Institute has developed a series of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)-aligned modules, which are designed to strengthen teachers' ability to teach content in the following academic domains:

LET'S TALK: ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT I

Oral language—listening and talking—is the primary means by which young children learn about and interact with the world. This training offers simple but powerful ideas to support young children build the skills, knowledge, vocabulary, and attitudes that help prepare them for future academic learning across content areas. This two-day program provides an overview of the research on oral language development and includes activities to enhance circle time; ideas for more effective read-alouds; ways to develop language through content-related activities; and ways to enhance children's dramatic play and language development during free choice time. Information on language diversity and bilingualism, effective classroom and activity area arrangements, and organizing successful oral language instruction is also included.

LET'S TALK: ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT II

This unit starts with a brief review of the process and mechanics of language development in early childhood, then delves more deeply into several instruction-related aspects.



TRAINING RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

LET'S TALK: EARLY LITERACY

This module presents an overview of research on the foundations for literacy and how they may be enhanced in early childhood, including applied information to help guide instructional improvement. The materials are designed to be presented as an intensive one-day seminar or can be broken into four separate trainings covering the areas of print and book awareness, phonological awareness, letter knowledge and early word recognition, and written expression and curriculum integration.

LET'S TALK: EARLY MATHEMATICS

This module provides an overview of the research and standards on age-appropriate mathematics development, including practical takeaway materials to help assist in instruction. The most important early childhood mathematical foundations are addressed, including numerical sense and problem solving, building math vocabulary, using math manipulatives, and curriculum integration. The materials may be presented as a very intensive one-day session or broken into four separate trainings.

LET'S TALK: EARLY SCIENCE

This module provides research-based information on early science development in the three key areas of physical science, life science, and earth science, along with applied information for improving instruction in each area. The materials are designed so that they can either be implemented as an intensive, day-long professional development seminar, or broken up into four separate training sessions, covering the areas of: scientific inquiry, building science vocabulary, developing a science area, and curriculum integration.

LET'S TALK RESOURCES IN DEVELOPMENT

LET'S TALK: TIPS FOR PARENTS

Kids who are engaged in interactive conversations from infancy on have larger vocabularies and are well prepared to enter school. This word knowledge pays off exponentially as students progress through school. It's never too soon to start talking to and with your child, or to provide them with interesting experiences and the vocabulary to describe and ask questions about the world around them. This pamphlet provides parents with simple, fun, yet powerful ideas on how to build their children's knowledge and vocabulary. (Coming soon.)

LET'S TALK: GOOD BEHAVIOR

Research has documented a significant association between children's language skills and their socio-emotional development, although it is still not clear whether language delays cause behavioral problems or behavioral problems cause language delays. Whatever the case, it is clear that early childhood educators need tools that can help them tackle both issues at once. Working with pre-k teachers and researchers, the Shanker Institute is developing tools and materials to help early childhood educators tackle both issues at once. (Coming soon.)