

Research About Language in Children, Ages 1 to 4, in Stable Households by Economic Group

Number of words exposed to	Economic group	Affirmations (strokes)	Prohibitions (discounts)
13 million words	Welfare	1 for every	2
26 million words	Working class	2 for every	1
45 million words	Professional	6 for every	1

Source: *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* by B. Hart & T. R. Risley.

In fact, Hart and Risley found that by age 3 children from professional, educated families have heard at least 30 million more words than children from less educated, welfare families.²⁷

Based on this work, a number of researchers have studied the relationship of school outcomes based on early language experience. They found that early language exposure predicted subsequent verbal ability, receptive and spoken language, and academic achievement through the third grade.²⁸

The use of formal register is further complicated by the fact that these students don't have the vocabulary or the knowledge of sentence structure and syntax to use formal register. When student conversations in casual register are observed, much of the meaning comes not from the word choices, but from the nonverbal assists. To be asked to communicate in writing without the nonverbal assists is a formidable, even overwhelming, task, which most students from poverty tend to avoid. Writing, at least initially, has very little meaning for them.²⁹

DISCOURSE PATTERNS IN FORMAL AND CASUAL REGISTER

The pattern of registers is connected to the second issue: the patterns of discourse. Discourse will be discussed here with two different meanings. The first meaning is the manner in which the information is organized. In the formal register of English, the pattern is to get straight to the point.³⁰ In casual register, the pattern is to go around and around and finally get to the point. For students who have no access to formal register, educators become frustrated with the tendency of these students to meander almost endlessly through a topic. But this is simply the manner in which information is organized in casual register.

In middle class, family diagrams tend to be drawn as shown in the first diagram that follows. The notion is that lineage is traceable and that a linear pattern can be found.

In generational poverty (second diagram), the mother is the center of the organization, and the family radiates from that center. Although it can happen that the mother is uncertain of the biological father, most of the time the father of the child is known.⁶⁶ The second family diagram is based on a real situation. (Names have been changed.)

In this pattern, Jolyn has been legally married three times. Jolyn and Husband #1 had no children. Jolyn and Husband #2 had one child, Willy. They divorced. Husband #2 eventually married the woman he lived with for several years, and they had a child together. She also had a son from a previous marriage. Willy has a common-law wife, Shea; Shea and Willy have a daughter. Jolyn and Husband #3 lived together several years before they were married, and they have a son named M. J. When M. J. was 13 he had a child with a 13-year-old girl, but that child lives with the girl's mother. Husband #3 is living with a younger woman who is pregnant with his child.

DIAGRAM OF MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILY

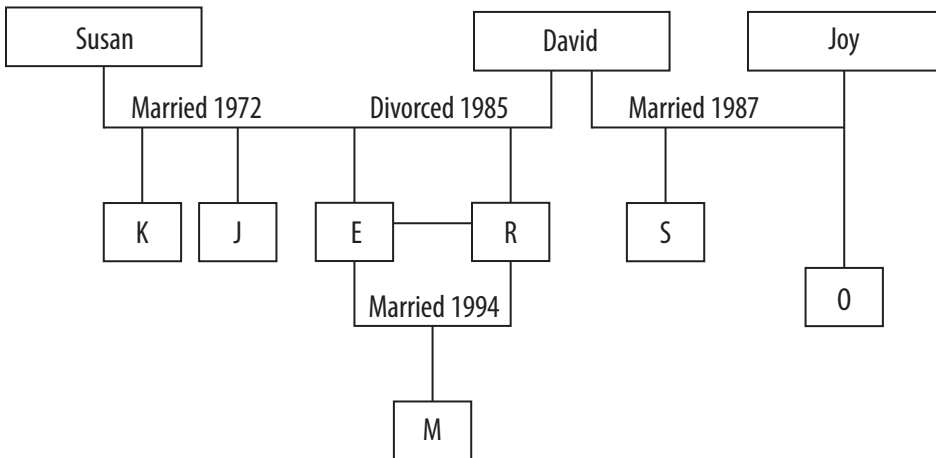
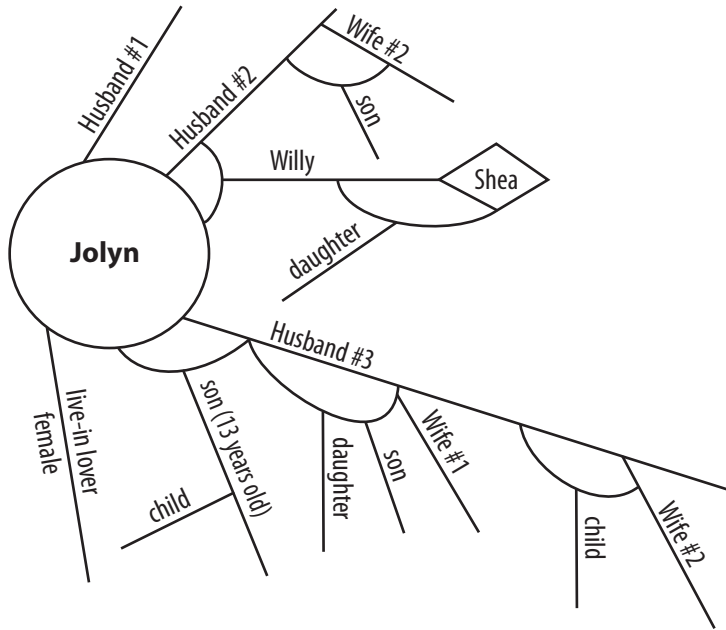


DIAGRAM OF FAMILY FROM GENERATIONAL POVERTY



As noted, *the mother is invariably at the center*, though she may have multiple sexual relationships. Many of her children also will have multiple relationships, which may or may not produce children. The basic pattern is the mother at the heart of things, with nearly everyone having multiple relationships, some legally recognized and some not. Eventually the relationships become intertwined. It wouldn't be out of the question for your sister's third husband to become your brother's ex-wife's live-in boyfriend. Also in this pattern are babies born out of wedlock to children in their early teens; these youngsters are often raised by the grandmother as her own children. For example, the oldest daughter has a child at 14. This infant becomes the youngest child in the existing family. The oldest daughter, who is actually the mother of the child, is referred to as her sister—and the relationship is a sibling one, not a mother-daughter one.⁶⁷

But the mother or maternal grandmother tends to keep her biological children. Because of the violence in poverty, death tends to be a prominent part of the family history. But it's also part of the family present because the deceased plays such a role in the memories of the family. It's important to note when dealing with the family patterns who is alive and who is dead—because in the discussions they are often still living (unless you, the listener, know differently).⁶⁸

PARTICIPATION OF THE STUDENT

While the teacher or administrator is analyzing, the student must analyze as well. To help the student do so, this four-part questionnaire is given to the student for completion. This has been used with students as young as second semester of first grade. Children in poverty have the most difficulty with Question #3. Basically, they see no other choices available than the one they have made.

In going over the sheet with the student, the educator is urged to discuss other choices that could have been made. Students often know only one choice. They don't have access to another way to deal with the situation. For example, if I slam my finger in the car door, I can cry, swear, hit the car, be silent, kick the tire, laugh, stoically open the car door, groan, etc. I have a wide variety of choices.

NAME: _____

1. What did you do? _____
2. When you did that, what did you want? _____
3. List four other things you could have done instead of the choice you made.
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
4. What will you do next time? _____

THE LANGUAGE OF NEGOTIATION

One of the biggest issues with students from poverty is the fact that many children in poverty must function, in effect, as their own parents. They parent themselves and others—often younger siblings. In some instances they also act as parent to the adult in the household.

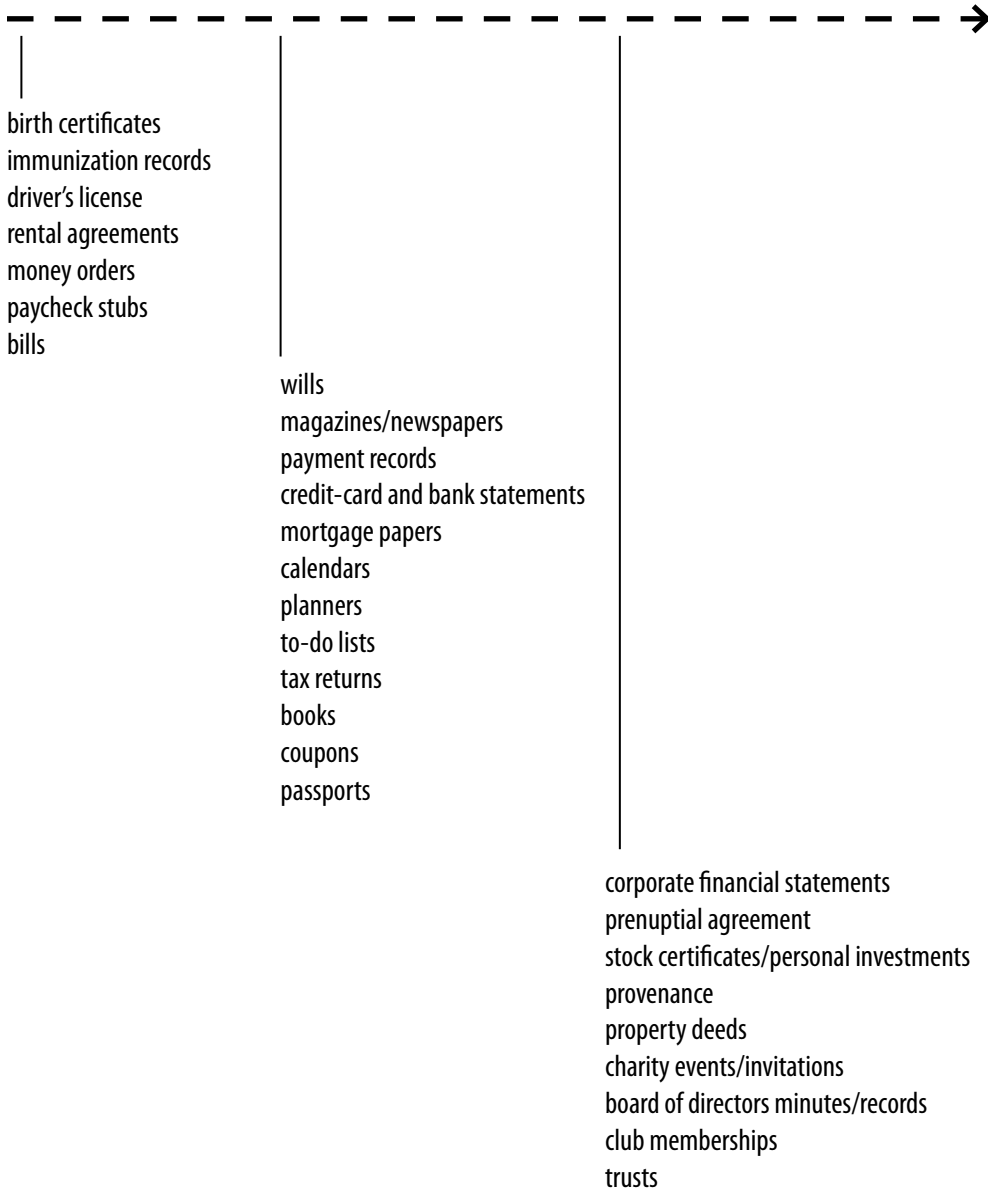
Inside virtually everyone's head are three internal voices that guide the individual. These voices are the child voice, the parent voice, and the adult voice. It has been my observation that individuals who have become their own parent quite young seldom have an internal adult voice. They have a child voice and a parent voice, but not an adult voice.¹¹⁹

ABSTRACT ITEMS AND THEIR CONCRETE REPRESENTATIONS

ABSTRACT ITEM	REPRESENTS
Grades	The “ticket” to get into college, a better job, more money
House deed	The physical property
Address	The physical location
Social Security number	The person (a way to keep track of people on paper)
Daily to-do list	Tasks to be accomplished that day
Clock or calendar	Abstract time
State assessment	Knowledge base and personal vocabulary; a representation of shared understandings for communication
Homework	Ability to complete a task in a given time frame in order to establish understandings
Insurance papers	An external support system that provides money, assistance, and expertise for unusual circumstances, health, etc.
Driver’s license	The right to physically operate a vehicle
TV guide	The shows or programs
Photograph	The person (a photo doesn’t breathe; it’s a two-dimensional representation of the person)
Letters in alphabet	Symbols that represent physical sounds that together make up words
Numbers	Symbols that represent quantity
Musical notations	Symbols that represent sounds and timing
Road map	Objects, roads, etc., in physical space
Sonogram	A three-dimensional representation of an object
MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)	A three-dimensional representation of a body, body part, etc. (it isn’t the body, but it represents the body)
Trust document	A legal entity (has its own Social Security number) that pays taxes, owns property, and identifies how assets will be held and distributed over time
Student handbook	Paper version of the appropriate behaviors that are to be used
Teacher contract	A legal document that establishes expectations for teachers’ compensation, benefits, terms of employment, etc.
Menu	The food choices in a restaurant (it isn’t the food itself)

Continuum of Paper Documents

As your resources grow and become more complex, the amount of paper documents in a household indicates to some extent your familiarity and comfort with the paper world.



FUTURE STORY	NAME:
<p>You are 10 years older than you are now. You are the star of a movie. What are you doing? Who is with you?</p> <p>Circle any of these that are in your future story: children, job, career, marriage/partnership, health, wealth, travel, living in a city, town, rural area, another country, vehicles, hobbies, sports, music, movies, college, technical school, military, church/religion, Internet, video games, friends, family, other.</p>	
<p>For which of these reasons do you want to graduate from high school?</p> <p>Keep track of money, I will know I am getting paid correctly, so I can go on to college or military or technical school, to get a better job, to take care of my parents or siblings, to afford my hobbies, to pay for my vehicle, to take care of my children, other.</p>	
<p>What do you enjoy doing and would do even if you did not get paid for it? What do you need to do so you can do that and get paid for doing it?</p>	
<p>Who are the friends and adults who will help you get your future story?</p>	
<p>WRITE OUT YOUR FUTURE STORY AND INCLUDE HOW EDUCATION WILL HELP YOU GET IT.</p>	
Signature:	DATE:

For more on these eight key issues/strategies, see the books *Under-Resourced Learners* and *Research-Based Strategies* (www.ahaprocess.com).

WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION MEAN IN THE SCHOOL OR WORK SETTING?

- The focus in schools needs to be on learning and on evaluation of student work.
- Make 80% of the grade based on content and 20% based on the processes the student must use or steps the student must take to do the assignment.