

# The Abecedarian Approach in the Early Years: Benefits for Life

**Professor Joseph Sparling**  
Melbourne Graduate School of  
Education





**a·be·ce·dar·i·an** (a' bē · cē · dâr' ē · ən)

*noun, adjective*

**one learning the rudiments of something (as the alphabet)** *Etymology: Middle English abecedary, from Medieval Latin abecedarium, alphabet, from Late Latin, neuter of abecedarius of the alphabet, from the letters a + b + c + d*



# Abecedarian research studies (RCT's)

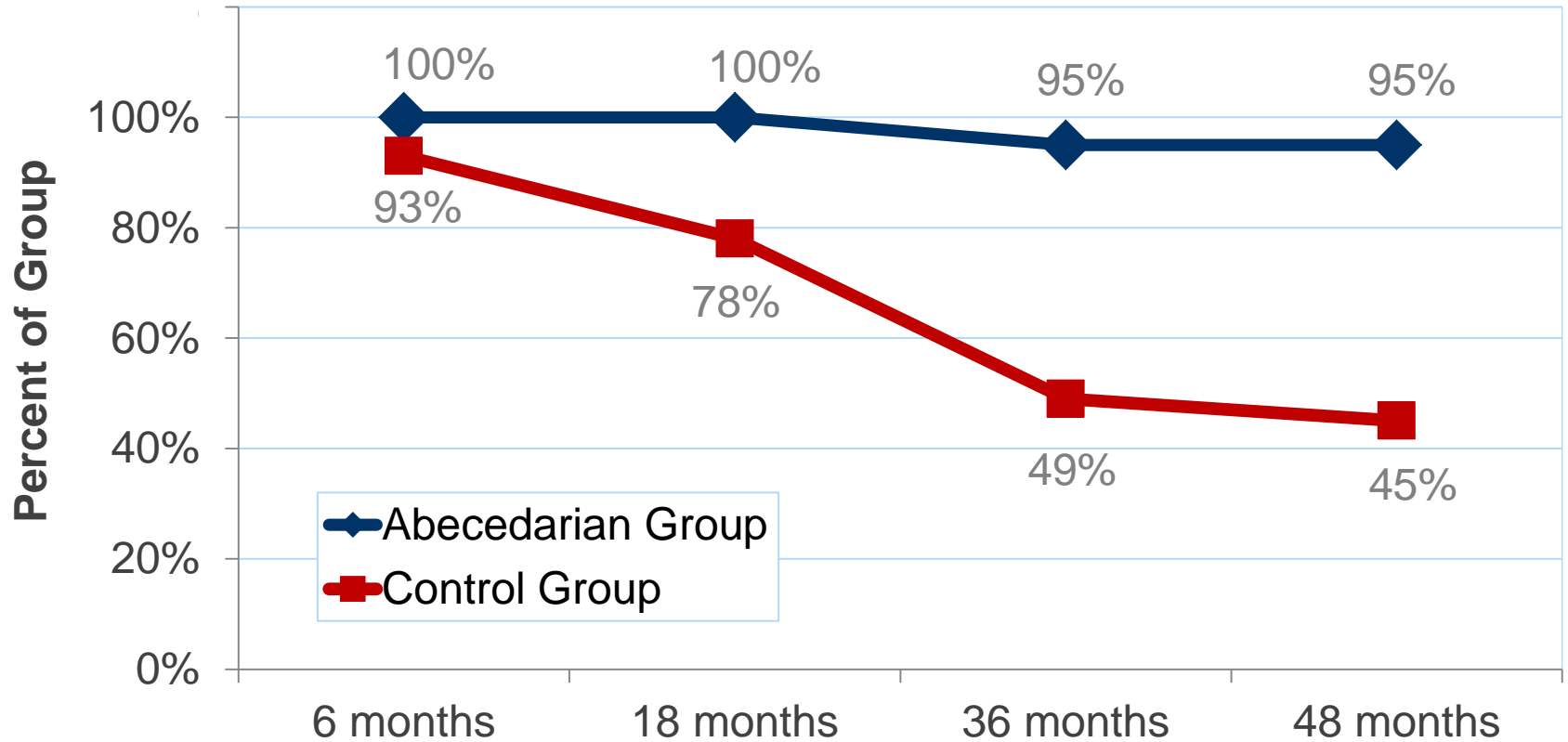
Randomized Samples	Location	N	Duration of Program	Type of Program	Oldest age of follow-up	
Abecedarian 1 (The Abecedarian Project)	Chapel Hill, NC	111 children	Birth to age 5 years	Center + social work + home visits + health care	age 35	
Abecedarian 2 (Project CARE)	Chapel Hill, NC	64 children	Birth to age 5 years	Center + social work + educational home visits + health care	age 21	
Int Program	Abecedarian 3	Boston, MA	138 children	Birth to age 3 years	Center + educational home visits	age 18
	Abecedarian 4	New Haven, CT	112 children	Birth to age 3 years	Center + educational home visits	age 18
				Birth to age 3	Center + educational home	

Plus a newly funded  
ARC research study  
in remote towns  
in NT, Australia

(CLIO Study)	USA, national	2,750 parents	Age 3 to 4 years	education groups	age 5
Abecedarian 15 (Massachusetts Family Child Care Study)	Massachusetts, state-wide	150 family childcare providers	2 years (between Birth to 5 yrs)	Family child care homes	caregiver data only
Abecedarian 16 (Healthy Child Manitoba Evaluation)	Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada	64 children	Birth to 5 years	Center + educational home visits	(began Feb. 2012)



# Child cognitive development across the first 4 years in the normal range, (IQ > 84 )



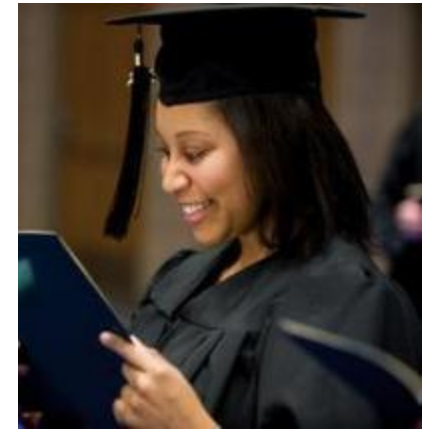
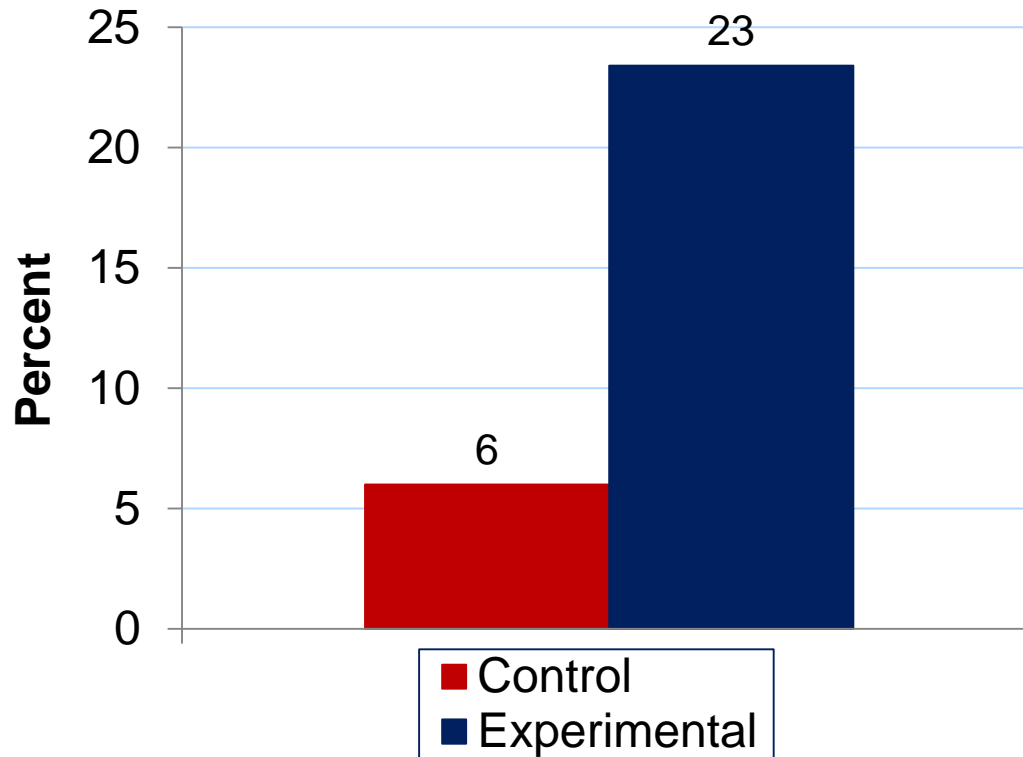
Martin, Ramey, & Ramey. (1990). *American Journal of Public Health*.



**Important and rapid cognitive growth happens very early in life.**



## Educational attainment: percent university graduation by age 30



Campbell et al., (2012). *Developmental Psychology*.



- At 18 years of age: fewer risky behaviors ( $p < .05$ )
- At 21 years of age:
  - Fewer symptoms of depression ( $p < .03$ ) at age 21
  - Healthier life styles. The odds of reporting an active lifestyle in young adulthood were 3.92 times greater compared to the control group
  - A significant reduction in teen parenthood (26% compared with 45% of controls,  $p < .05$ )
- At about 35 years of age:
  - Better blood pressure and less metabolic syndrome

McCormick et al. (2006). *Pediatrics*.

McLaughlin et al.. (2007). *Child Development*.

Campbell et al. (2008). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

Campbell et al. (2014). *Science*.



WHAT WE REALLY HADN'T  
APPRECIATED BEFORE WAS HOW  
**SUBSTANTIAL**  
THE **HEALTH IMPACTS** WOULD BE.

**James Heckman**

Nobel Laureate in Economics

*On his recent study examining the health effects  
of quality early childhood development*





## Benefits of investing in early education...

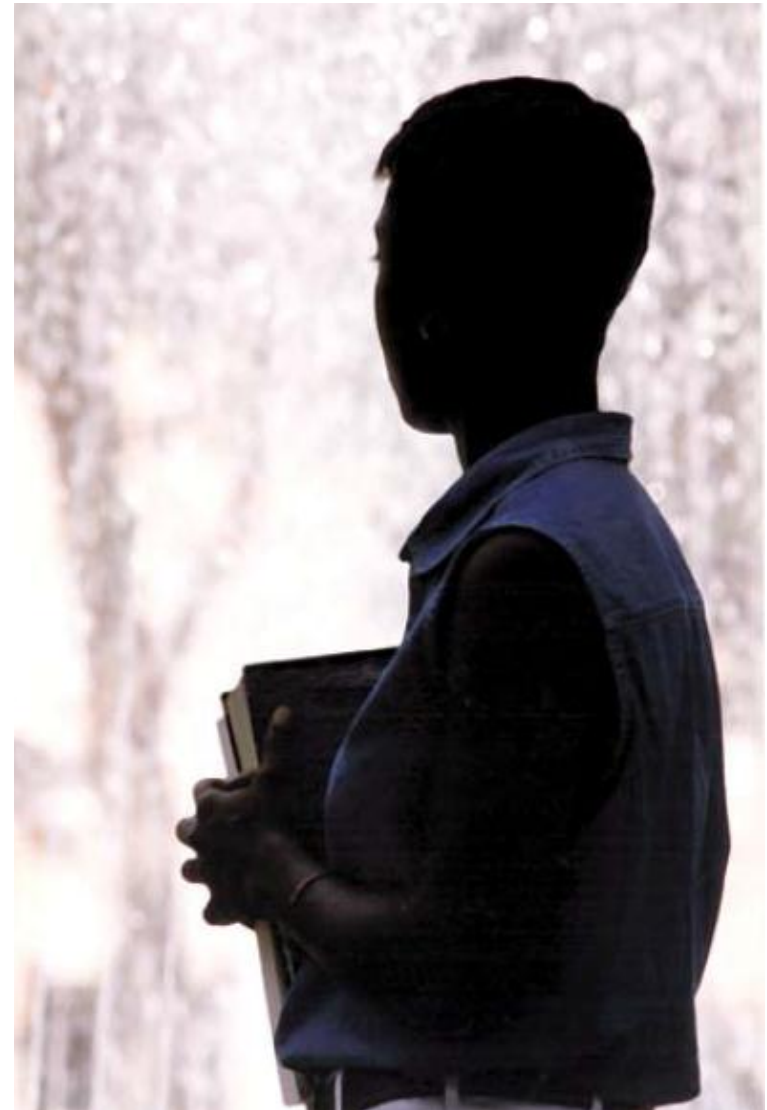


James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

*“The argument is not just an appeal to the poor. We’re saving money for everyone, including the taxpaying middle class and upper class. Right now they’re supporting prisons, health, special education in schools. The benefit is broadly shared. ... It’s something that would actually accrue to the whole country.”*



A Research validated program delivered in the first 5 years of life could create a future where previously vulnerable children succeed and thrive in school.

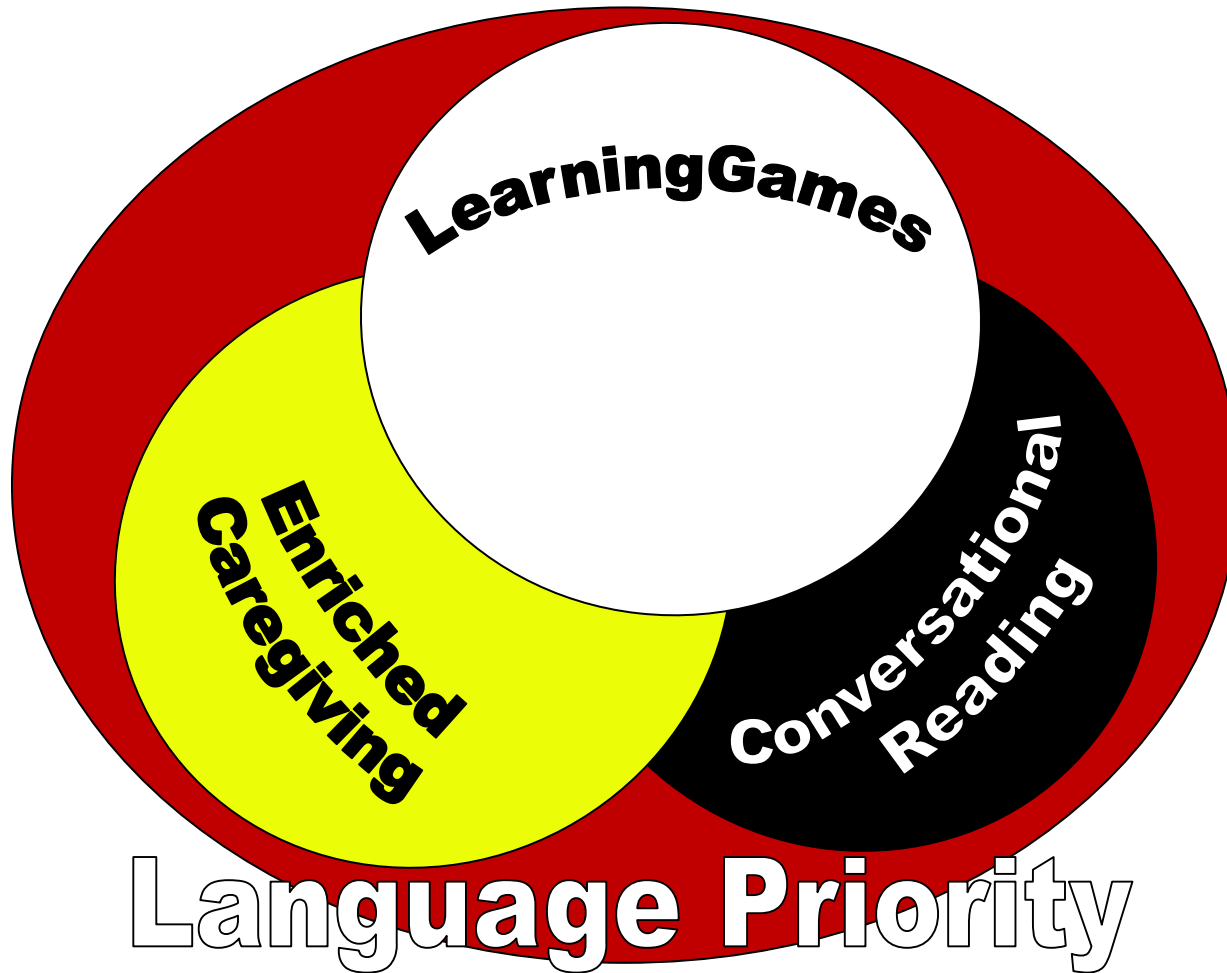




In Australia, it is called...

**3a**

ABECEDARIAN **A**PPROACH **A**USTRALIA

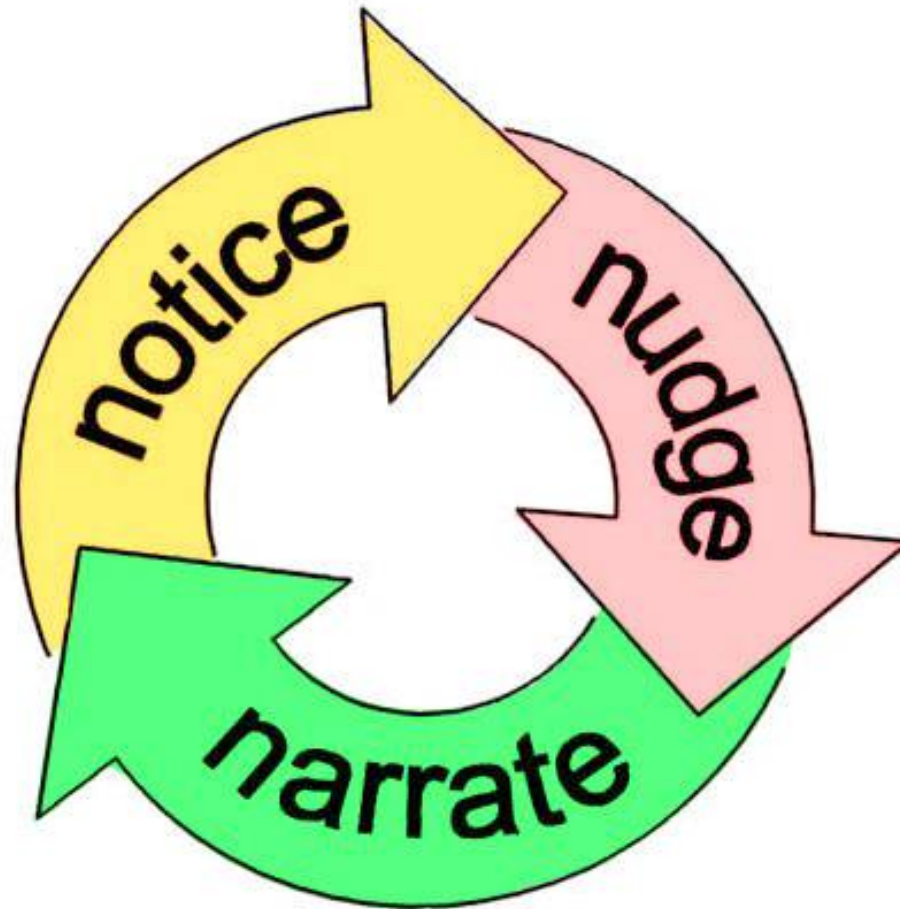


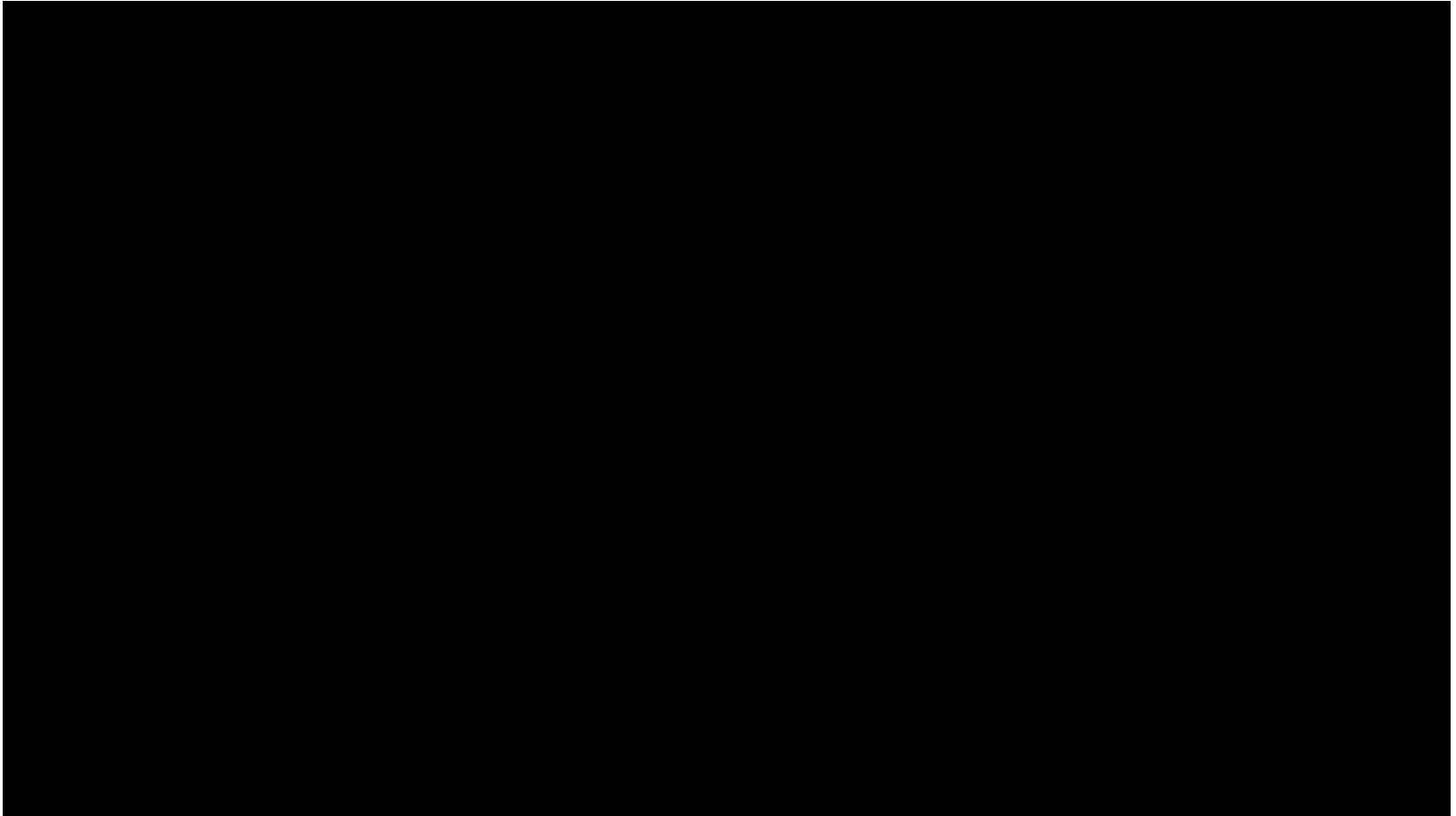


## 3a Component 1

# Language Priority









## Video: 3N Strategy

Adult enters into  
child's independent  
play & scaffolds  
with language.

Look for the  
Notice, Nudge, &  
Narrate labels.

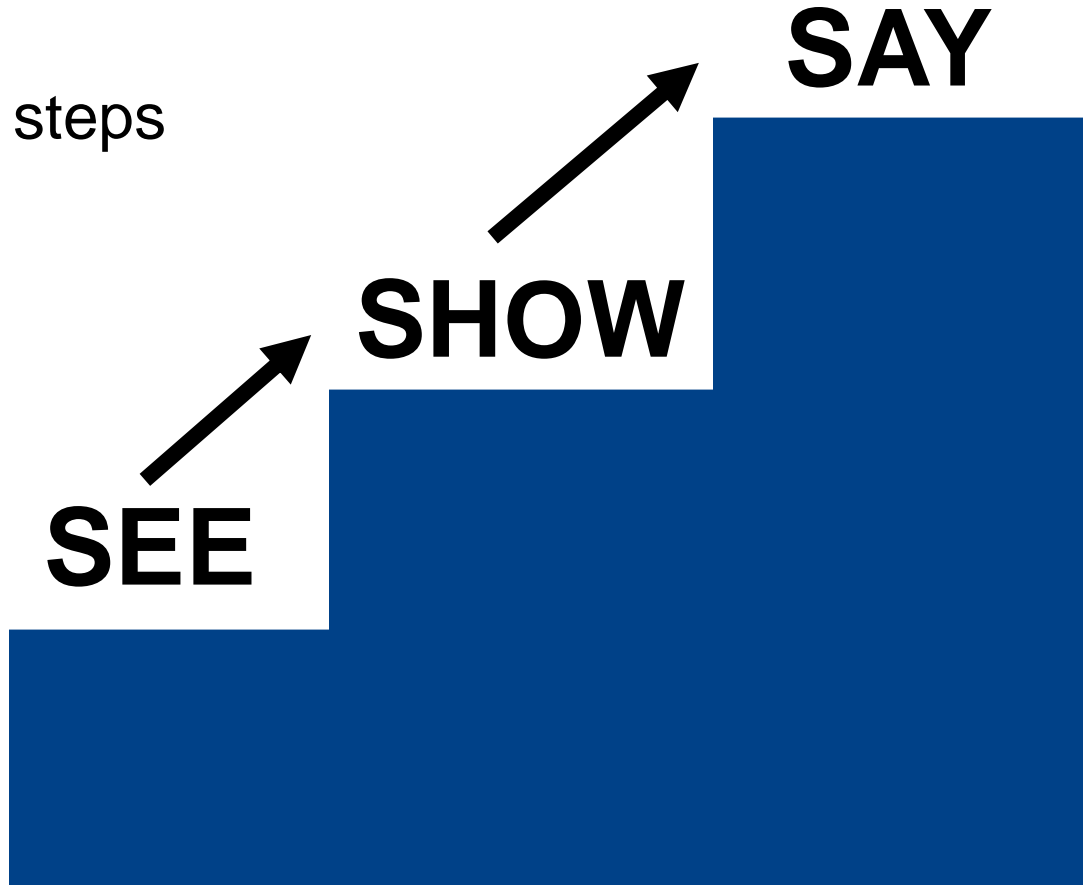




**3a** Component 2

# Conversational Reading

- It goes back-and-forth, like a conversation
- It goes up steps

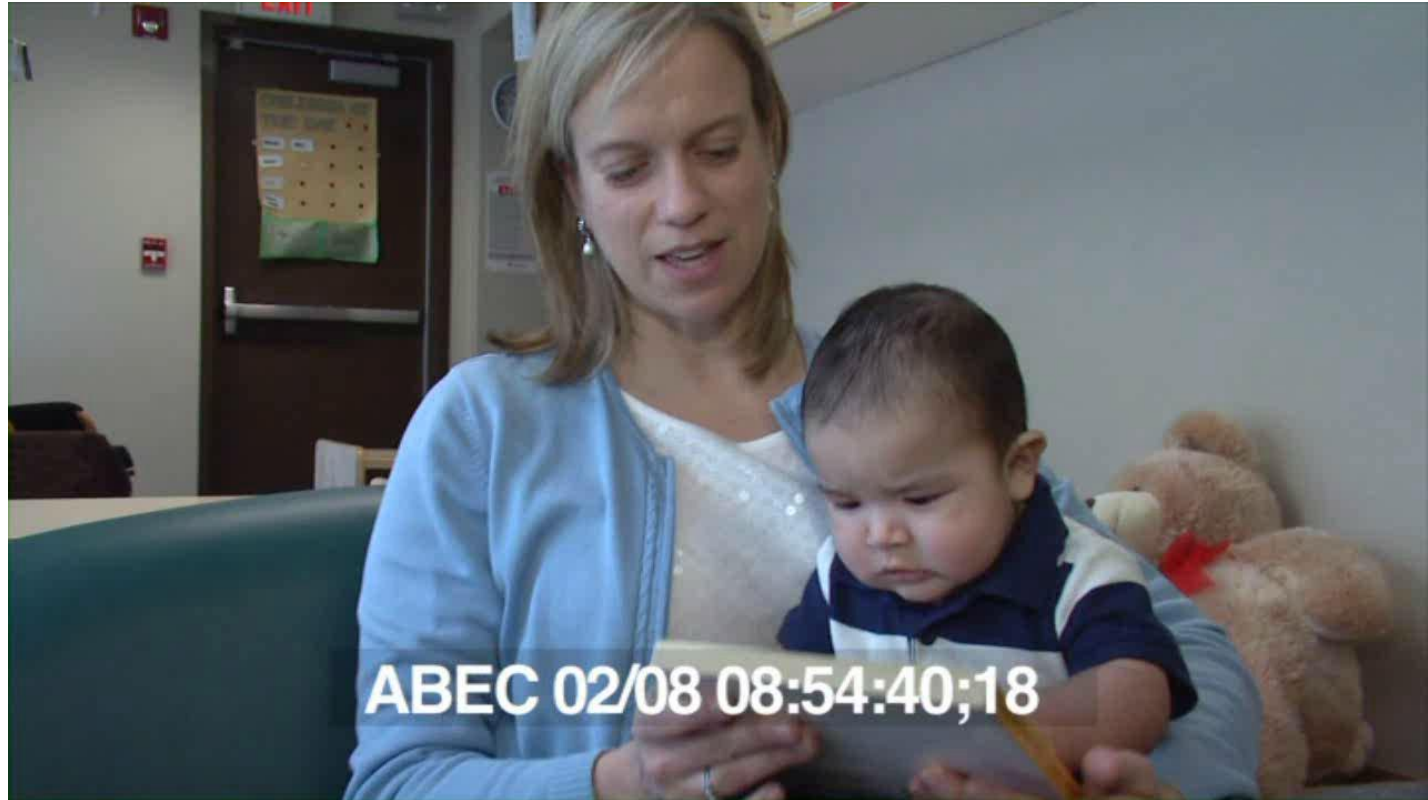




## Joint attention:

At first follow the child's lead – match your attention to his

Later, see if the child will follow your lead and match his attention to yours

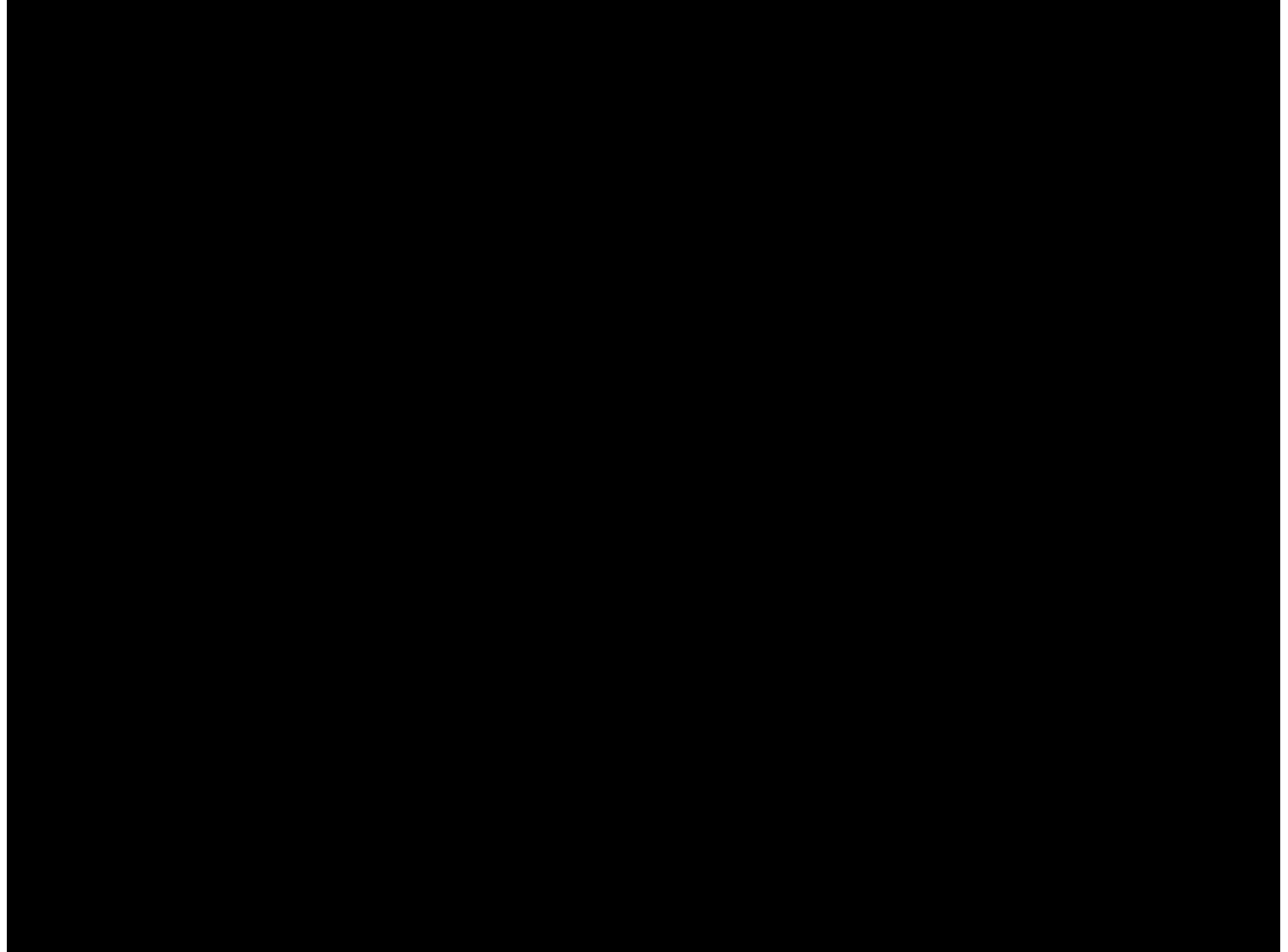




Conversational  
Reading

Galiwinku, NT

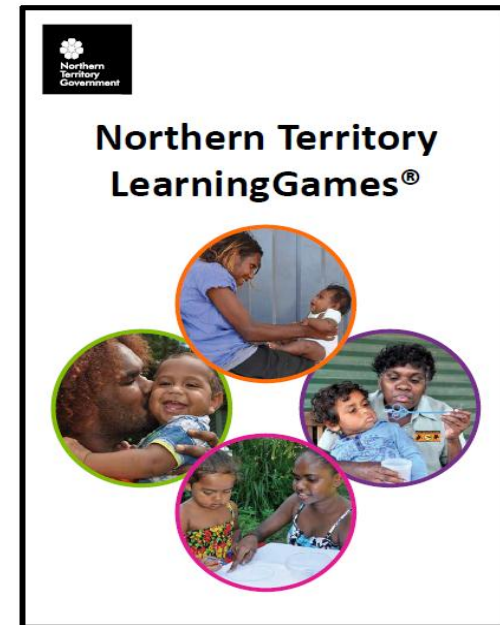
In language





**3a** Component 3

**LearningGames®**



ASG LearningGames® - <http://www.marcom.com.au>

NT LearningGames® - [earlychild.det@nt.gov.au](mailto:earlychild.det@nt.gov.au)

Game 16

## Ride a Horsie

*Ride a horsie up  
and down!*

Do a special action on the same  
one or two words in a rhyme  
and see if your baby notices.

Your baby will learn to look  
forward to certain words and  
their matching actions.

What the adult  
might say  
(the “Talk”)

1 sentence  
explaining  
the activity

Picture showing  
appropriate position for  
adult and child

1 sentence  
telling why it  
is important





## Why this is important

Babies enjoy all kinds of rhythm games. By moving your baby in a special way when you say a word in a song, your baby will learn to look forward to the particular word that signals the special event. This helps your baby learn that words can tell her what is happening to her. Hearing a rhyme repeated and moving to it in the same fun way gives her confidence in her ability to predict what will happen next.

## What you do

- Hold your baby on your lap as you say the rhyme: *Ride-a-horsie, ride-a-horsie, ride him into town. Ride-a-horsie, ride-a-horsie, up and down.* Gently bounce her to the rhythm of the rhyme.
- Bounce your baby high when you say *up*; when you say *down*, bounce her low.
- Make eye contact with your baby so that she can see your smiling face and you can see what she is feeling during the game.
- Repeat the rhyme and movements several times, then try pausing before saying *up and down*. She may show you she knows what will happen next by laughing, kicking her feet, or trying to move her body high and low.

## Let's read together!

*Up!*  
by Kristine O'Connell George

Fuller, bullet-point description of what the teacher or parent does

A book that relates to this game

Fuller explanation of why the activity is important and what later skills it is building toward

## Another idea

Try the game using other songs and rhymes such as "This is the Way the Farmer Rides," which uses changing rhythms and motions. Choose a special word or words and move your baby in a different way when you sing those words in the song.

Example of a variation or more advanced version of the game

What the adult  
might say  
(the “Talk”)

Pictures showing  
appropriate position for  
adult and child

**GAME 16** Kanga Hopping



Hold baby on your lap looking at you.

---

*Kanga hopping all around.*



Sing a song and bounce.  
*“Kanga hopping  
all around.  
Kanga hopping  
up and down!”*

---

*Kanga hopping up ...*



Bounce high when you say, “up.”

---

*... and down*



Bounce low when you say, “down.”  
Smile.

Short  
sentence  
explaining  
the activity

## GAME 16

Another Time



Play many days.  
Then stop before you say “up.”  
Baby wants you to continue.  
How does he show it?

Explanation of why the activity is important and what later skills it is building toward

### Baby learns

- to enjoy games with a rhythm or beat
- you say a word and an action happens
- to look forward to special words
- if you stop, baby tells you to go ahead

Variations on the game or more advanced version of the game

### More ideas

Move baby in different ways - in a circle, around and around.  
Sing and clap hands to the beat.  
Tap a rhythm on a tin.  
Stop and see if baby shows she wants you to continue.

A sentence about family strengths

*Families have lots of ways to teach baby to predict.*

Parent & Child

Family Liaison Officer





## Game 94. What's Gone? Age 30 mos.

How does this game use  
Language Priority?

How does it prepare  
children to succeed in  
school?

Game 94

## What's Gone?

*I've hidden something!*

*Let's see if you can remember what was here.*

Take away a toy from a group and let your child tell you which one is gone.

Your child will notice things a little more carefully and begin to remember and name something when it is missing.

THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM®  
Learning Games™  
Copyright 2007 Joseph Sparling



## Game 94. What's Gone?

What did the  
little girl not  
know how to  
do at the  
beginning of  
the game?



#94:  
What's  
Gone?





**3a** Component 4

# Enriched Caregiving

Each routine or activity has  
a **CARE** component, an **EMOTIONAL** component,  
*and*  
an **EDUCATIONAL** component



**CARE**

+



**EMOTION**

+



**EDUCATION**

=

## Enriched Caregiving





## Enriched Caregiving – Mealtimes

See if the adult:

- Describes what is happening
- Names things
- Asks questions
- Teaches words such as “more”

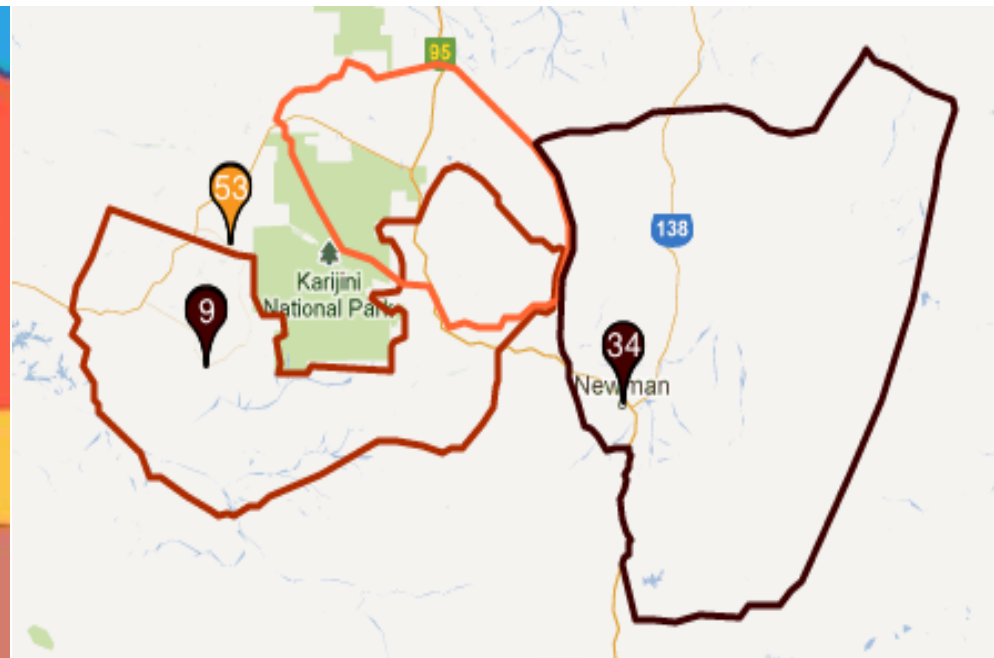
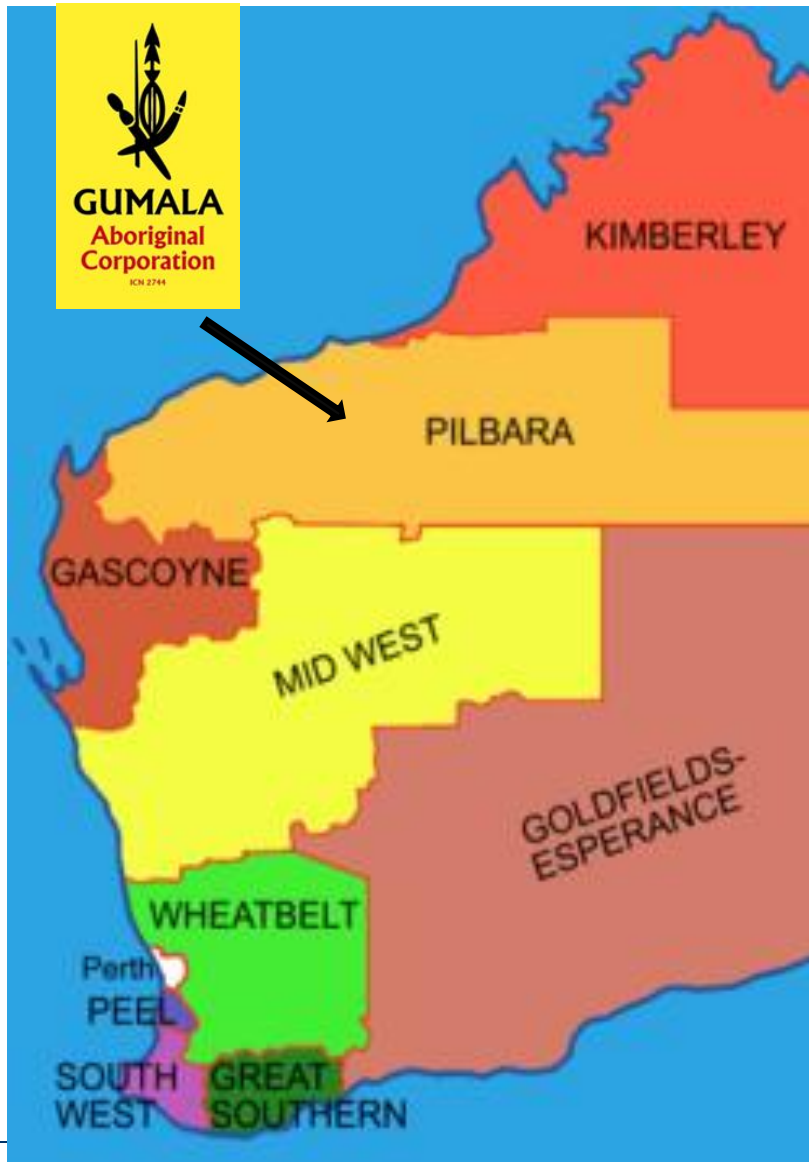




**Where is it being used?**



# 3A in the PILBARA, WA



The TRADITIONAL LANDS of  
The INNAWONGA  
BANYJIMA and  
NYIYAPARLI PEOPLE.



- Supported by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Victoria government:
  - Professional Learning in Child Care and Preschool
  - Professional Learning in Family Day Care Schemes





# Winnipeg, Manitoba, CANADA



IAGHLLAN Geographix<sup>SM</sup> Santa Barbara, CA (800) 929-4MAP





3a

# Family Booklets



- Could these be useful to MCH nurses?



Each booklet is 20 pages with large pictures and brief text



THE UNIVERSITY OF  

---

MELBOURNE