

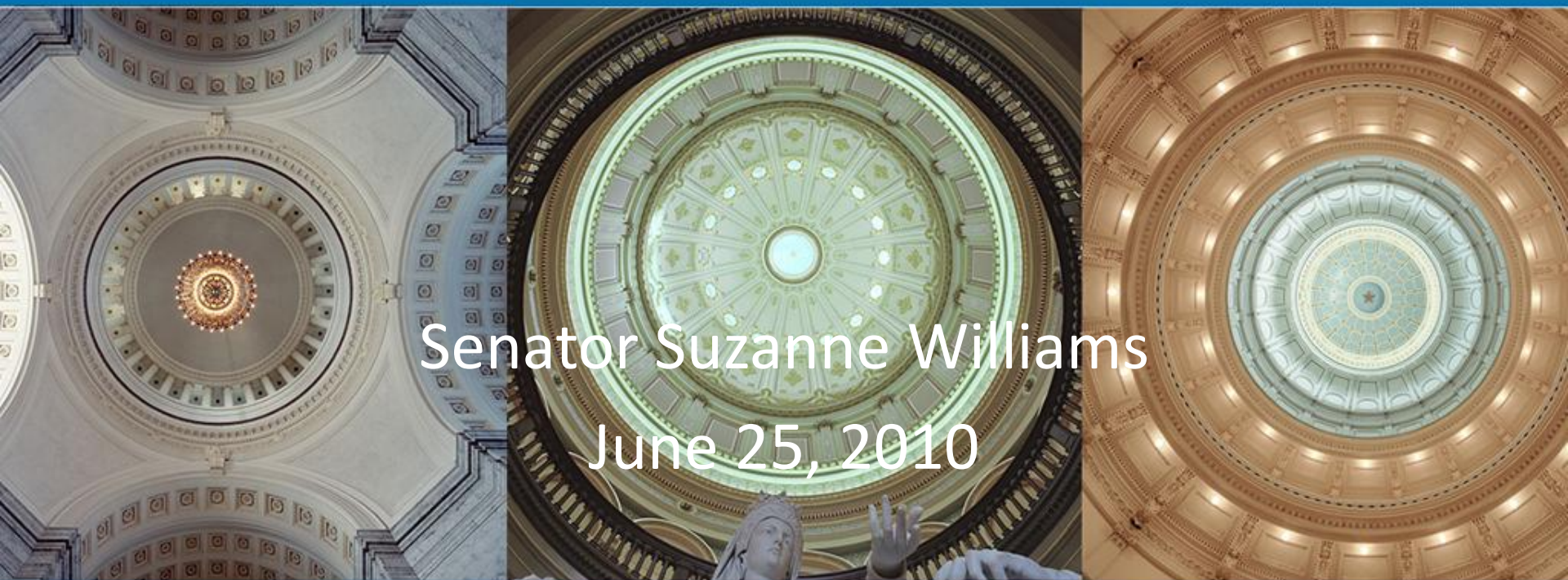


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Early Childhood: Promoting School Success in Native American Children



Senator Suzanne Williams
June 25, 2010



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National Caucus of Native American
State Legislators



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Cognitive Gaps

- From the age of 14 months to almost two-years old, cognitive gaps do not exist between Native American children and other children. They are equivalent with other students in problem solving, babbling, using words and exploring objects in play. (Early Longitudinal Childhood Study, 2005)
- By kindergarten, Native American children are exhibiting significant gaps in literacy, math, understanding shapes and fine motor skills. (Early Longitudinal Childhood Study, 2005)
- As a result, these children begin school as the lowest performing group.
- American Indian, along with black and Hispanic, students demonstrate significantly lower reading, math and vocabulary skills at school entry than white and Asian American children.



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Looking at two predictors to promote school achievement

- Exposure to Language
- Maternal Education



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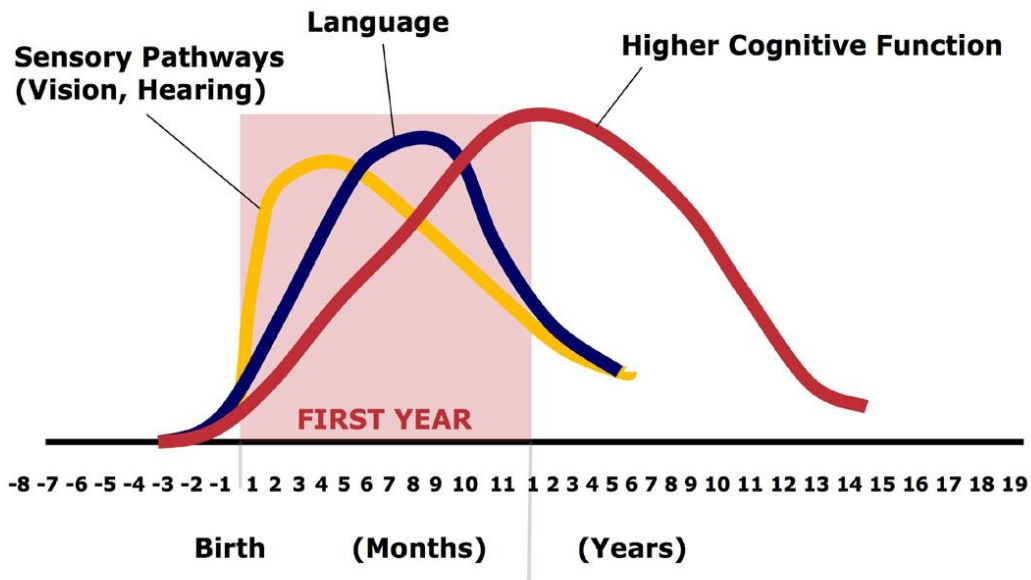
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Center on the Developing Child
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Human Brain Development

Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially



Source: C.A. Nelson (2000)



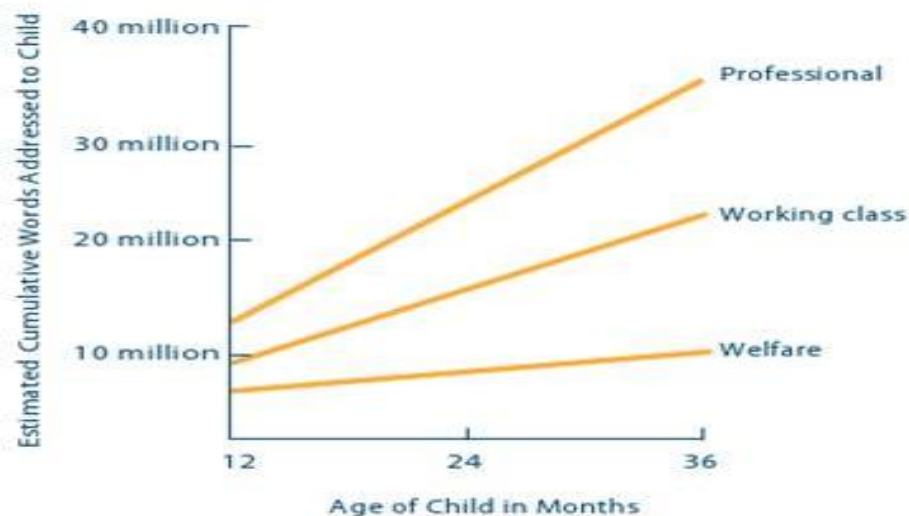
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Wide Differences in Early Exposure to Oral Language

Large differences in the extent of oral language experiences can affect students' literacy skills.



Source: Adapted from Hart, B., Risley, T.R. (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.



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Native American Context

Knowledge and experience in home language and culture play a positive role in children's academic, social and emotional development.



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Research

- Studies show that early childhood is the window of opportunity for language development (Diamond & Hopson, 1998; Wolfe, 1998).
- During this time, language development increases most rapidly than at any other period (Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998).
- Children begin school with a wide range of language and literacy skills. Many enter with partial expressive language skills. (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997).



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Oral Language

- Infants become wired for the sounds of their native language through daily interactions with parents or caregivers.
- Language affects not only cognitive growth but also social competence (McCabe & Meller, 2004).
- Children who learn to speak and interact successfully with others tend to develop more effective learning strategies and literacy skills (e.g. listening and speaking).



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Exposure and Language Acquisition

Keep in mind:

- what the adults do with children in terms of exposure to language and
- what the children are learning in terms of language acquisition.



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Links between Language and Literacy

- Teachers consistently identified children as high academic achievers if they used language “with notable skill and power.”
- Children with strong oral language skills in kindergarten later became the most proficient readers and writers. (Loban, 1976)
- Identified a positive relationship between metalinguistic awareness and reading proficiency. (Turner, Nesdale & Wright, 1987)
- Babies’ and preschoolers’ exposure to more and to specific kinds of adult talk around them related positively to later reading proficiency. (Hart & Risely, 1995; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001)



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Importance of Maternal Education

Double opportunity for:

- Job success
- Success of young children



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Research

- Maternal education is a strong correlate of children's language, cognitive, and academic development. Source: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development
- Children of more highly educated parents enter school with higher levels of academic skills and continue to perform better than other children (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Lee & Burkham, 2002).
- Increases in mother's education are linked to young children's expressive and receptive language skills but only among mothers with initially low levels of education (NICHD)
- Economically disadvantaged mothers are especially likely to return to school; close to 50% of low-income mothers attend school after the birth of their children (Love et al., 2002; McGroder, Zaslow, Moore, & LeMenestrel, 2000; Rich & Kim, 1999).



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How to address the issues?

Maternal Education

- GED, community colleges, high and middle school (target)

Family Supports

- Focus on relationship between the mom and child in terms of language exposure
- Home/nurse visiting (common approach in a number of states)
- Culturally relevant to the tribe (innovative)
- Mom networks
- Provide supports for education and training through tribal CCDF. (Are tribes accessing these funds?)

Legislative Support

- Is legislative support need in your state?