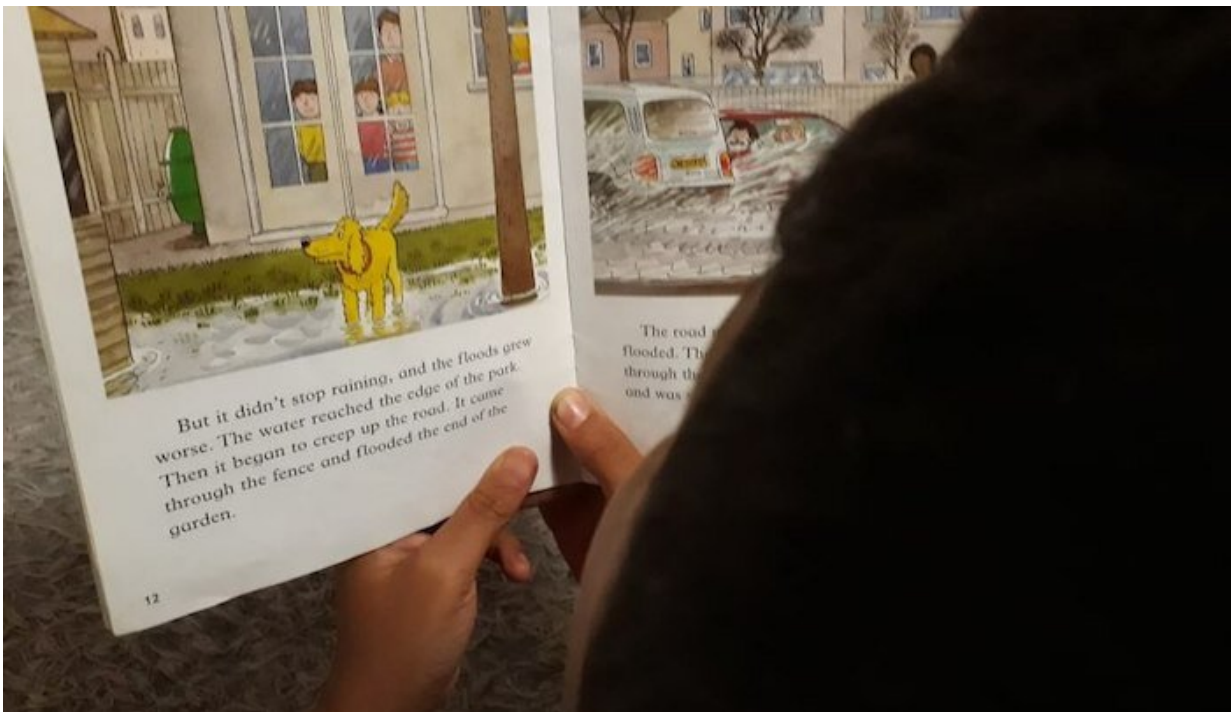


## Researchers gather interventions addressing 'word gap' into special edition of journal

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Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Some children in the U.S. grow up under severe disadvantage in terms of the amount and quality of language they are exposed to in their earliest years. Researchers have documented that some children are exposed to roughly 30 million fewer words than other children during years that are critical for learning language. Researchers call this the "word gap" and

say it portends lifelong consequences.

"The word gap represents inequities in early experience with language that can place children at a disadvantage in terms of not only their early language and vocabulary development, but also literacy and school readiness," said Dale Walker, associate research professor and scientist at Juniper Gardens Children's Project and the Life Span Institute at the University of Kansas.

"When young children do not have sufficient opportunities to hear and practice language, they are less likely to develop vocabulary by age 3," Walker said. "That can lead not only to decreased language and social outcomes, but children are less likely to be ready to succeed in school. They begin school already at a disadvantage in terms of the vocabulary that they've been exposed to and can continue to fall behind in reading and in school achievement. And as noted by economists, that inequity can follow a child into adulthood in terms of educational opportunities and their earning potential."

Walker and Judith Carta, professor of special education at KU, recently guest-edited a special issue of the peer-reviewed *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* that brings together 18 language-intervention research and [empirical studies](#) that address the word gap.

"Understanding research evidence is necessary to inform education and intervention efforts to improve the [language](#)-learning experiences for young [children](#) and prevent the word gap," Walker said.

The research in the special issue covers interventions conducted with parents, educators and health care providers. Further, it includes cultural and linguistic diversity of study participants, as well as training and implementation practices, and the methodological factors informing intervention research.

Walker, who recently earned KU's Steven F. Warren Research Achievement Award, said she hoped research gathered in the special edition could be used by academics, early childhood educators, health care professionals and policymakers.

"We are encouraged about the potential of efforts to address the word gap and hope that our special issue on this topic can be used as a resource that can help inform future research, practice and prevention to close the word gap," she said.

**More information:** Dale Walker et al, Intervention research to improve language-learning opportunities and address the inequities of the word gap, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.10.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.10.008)

Provided by University of Kansas

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