



GEM OF THE MONTH STUDY



When Children Are Not Read to at Home: The Million Word Gap

Logan et al. (2019) examined 60 commonly read children's books to estimate the number of words children are exposed to during joint book reading sessions. Given the significant correlations between the number of words to which children are exposed and their vocabulary development during childhood the *heard vocabulary* from joint book reading sessions could be impactful on the reading and vocabulary development of all children. The researchers worked with a large metropolitan library to determine the 100 most popular books circulated for both board books (targeting infants and toddlers) and picture books (targeting preschoolers). From the 200 titles identified the researchers randomly selected 30 books from each list and transcribed them. They found that board books contained an average of 140 words, while picture books contained an average of 228 words. From this, the researchers calculated that parents who read to their child once per day expose their child to nearly 78,000 words per year. Over time this adds up to children hearing over 296,000 words by kindergarten, and 1.5 million words if read multiple books per day. This exposure is important as research shows children's books are more lexically diverse than standard caregiver-child conversations and have significant influences on children's vocabulary development. Given that there are significant links between the number of words children are exposed to and their vocabulary trajectories during early childhood, shared book reading represents an important resource for closing the Word Gap.

Logan, J. A., Justice, L. M., Yumus, M., & Chaparro-Moreno, L. J. (2019). When Children Are Not Read to at Home: The Million Word Gap. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, 40*(5), 383-386.

Advancing Knowledge to Bridge the Word Gap

We know language is a critical skill for children's future successes in school and life. However, one-half of all caregivers report rarely or never reading to their children, but this research presents an opportunity for caregivers to expose children to significantly more words before starting kindergarten. Adult-child shared reading provides a context for joint engagement, which serves as an opportunity for vocabulary development. Therefore, this study provides an accessible framework for parents and caregivers to increase children's exposure to new vocabulary through shared book reading.

Want to nominate the next Gem of the Month?
Email Alana Schnitz at aschnitz@ku.edu

www.bwgresnet.res.ku.edu