**Nonverbal Cues Could Boost Kids' Vocabulary**

Meaningful gestures and glances may help children learn more words, independent of how much parents talk to them

By Janelle



Children with a large vocabulary experience more success at school and in the workplace. How much parents talk to their children **plays a major role**, but new research shows that it is not just the quantity but also the quality of parental input that matters. (Thesis)**While many belive that parents should have more and more speaking activities with the children,** **helpful gestures and meaningful glances may allow kids to grasp concepts more easily than they otherwise would.**

In a study published in June in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, Erica Cartmill of the University of Chicago and her collaborators videotaped parents in their homes as they read books and played games with their 14- or 18-month-old children. The researchers created hundreds of 40-second muted video clips of these interactions. Another set of study participants watched the videos and used clues from the scenes to guess which nouns the parents were saying at various points in the sequences. The researchers used the accuracy of these guesses to rate how well a parent used nonverbal cues, such as gesturing toward and looking at objects, to clarify a word's meaning.

Cartmill and her team found that the quality of parents' nonverbal signaling predicted the size of their children's vocabulary three years later. Surprisingly, socioeconomic status did not play a role in the quality of the parents' nonverbal signaling. This result suggests that the well-known differences in children's vocabulary size across income levels are likely the result of how much parents talk to their children, which is known to differ by income, rather than how much nonverbal help they offer during those interactions.