



# Signs of Literacy: What's ASL got to do with it?

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# Data Sources

- 1985-1993 Family
  - 6 families
  - 15 children
- 1993-1996: Preschool
  - 6 classrooms
  - 11 teachers (5 deaf; 6 hearing)
  - 60 children (6 from the family study)
- 2001-Current: Follow-up
  - 6 focal children



# Paths to Biliterate Development Formed by:

- Personal history of the child and family
- Social contexts available for learning
- Support children receive to engage with a variety of topics and texts in both languages.

» Moll, L. & Dworin, J. (1996). Biliteracy development in classrooms: Social dynamics and cultural possibilities. In D. Hicks (ed.), *Discourse, learning, and schooling*. New York: Cambridge.



# The first three years of life: Language, literacy and cognition

- ❖ *What's ASL got to do with it?*
- ❖ *What's Mommy got to do with it?*
- ❖ *What's Miss Nelson got to do with it?*
- ❖ *What do you have to do with it?*



# Rita's Reading Strategies:

- Uses relevant background knowledge
- Makes meaningful predictions
- Determines important ideas/concepts
- Constructs images
- Figures out unknown words
- Monitors understanding
- Questions before/during/after reading
- Clarifies/Revises meaning



# Rita as a Bilingual Reader

- Searches for relationships between English words in text and ASL signs
- Translates English text to ASL
- Transfers information gained through ASL to process text



» Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996



# Rita's Story

- ❖ Born deaf; identified at 3 months of age
- ❖ Hearing signing parents
- ❖ Early education program at 5 months
- ❖ Extended family members took sign classes for 12 years
- ❖ Reciprocal involvement with the Deaf community



# Key factors in Rita's story:

- ❖ Early ongoing language input and opportunities for social interaction using language.
- ❖ Early and ongoing affirmations.
- ❖ Early involvement in a variety of literacy experiences.
- ❖ Parents expected her to become bilingual and literate.
- ❖ Early home and school experiences prepared her for school-related literacy events.



# Rita: Preschool Years

- Interacts with books for extended times
- Constructs meaning from print and pictures in books
- Points to pictures, matches her handshape with drawing of handshape (fs), signs, and mouths to label pictures
- Observes and participates in extended conversations around books



# Rita: Preschool Years

- Participates in discourse about a range of topics with peers and adults
- Uses language for a variety of functions
- Evidence of metalinguistic awareness through sign play, discussions of lexical preferences, correction of others
- Communicates with ease with peers and adults; Complex structures emerging



# Rita: Preschool Years

- Reads and writes her own name
- Creates text with invented spellings, using support from environmental print, signs, fingerspelling
- Constructs meaning with text and pictures in a variety of writing context



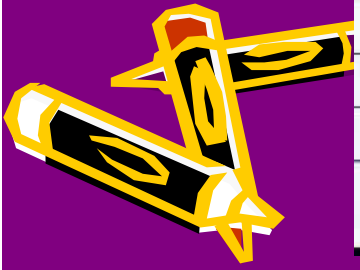
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I gave Mom some  
flowers for Mother's  
Day,



I gave Mom some flowers for Mother's Day,

and necklace



# What we learn from Rita's story:

## Impact of early language on literacy:

- *Depth and breadth of language knowledge and comprehension*
  - Linguistic and cognitive
- *Wealth of conceptual knowledge*
- *Expansive lexical knowledge*
- *Self confidence: "I can!"*



# Importance of the first three years of life:

...the problem of skill differences  
among children at the time of school  
entry is bigger, more intractable, and  
more important than we had thought.

» Hart & Risley, 1995, p. 193.



# *Everyday parenting:* The first three years

- Parents talk...
  - To engage their child
  - For sociability
  - To stay involved
  - To encourage child to tell about things
  - To praise
  - To confirm/verify/restate what child says
  - To prompt child to say more
- Parents listen...
  - To add information
  - To encourage commenting
  - To prompt elaboration



» Hart & Risley, 1995; 1999.

# Number of words heard by children at ages 1 - 2:

- Welfare families
  - 620 per hour
- Working-class families
  - 1,250 per hour
- Professional families
  - 2,150 per hour



# Number of words heard by age three:

- Welfare families:
  - 10 million
- Working-class families
  - 20 million
- Professional families
  - 30 million



Vocabulary use at age 3  
was strongly predictive of:

*Third grade...*

- ❖ *Language skill*
- ❖ *Reading comprehension*
- ❖ *Academic performance*



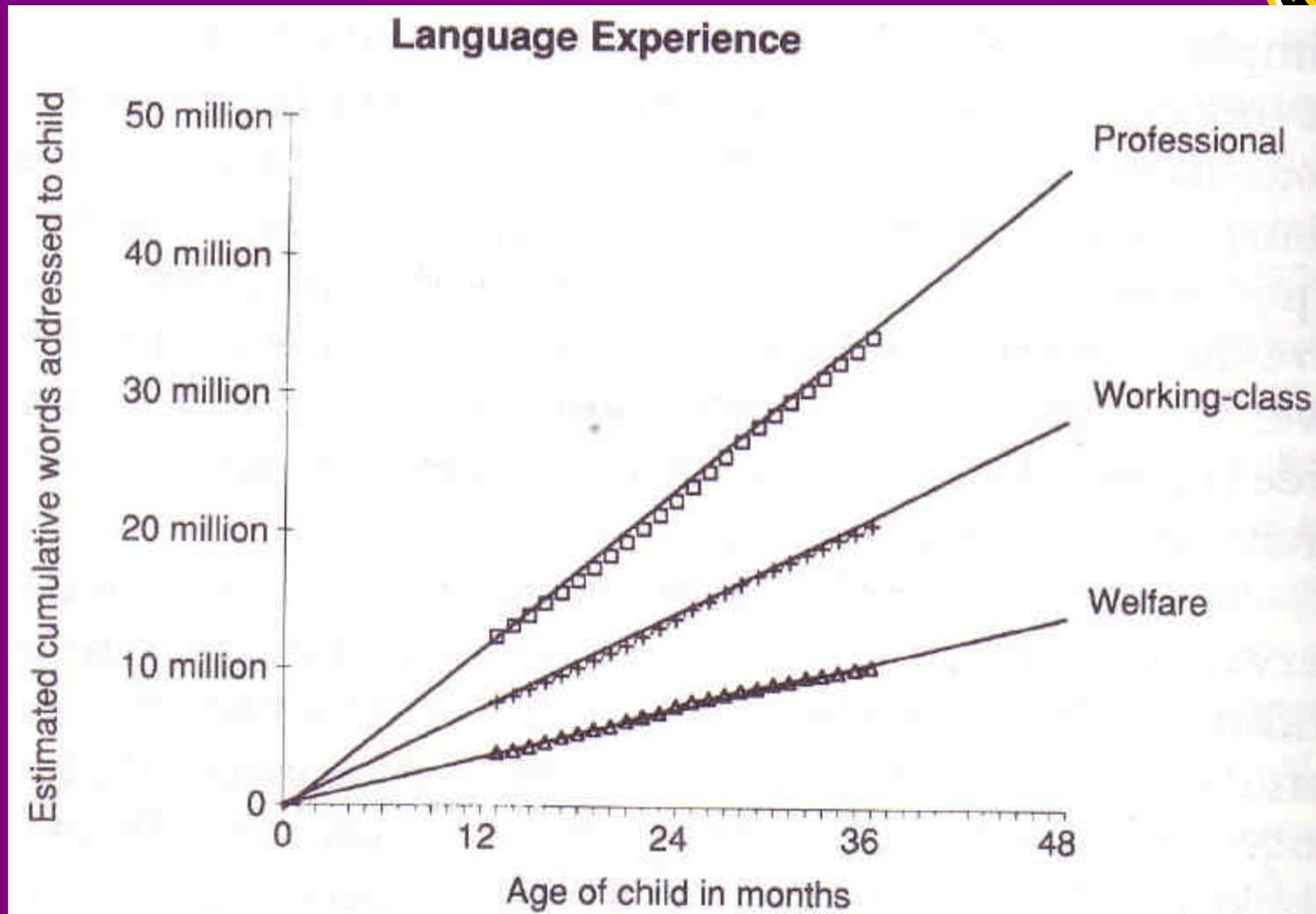
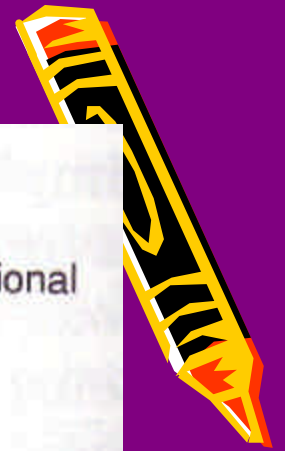


Figure 19. Estimated cumulative differences in language experience by 4 years of age. (See Appendix B for a detailed explanation of this figure.)



*So much is happening to children during their first 3 years at home, at a time when they are especially malleable and uniquely dependent on the family for virtually all their experience, that by age 3 an intervention must address not just a lack of knowledge and skill, but an entire general approach to experience.*

» Hart & Risley, 1995, p. 193



# Children's accomplishments depends on:

Amount of experience children accumulate with parenting that provides:

- ❖ *Language diversity*
- ❖ *Affirmative feedback*
- ❖ *Cognitively challenging language*
- ❖ *Gentle guidance*
- ❖ *Responsiveness*

▪ Hart & Risley (1995; 1999).



# Our roles:

Ensuring all children receive enriched experiences that prepare them for school and literacy learning:

- ❖ *Quality child care for infants and toddlers*
- ❖ *Parent Aides*
- ❖ *Parent Mentors*
- ❖ *Other innovations for reaching deaf children and their families early.*



*Access is key...In both language acquisition and learning to read, access is the critical component. Children with access to rich and responsive language interactions about their experiences in the first three years of life develop power over language.*

*» Braunger & Lewis, 1998, p. 59*

