Ko te reo te kakahu o te hinengaro, te huarahi ki te Ao Turoa

Language is the cloak cast by our thoughts that create pathways into the world.
Talking to babies is everyone’s business

Alison Sutton
Director Talking Matters
Skills Highway Forum, Auckland
April 5, 2015
How many brain connections develop in a baby’s brain per second?
How many words might a 5 year old child know before they start school?
A learner asks you what is the best way I can help my kids, so it's easier for them…
What do you say?
Why talk matters so much

Oral language underpins thinking and learning.

Learning, thinking, knowledge and self-expression rely on talk.

And is the foundation for literacy.
Reading and writing float on a sea of talk...
What’s the challenge?
Some children start school able to use 6,000 words. Others are able to use only 3,000 words.

If you start ahead, you stay ahead.

Children who are not talked with

• Struggle to express themselves
• Have limited relationship skills, are less confident
• Hold fewer concepts and ideas
• At risk of behaviour issues
• At risk in adulthood – employment, mental health, justice …..
A slow start - long term impact

75% of students with low literacy at age 8 have low literacy at age 16.

24% of Auckland children start high school below the reading standard.
The solution? Interaction and talk in the first 1000 days
Talking Matters Campaign
goals 2018-2023

Broad and sustained action on early language in communities and key organisations across the country

National recognition of the importance and impact of early language
- funding, research data and policy shifts
Children flourishing as thinkers, talkers & readers

Families and whanau interact & talk more and differently with little ones

Services focus on talk and provide language rich support to families

Communities believe in and ACT on the power of talk

Build the evidence about what works

Policy Research

Children
Flourishing as thinkers, talkers & readers
We will shift the system

Policy & funding

Practitioners and services

Community and family support

Parents & whanau
What’s the science about what makes a difference?
3 core concepts

1) **Early experience builds** brain architecture
2) **Toxic stress derailed** brain development
3) Caregiver-child interaction shapes brain circuitry – serve and return/ back and forth conversation

Harvard Centre on Developing Child
The **first 3 years** are critical to wiring up a child’s brain for life

Babies develop **1 million neural pathways** a second

Everyone who talks, smiles, reads and plays with a child **in any language** helps them learn and grow
What strategies could WL Providers promote?
Talk, talk, talk
Professor John Hattie

Read books to small children
Talk with teenagers about topical issues
Read themselves

Let’s Read them a story. The parent factor in Education. OECD
You make the difference!

When a baby babbles, gestures or cries, and you respond by hugging, using words and making eye contact you help them form connections in their brain.

This supports how they learn and build relationships for their whole life.
Serve and return in action

Also see Serve and Return at Harvard https://youtu.be/m_5u8-QSh6A
Gift vocabulary & ideas

Meet Sefa

Meet Ana
Nana says: “It’s cold. I think we need to put on a sweatshirt. I’ve just put mine on. You like it don’t you! It’s fluffy and soft. Let’s look for your sweatshirt Sefa, to keep you nice and warm. Here’s your red one. Arms up. Over your head. Oh you got stuck. Let’s pull it down. Now you are warm. Cuddles will keep you toasty and warm too. A big squeeze from Nana. Hey look at the birds out the window. They’re eating worms.”

Nana says: “Sit up. Arms up. Now you’re warm” “Look at the birds out the window”

...and then 4 minutes of silence

Sefa hears 70 words in 5 minutes, on 10 topics - lots of ideas to light up his brain

Ana hears about 7 words in 5 minutes, on 2 topics - not many words and concepts
Reading is a special kind of talk
Why reading helps so much!

Books:
- Help parents and child bond
- Use more complex ideas, concepts and vocabulary than speech
- Build print and text awareness
- Shape children as learners

Being read to is a protective factor for vulnerable children
Upskill parents about reading

They’re too young - We’ll wait until they get to school - START EARLY

They don’t like to read – they run away before we’ve finished - AGE APPROPRIATE -

My husband doesn’t take reading seriously. He doesn’t stick what’s on the page – MAKE READING FUN, USE PICTURES

What’s the point of reading it again – READ & REREAD
Share key messages with learners

Chatting switches on the 'WIRING' in their brains

2 words together at age 2
1,000 fluent spoken words by age 4
• Babies learn **before** they are born
• Babies communicate **before they talk**
• 80% brain growth has happened **by age 3**
• Babies can only learn what an older person explains to them
• What is ordinary and everyday to you is new and exciting to your tamariki
• Talk in your home language – bilingual babies have bigger brains
Talking more with children makes a difference....
Raise expectations about what’s normal
Typical language pathway

Early communication: crying, cooing, babbling

First words: 12 - 16 months

50+ words: 18 months

200-300+ words: 24 months

Anywhere from 500 - 1,100 words - age 3

3000-6,000 + expressive words - 5-7 years

Talking Over Time

It's never too early to talk, read and sing with your baby. Here is some information about how children learn to communicate as they grow. Use the languages you are most familiar and comfortable with.

For more information visit: www.talkingmatters.org.nz
Build in short bursts on talk

• Use information about the power of talk as a literacy exercise
• Watch videos on brain development with learners
• Discuss in your group what adults can do to make a difference to kids
• Run a session on reading to children – invite in local library/ local ECE teacher
• Discuss importance of home language - Bilingual kids grow big brains!
• Get learners to show kids that literacy matters - make a photo book about work for their children
• Run a session with Brainwave
Answers

Babies’ brains develop 1 million neural pathways or connections per second

A 5 year old may know and be able to use 6000 words on school entry

Most important thing parents can do to help children develop as learners - talk WITH them, back and forth talk – and reading
Your ideas for actions to promote talk at home & build our future workforce?
Want to connect with Talking Matters and try out specific ideas?
An cross sector collaboration so more children get the start they need. Talking is brain food.