

# Toddlers Empowered by the 5 R's

A New Research-Based Framework for Building Language

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**Language** develops in caring relationships through back-and-forth conversations that build on children's natural curiosity and desire to connect.



What we give children when they are little builds foundations for thinking, making friends, and continuing to learn.  
It can affect their entire lives.

# Language is Key



**To literacy:** storytelling, vocabulary, how sounds combine to make words



**To learning:** questions, step-by-step problem solving, concepts, reasoning, memory



**To social/emotional development:** making friends, negotiating, expressing feelings, self-control, resilience

Almost all children learn language, following similar patterns and timetables, **but they don't learn equally well.** The more “play talk” parents and teachers other caregivers share with babies and young children, the faster and more fully children’s language develops.

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# Talk to Me, *Baby!*



How You Can Support  
Young Children's  
Language Development

*2nd*  
EDITION

Betty S. Bardige

Foreword by Joanne Knapp-Philo

“Play Talk” makes the difference for language development . . .



# ...because Play Talk is rich talk!

- Responsive – Follows the child's lead
- Imaginative and often silly
- Open-ended and encouraging
- Asks and explores questions
- Includes talk about past, future, what if...
- Models thinking and reasoning
- Richer vocabulary
- Longer conversations with more information
- More elaborate sentences and descriptions
- Word play, songs, & rhymes

# Toddler Language Milestones

- 6-15 months
  - Joint attention, imitation, & communicative babbles & gestures
- 10-18 months
  - Symbolic gestures; “expressive jargon,” & first words
- 15 -24 months
  - Putting words together
- 18-30 months
  - Speaking in sentences. Verbal (or sign) language is the child’s dominant mode of communication.

# Priming the Language Pump:

How Adults Help Children Make the Shift from Babbling and Gesturing to Using Words

- Labeling objects and actions; narrating the world
- Responding to babbles and gestures, and anything that sounds like a word
- Pairing words with gestures, objects that a child is looking at or handling, or “Baby Signs”
- Using special baby talk (in some cultures) that is easier for children to say
- Continuing to converse – in *parentese*, baby talk, and adult language!



**Bathe children in love and language!**

# Treat Babbling as Meaningful Communication



Gros-Louis, J., West, M. J., & King, A. P. (2014). Maternal responsiveness and the development of directed vocalizing in social interactions. *Infancy*, 19(4), 385-408.



# Let's Talk!



Gros-Louis, J., West, M. J., & King, A. P. (2016). The influence of interactive context on prelinguistic vocalizations and maternal responses. *Language Learning and Development*, 12(3), 280-294.

Toddlers are eager to learn new words  
- and need lots of chances to use them!



# Off Like a Rocket



Sometime between 18 months and two and a half, young children's language "takes off." Having amassed a vocabulary of about 50 words or stock phrases, the child begins to combine words in novel ways to create sentences that follow a rudimentary grammar. **Suddenly, the child who took six months to learn those 50 words is learning 9 new ones every day!** To parents, it feels like a miracle! Their child is bursting with language – and soon using it as his dominant means of communication.

# Play Talk Makes a Meaningful Difference More is Better!

- For infants, toddlers and preschoolers
- In homes and child care settings
- With fathers and mothers
- In professional families and those with less or little education
- With middle class children & children in deep poverty
- With languages other than English
- With children receiving cochlear implants
- With toddlers at risk for autism spectrum disorders

# And there's more...

Toddlers learn language faster and more fully when:

- Talk is **responsive** (video vs. Skype)
- Talk is **rich**, and goes beyond the here and now
- **Referents** are clear (talk with your hands)
- Adults adapt to the child's processing **rate** (often unconsciously) – and then add more!
- **Repetition**, redundancy, and effort aid retention

# Skype Me! – **Responsive** Talk is Key



Roseberry, S., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2014). Skype me! Socially contingent interactions help toddlers learn language. *Child development, 85*(3), 956-970.

# Talk with Your Hands! – Make **Referents** Clear



Cartmill, E. A., Armstrong, B. F., Gleitman, L. R., Goldin-Meadow, S., Medina, T. N., & Trueswell, J. C. (2013). Quality of early parent input predicts child vocabulary 3 years later. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 110*(28), 11278-11283.

# Add **Richness** & Complexity at an Optimal **Rate**



Weisleder, A., & Fernald, A. (2013). Talking to children matters: Early language experience strengthens processing and builds vocabulary. *Psychological Science*, 24(11), 2143-21

# Repetition Aids Learning



Neuman, S. B., & Dwyer, J. (2011). Developing vocabulary and conceptual knowledge for low-income preschoolers: A design experiment. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 1086296X11403089.

Demir, Ö.E., Rowe, M.L., Heller, G., Goldin-Meadow, S., & Levine, S.C. (2015). Vocabulary, syntax, and narrative development in typically developing children and children with early unilateral brain injury: Early parental talk about the “there-and-then” matters. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(2), 161.

# Remove Barriers to Communication



# Find "Up Close and Personal" Time















# Enjoy Relaxed Conversation Throughout the Day



# Removing Communication Barriers

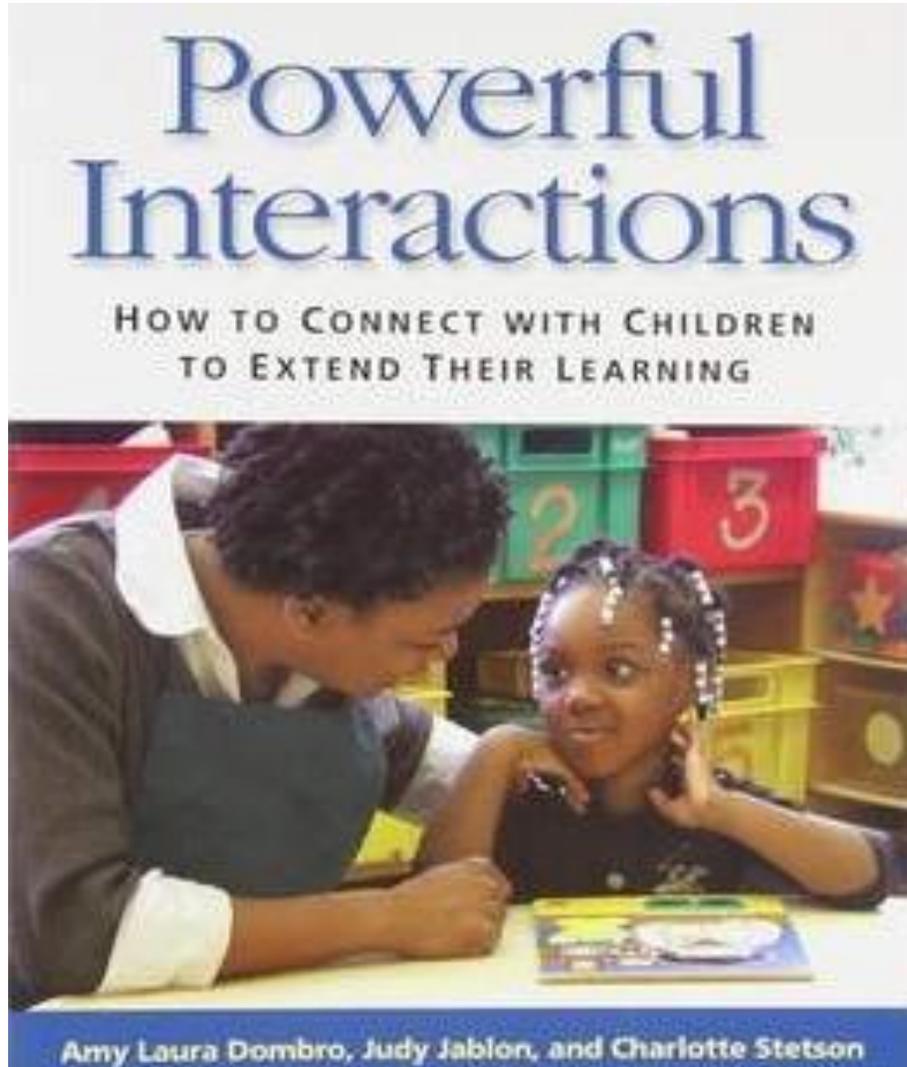
## What changes would make the **MOST** difference?

- ❑ **Environmental changes:** Reducing noise, creating private spaces, using outdoor space well, rearranging furniture, spaces and props for pretending, displays that prompt conversation, windows and mirrors
- ❑ **Schedule changes:** fewer transitions, setting aside times to talk when children are most alert and receptive, smaller groups for reading
- ❑ **Grouping & Relationship changes:** Staying with the same group for more than 1 year, more conversation with families, primary caregiver assignments, multi-age groups
- ❑ **Language changes:** Using Baby Sign along with words, knowing or learning a child's home language, getting Early Intervention for a child with a language challenge and using an alternative communication system if recommended, teachers using their richest language
- ❑ **Curriculum:** Interesting things to talk with toddlers about – and for them to talk and pretend about with each other; tools for tracking language

POLL

## Removing Communication Barriers: What changes would make the MOST difference for you?

- Environmental: reduce noise, private playspaces, etc.
- Schedule: fewer transitions, small groups for reading, etc
- Grouping: Lengthen & deepen relationships with families
- Language: Baby Sign, home language, alternative system
- Curriculum: themes, books, activities, assessment tools



- Be present.
- Make a connection.
- Extend the learning.

Dombro, A. L., Jablon, J. R., & Stetson, C. (2011). *Powerful interactions: How to connect with children to extend their learning*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

# Optimize the 5 R's

- **Responsiveness (Serve and Return)**

- Face-to-Face Get on the child's wavelength --Encouragements --Follow the Child's Lead
- Invite a Response --More Turns --Build on Child's Ideas --Extended Conversation

- **Richness (Play Talk)**

- More words -- Description --Specific, Interesting, & Unusual Words --Details --Word Play
- Beyond the here & now --Literary Language --Use Your Richest Language

- **Referential Clarity (What are you talking about?)**

- Nonverbal clues -- Joint attention --Connection to experience --Baby Sign --Pictures
- Meaningful Context --Explain Words & Concepts --Ask Clarifying & *wh* questions

- **Rate (Time to Process)**

- Just Enough --Add **a bit** more --WAIT for a Reply --Expand and Elaborate
- Wait longer for a child to shift languages --Increase Sentence Length & Complexity

- **Repetition**

- Elaborated reminiscing -- Pattern --Favorite Books, Songs, and Games -- Practice!
- Talking about the past --Same Words in Multiple Contexts and Languages --Themes

# Responsive Communication

- Get on the child's wavelength –  
then S-T-R-E-T-C-H
- Match emotional tenor



# Follow the CAR

## A Technique for Optimizing Responsiveness

- **F**ollow the child's lead.
- **C**omment - and wait for a response.
- **A**sk a question - and wait for a response.
- **R**espond by adding a bit more - and wait for a response.



WASHINGTON LEARNING SYSTEMS:

[www.wlearning.com/products/language-is-the-key/car-strategies/](http://www.wlearning.com/products/language-is-the-key/car-strategies/)

# Respond to **WHAT** the Child Means to Say, Not to **HOW** He Says It

- Don't correct grammar, pronunciation, or choice of language, dialect, or communication modality.
- If you don't understand what a child said, ask him to repeat it or show you.
- Respond with correct forms. Add a bit more to spark the child's response.



# Give Toddlers Encouraging Words and Positive Guidance



Toddlers often talk to themselves out loud as they remind themselves how to behave, make simple plans, or talk their way through problems. This self-talk gradually becomes inner speech.

**Inner speech:** Talking silently to oneself or thinking in words.

# Richness: "Juicy Words" I Learned from Two-Year Olds



excavator



tender



apatosaurus



coreopsis



nurse sharks

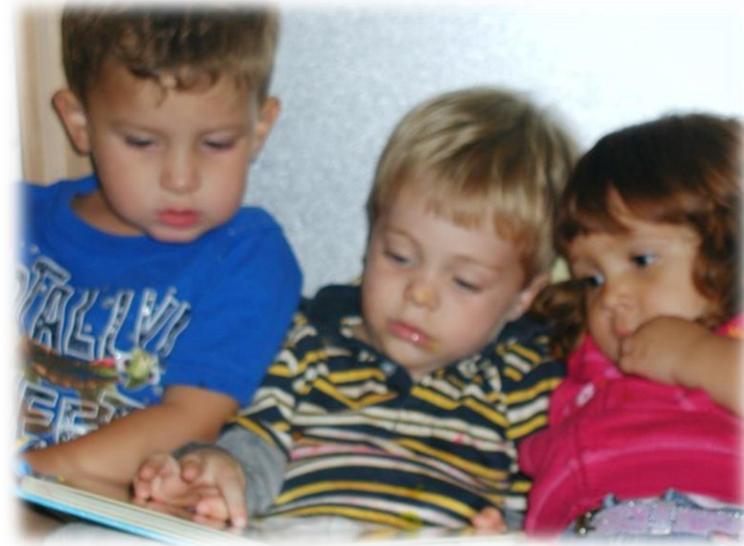
**Little children love BIG words -  
and the impressed reaction they get!**

# Richness: Using Books as Springboards for Conversations

The books toddlers like best:

- Have pictures that are easy to name and talk about.
- Give them lots of things to do, say, act out, or imitate.
- Contain interesting words and mellifluous phrases.
- **May show lots of members of a category.**
- Tell simple stories or have patterns that are easy to follow.
- Often tell reassuring stories about characters who get lost & are found, run away & come back, or make mistakes & are forgiven.
- Enable toddlers to pursue special interests and become “experts.”

- adapted from *Talk to Me, Baby!*



## Richness: Conversations that Connect Books to Real Life



“It is the talk that surrounds storybook reading that gives it power.”

-- NAEYC and International Reading Association Position Statement

# Richness: Explore Children's Interests in Depth

## Hammy the Hamster

handle

gentle

curious

active



rodent

omnivorous

burrow

store food

nocturnal

hibernate

desert

cheek pouches

# Rich Language Builds the Foundation for Reading Comprehension

“Children are natural knowledge seekers. Whether it’s orca whales, dinosaurs, or the latest technological doo-dad, children’s activities are often guided by their need to know. “

“To be successful in reading comprehension, students must acquire knowledge.”

“Children need time--to actively play with ideas, experience and ask questions, connect new learning with what they already know. Activities that pose problems, get children immersed in interesting topics, allow them the time to develop expertise -- all contribute to knowledge gains.”

Neuman, S. B. (2010). Lessons From My Mother Reflections on the National Early Literacy Panel Report. *Educational Researcher*, 39(4), 301-304.

# Optimize the **Rate**: Give Toddlers Time to Put Thoughts into Words

- Be patient. You may need to wait 5 seconds or more for a toddler to respond to your question.
- Take breaks and breathers.
- Let the child choose or change the subject.
- Acknowledge the child's contribution, then extend his ideas in a way that invites a response.
- Avoid questions or teaching that shuts down conversation.



# Optimize the Rate: Capturing "The Birth of a Word"

MIT Researcher Deb Roy rigged his apartment to capture his son's early language experiences.



Just before the child learned a word, the sentences he heard containing that word got shorter and shorter. Once he learned the word, the sentences containing it gradually lengthened. His parents and caregiver were consistently responding to his cues, without being aware of it.

Deb Roy, The Birth of a Word. TED Talk

# Optimize the **Rate**: Fewer Words, Then a Bit More



Tyler (pointing to a cat): Goggie.

Mom: That's not a doggie, Tyler; it's a cat.

A fat, black cat.

Can you say "CAT"?

Tyler: Cat.

Mom: That's right, Tyler!

It's a CAT.

A fat, black cat with white feet.

Tyler: Back cat.

# Clear Referents

- Gestures
- Joint attention to objects, actions, and pictures
- Pointing & demonstrating
- Priming expectations with context & themes
- Links to lived experience



# Clear **Referents**: Picture Books and Movement Songs



Head, Shoulder, Knees & Toes

Shake Your Sillies Out

The Itsy Bitsy Spider

I'm a Little Teapot

The Wheels on the Bus

**Make up new words  
to favorite songs!**

## Repetition with Enrichment: *Elaborated Reminiscing*

“Let’s tell Mommy what we did today. You played in the sand!”

“Pail.”

“Yes. You filled your pail with sand! And then we dumped it out!”



**It’s a great way to build language! Children who have heard more *elaborated reminiscing* as toddlers will tell more sophisticated stories and remember more details of events as preschoolers.**

Susan Engel, “The Emergence of Storytelling During the First Three Years”

[http://main.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter\\_key\\_language\\_storytelling&AddInterest](http://main.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_language_storytelling&AddInterest)

# Optimizing the 5 R's:

## Richness, Responsiveness, Rate, Referent Clarity, Repetition

### Kirsty's First Story

*One winter day a fox trotted past Kirsty's living room window. Her mother pointed excitedly as it ran out of sight, then showed Kirsty the tracks in the snow.*

"See fox" said Kirsty the next morning.

"Yes," replied her mother, "we saw a fox."

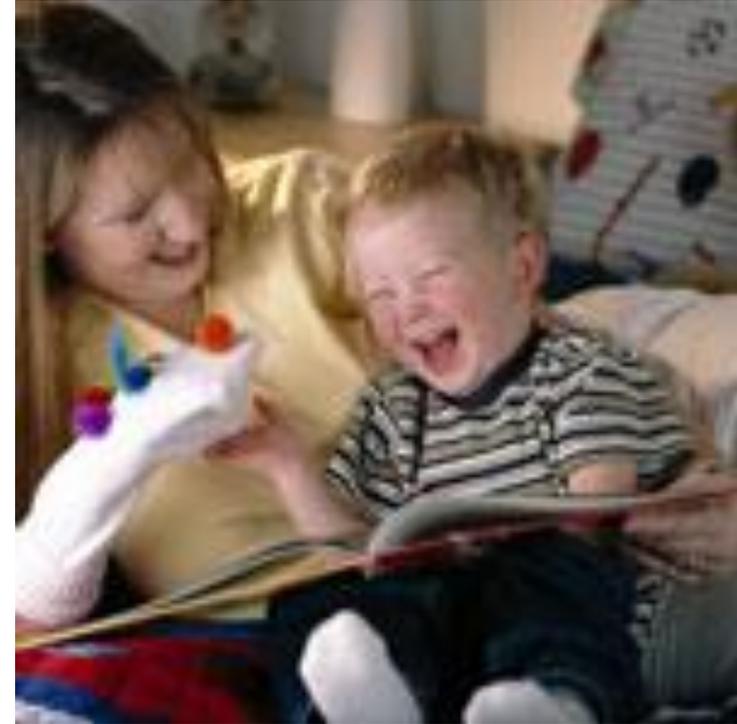
"Feet," said Kirsty.

Her mother elaborated. "Its feet made tracks in the snow," and Kirsty repeated "snow."

Over the next few days, Kirsty told the story at least **100 times**, helped by her mother and father, and then by her clued-in caregiver. Kirsty's few contributions – "See fox," "feet," and "snow" were soon supplemented with "run," "fast," "tracks," "tail," and "red" as the story grew more elaborate.



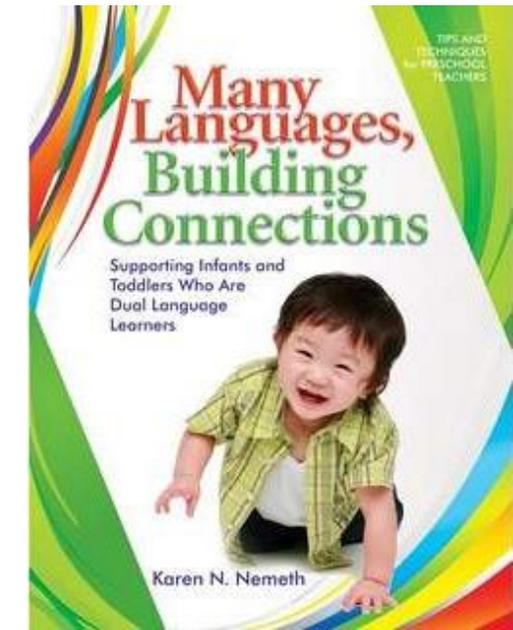
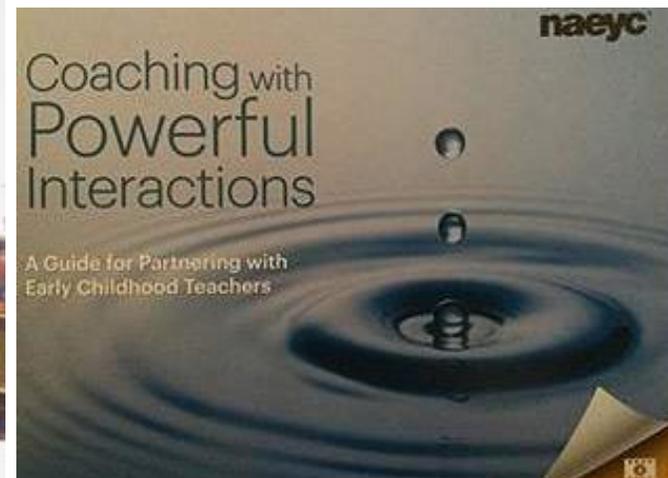
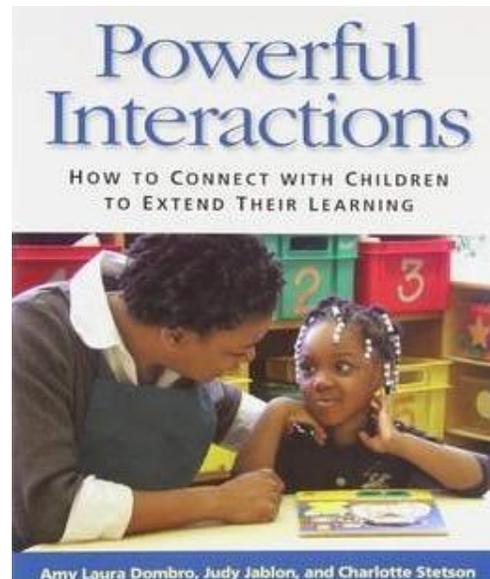
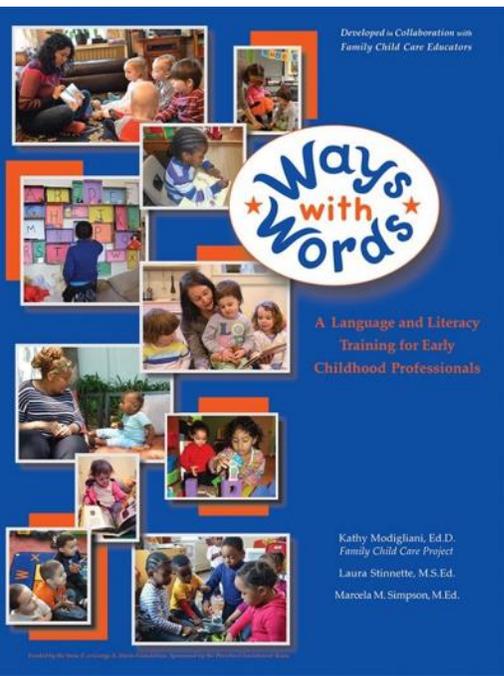
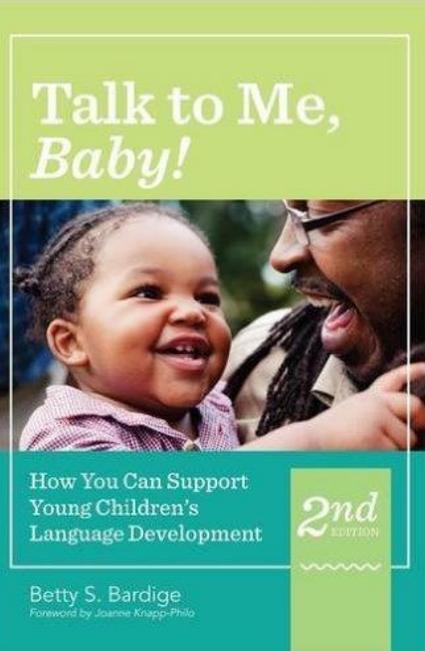
# Share Humor



“Babies and small children love to hear the sound of laughter.”  
- *Wakanyeja WoAwanka (Caring for Our Sacred Children)*

# Resources

- *Talk to Me Baby!* Handouts in English & Spanish  
<http://www.brookespublishing.com/resource-center/download-your-materials/talk-to-me-baby/>
- Resources for Early Learning (Video-based PD Modules)  
[http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators\\_pd/](http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators_pd/)
- *Ways with Words: A Language & Literacy Training for ECE Professionals*  
<http://www.readby4thgrade.com/wayswithwords>



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