

Background of the Word Gap

- The importance of early experience with language and disparities in the quality and quantity of language input experienced by children from poverty backgrounds was documented in research conducted by Hart and Risley (1992) and described in their book, *Meaningful Differences* (1995).
- By age 4, children from higher-income families typically have twice the vocabulary size of children from lower-income families (1100 words vs. 500 words) (Hart & Risley, 2003).
- Vocabulary is a critical precursor of school readiness and literacy.
- Observations of language interactions between parents and their infants/toddlers uncovered staggering differences related to family income in the quality and quantity of words that children heard by age 4--an estimated gap of over 30 million words, disproportionately affecting the poorest children (Hart & Risley, 2003).

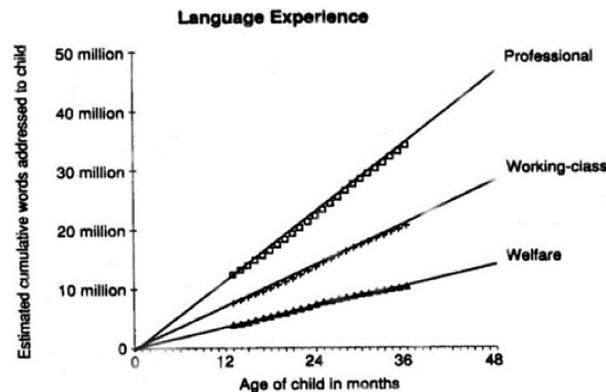


Figure 19. Estimated cumulative differences in language experience by 4 years of age. (See Appendix B for a detailed explanation of this figure.)

What is Needed to Address the Word Gap?

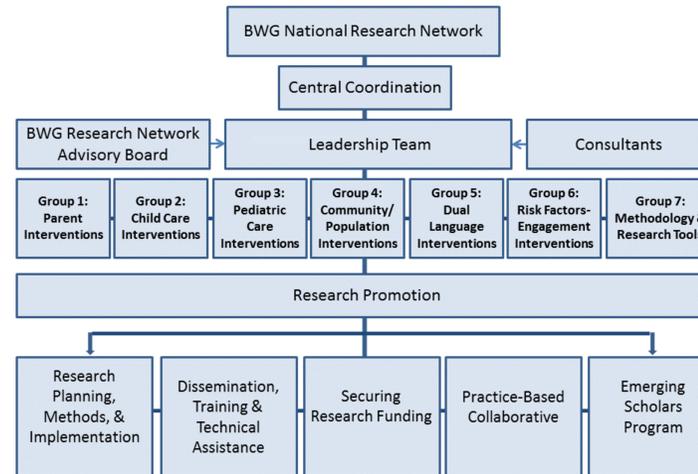
The Word Gap is a public health problem. Research is needed to demonstrate the feasibility and potential results of interventions designed to address this problem at the individual, community, and population level.

Bridging the Word Gap Research Network

The Bridging the Word Gap Research Network is a collaboration of more than 150 nationally recognized researchers, health care practitioners, early educators, policymakers, civic leaders and funders. The long-term goal of the Bridging the Word Gap Research Network is to increase the capacity of parents, caregivers, educators, health care providers, and communities to provide evidence-based solutions to preventing the Word Gap. The objectives include work to:

- Develop and maintain the infrastructure for an interdisciplinary research network for promoting scientific collaboration for advancing Word Gap intervention research.
- Plan and implement intervention research designed to increase language exposure and reduce the Word Gap.
- Disseminate critical information and foster continued education activities on research findings to inform researchers, professionals, policy makers, the public, and other stakeholders, including families.
- Advance the nation's capacity to conduct Word Gap research.

Bridging the Word Gap Research Network Organization Structure



The organization promotes research through: study planning and implementation; securing research funding; maintaining a Practice-Based Research Collaborative (PBRC); and carrying out the Emerging Scholars Program.

Key Accomplishments of the Network

- Recruited a multidisciplinary group of 150 researchers, educators, health care providers, civic leaders, and policymakers to work collaboratively to address the word gap**
- Developed a database of intervention studies and research syntheses to document effective practices and to identify research gaps**
 - We conducted a systematic literature search of peer-reviewed journals to assemble a database of 2,000 empirical studies for review and analysis.
 - Each work group is carrying out a systematic review of research studies that 1) synthesizes the evidence base and identifies the most promising practices; 2) identifies research gaps and points to most needed areas for future investigation; and 3) provides implications for practice and future research.
- Developed the national agenda for BWG research based on national survey**
 - Over 1,000 researchers, early education, and health care professionals completed a survey to inform the national research agenda.
 - Top research priorities include: 1) Designing new strategies to help parents and other family members talk and interact more; 2) Identifying factors that influence the quality of implementation; 3) Testing the effectiveness and utility of strategies; 4) Identifying and testing strategies for communities and neighborhoods; and 5) Identifying measurement and analysis.
- Digital Tools Library for Researchers**
 - Online access to tools and methods contributed by Network Members (i.e., Measures, Interventions, Statistical Methods, Data) for use in Word Gap intervention research in development.
- Generated new grants, publications, and presentations**
 - 29 publications
 - 24 grants submitted, 18 awarded
 - 50 presentations including major symposia at international conferences

Network Initiatives

The Practice-based Research Collaborative (PBRC): A consortium of 12 research-program partnerships focused on serving as innovation clusters to develop interventions or strategies and to address questions of immediate importance to bridge the word gap. The PBRC concept emphasizes rapid-cycle, efficient, research and dissemination efforts that produce practical information and tools linking success to their impact on outcomes.

Word Gap Initiatives



Emerging Research Scholars: Ten early career scholars from multiple disciplines focused on Word Gap research have been selected as BWG Emerging Research Scholars. The scholars receive mentorship, support, and training opportunities to facilitate their involvement in the Network and in completing their research projects.

Multi-Level, Combination Intervention-Prevention Research: A multi-component intervention study plan examining complementary, simultaneous intervention components active at the Population, Community, and Individual Family levels:



Greenwood, C. R., Carta, J. J., Walker, D., Watson-Thompson, J., Gilkerson, J., Larson, A. L., & Schnitz, A. (2017). Conceptualizing a Public Health Prevention Intervention for Bridging the 30 Million Word Gap. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 20(1), 3-24.

Acknowledgements

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