



GEM OF THE MONTH

Highlighting an exemplary intervention study



A parent-directed language intervention for children of low socioeconomic status: A randomized controlled pilot study

Suskind et al. (2016) examined an 8 week parent-directed home-visiting intervention with 23 mother-child dyads of low socioeconomic status (SES). Low SES was determined by the mother's eligibility for Medicaid and/or Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The intervention aimed to increase parent knowledge of child language development and improve parent-child language interactions. The researchers utilized LENA technology to measure parent-child talk and provide linguistic feedback to parents. Results indicated parent knowledge, adult words, conversational turns, and child vocalizations increased significantly for the intervention group.

Suskind, D. L., Leffel, K. R., Graf, E., Hernandez, M. W., Gunderson, E. A., Sapolich, S. G., ... & Levine, S. C. (2016). A parent-directed language intervention for children of low socioeconomic status: A randomized controlled pilot study. *Journal of child language*, 43(2), 366-406.

Advancing Knowledge to Bridge the Word Gap (BWG)

This article contributes a number of standout lessons to our knowledge and capacity to bridge the word gap. First, is the use of the LENA technology as a proximal outcome measure of change in parents' talk to children at home that is a target of their intervention. Successful interventions need to change adult talk if they are to make a difference in children's language. Second, is the intervention itself, combining brief parent education, home visiting, and linguistic feedback from the LENA on parents' goals of changing the amount and diversity of talk the child hears at home. Successful interventions need to engage parents and give the knowledge of the power they have to affect their child's talk. Third, is the purposeful inclusion on families in poverty at high risk for the Word Gap, and fourth, is the use of the Randomized Clinical Trial design along with additional measures of parent change (including change in parent knowledge of the WG and the power of talk). Relatively fewer controlled language intervention research studies in the literature have focused their intervention and evaluation on children and families from low SES backgrounds as participants. The work is leading to future intervention work with larger samples and longer durations of involvement and follow-up.

Meet the First Author

Dana Suskind, University of Chicago

Why did you do this study?

Dana: This study assesses the effectiveness of a novel parent-directed behavioral intervention designed to empower parents and caregivers with knowledge and skills to develop their children's intellectual and educational potential during the first three years of life. This intervention represents a first step in a multi-faceted community-wide approach (see link <http://tmwcenter.uchicago.edu/what-we-do/evidence-based-interventions-tools/>)

How is this study informing your next research steps?

Dana: Findings of this study informed the iteration of the TMW homevisiting intervention with systematic incorporation of additional behavioral nudges in order to promote sustained parental behavior change and ultimately, child impact. We are in the midst of a 5-year longitudinal randomized controlled study following children from 13 months of age until kindergarten.



Commentary by the Nominator

Charlie Greenwood, University of Kansas

Suskind and her team at the 30 Million Words Initiative (<http://tmwcenter.uchicago.edu/>) continue to develop a scalable intervention approach to Bridging the Word gap that is supported by strong evidence of effectiveness. This current study is one in a line of continuing studies designed to increase evidence and improve interventions based on what works. Additional intervention studies by this team reach across low SES children and families as well as children with hearing and other language risks to successful language development (e.g., Suskind, D. L., Graf, E., Leffel, K. R., Hernandez, M. W., Suskind, E., Webber, R., ... & Nevins, M. E. (2016). Project ASPIRE: Spoken Language Intervention Curriculum for Parents of Low-socioeconomic Status and Their Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children. *Otology & Neurotology*, 37(2), e110-e117).