Language and Literacy
What research tells us about improving outcomes for young children

Barbara A. Wasik, Ph.D.
Temple University

Presentation to the Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation
April 12-13, 2011
Thank You

• Early Reading First funding
• Baltimore City Head Start teachers, assistants, Administrators, and children
• Johns Hopkins University Coaches and staff
• Dr. Annemarie Hindman
Importance of Developing Oral Language and Vocabulary

- Predictor of success in learning to read
- Predictor in overall success in school
- Poorly developed language skills are highly related to poverty
Literacy Readiness Skills

Oral Language Vocabulary

Phonological Sensitivity

Alphabet Knowledge

Print Awareness

Learning to Read
Research Suggests

- Low quality linguistic exchanges persist (Dickinson, Justice)
- Considerable amount of teacher language is directive and consists of comments, not questions (Gest)
- Opportunities to engage in dialogue that scaffolds children’s language is limited (Dickinson, Wasik)
Closing the Achievement Gap

- Focus on improving the quality of classrooms
- Focus on increasing the quality of teacher–child language interactions, specifically scaffolding language through conversations and book reading experiences
- Focus on increasing children’s vocabulary development
Professional Development Models

• Well-researched, intensive PD interventions focused on developing language and pre-literacy (Dickinson, Justice, Landry, Pianta, Powell, Wasik)

• Outcomes show improvements in pre-literacy skills such as phonological sensitivity & alphabet knowledge but vocabulary and oral language skills are difficult to change
Oral Language & Vocabulary

• Children provided with multiple exposures to words in meaningful contexts learn words (Biemieller & Boote, 2006; Beck and colleagues, 2007)

• Exposure to vocabulary through book reading and followed-up with activities that include opportunities to use words increases vocabulary development (Wasik & colleagues; Coyne & colleagues; and Silverman & colleagues)
Teachers’ Use of Language

• Train teachers to change the way they talk & interact with young children
  – Ask “open-ended” questions
  – Model rich language
  – Provide meaningful feedback
  – Recast what is said in a more rich, elaborated way

• Increasing the instructional quality
ExCELL: Exceptional Coaching for Early Language and Literacy

• One example of an effective PD intervention

• Focused on scaffolding teachers’ language interactions to provide more opportunities for children to talk and use language

• Book reading plays a critical part language development
ExCELL

• Intensive, comprehensive language and literacy coaching professional development (PD) intervention

• Monthly group trainings

• Books, materials, and lesson plans that support the development of children’s language and literacy, and

• Progress monitoring
ExCELL

• Head Start Teachers and Children
• In urban Baltimore City
• 100% free lunch
• 99% African American
Teacher Measures

• All teachers were administered:
  – CLASS
  – ELLCO
  – Teacher belief measure
  – Teacher knowledge measure
  – Fidelity measures
Child Measures

• PPVT-III (Receptive language)
• Alphabet
• Phonemic awareness
• All are predictors of success in reading
Teacher CLASS

![Bar chart showing the comparison between ExCELL and Control groups for Pre-test and Post-test results.](chart.png)
Teacher Background

• Varying degrees of education
• Education did not impact performance
• Years of experience did not impact performance
• All teachers can learn these strategies
Child PPVT-III

The graph shows the comparison of Pretest and Post-test scores for ExCELL and Control groups.

- **Pretest**: ExCELL group scores are slightly higher than the Control group.
- **Post-test**: ExCELL group scores show a significant increase compared to the Control group.

College of Education
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
Phonological Sensitivity

Pre-test

Post-test

ExCELL
Control

College of Education
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
Understanding the Findings in Terms of

• Effectiveness
• Fidelity
• Feasibility
• Sustainability
Teacher Behaviors Related to Increases in Child Vocabulary

- Not the number of open-ended questions teachers asked but,
- The amount of opportunities given to children to talk and use language
- The more children used language in a meaningful context $\rightarrow$ increases in vocabulary
What Do These Findings Suggest?

- Teachers’ use of language is critical in developing children’s language
- Teachers can change the way they interact with targeted coaching & training
- Language development is relevant for all domains, including math and science.
Unpacking the Intervention: What are the active ingredients

• Book reading (including reading the book and follow-up activities that reinforce the language and vocabulary in the books) is critical to language development.

• Opportunities for children to use language
Lessons Learned

• Difficult to scaffold teachers’ language
• Videotaping is a powerful tool in impacting change
• Teachers need both conceptual and procedural knowledge to change their behaviors
Thank you!
Barbara A. Wasik
PNC Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Education

Center for Early Education and Development

Temple University

bwasik@temple.du