

Panel Discussion
Partnering to Facilitate Language and Literacy:
Capitalizing on Diverse Home Learning Environments

Learning Outcomes, Panelist Bios and Moderator Bio

Learning Outcomes:

1. Participants will identify diverse home learning environments
2. Participants will describe partnerships that support language and literacy in diverse communities
3. Participants will label three caregiver practices which support language and literacy growth

Panelists

Ameer Baraka

Ameer Baraka is an award-winning, Daytime Emmy-nominated actor, celebrated author, dyslexia advocate, youth mentor, and prison coach. Born into humble beginnings in New Orleans, Louisiana, Ameer's early life was marked by challenges, leading him in and out of the prison system as a youth. Diagnosed with dyslexia in his mid-twenties while incarcerated, Ameer overcame illiteracy and discovered the transformative power of education—a pivotal experience that shaped his mission to uplift and inspire others. Ameer has forged a successful acting career, currently on BET's hit show ZATIMA, where he plays the compelling role of Jeremiah. His credits include starring in productions such as American Horror Story: Coven, Tales of the Walking Dead, and A House Divided. He has shared the screen with Hollywood legends such as Angela Bassett, Kathy Bates, Eddie Griffin, and Academy Award winner Forest Whitaker, earning a reputation for delivering captivating performances. His journey from hardship to stardom is as inspiring as the roles he portrays. Beyond the screen, Ameer Baraka has dedicated his life to empowering at-risk youth, especially those in underserved communities. Through mentorship programs, he guides young people away from crime and toward education, while also working with incarcerated youth to teach life skills and instill hope for a better future.

Ameer's advocacy has reached national and international platforms. He testified before the U.S. Senate, sharing his powerful story to raise awareness about dyslexia and its societal impact. Additionally, he has spoken at Harvard University, inspiring audiences with his journey of redemption, resilience, and the transformative power of literacy. His work and story have been featured in numerous prominent publications, including Forbes, where his advocacy for dyslexia awareness and community support was spotlighted. His life has also been covered by outlets like ABC News and BET, amplifying his voice as a leader and changemaker. His appearance on Oprah Winfrey's Blackboard Wars further highlighted his dedication to improving education and opportunities for youth in New Orleans.

Ameer's mission goes beyond mentorship. He collaborates with law enforcement agencies, providing racial bias training to help officers address implicit prejudices, and travels globally to speak at universities, corporations, and youth organizations. His unwavering commitment to education and empowerment continues to inspire change and uplift communities. Ameer Baraka's life is a testament to the power of perseverance, education, and faith. From the Louisiana State Penitentiary to testifying before Congress to addressing future leaders at Harvard, his story serves as a beacon of hope, proving that no obstacle is too great to overcome. Whether on screen, in classrooms, or on global stages, Ameer's message is clear: with determination and support, anyone can transform their life and the lives of others.

Dr. Samantha Ghali (virtual)

Samantha Ghali, PhD, CCC-SLP, is an NIH T32 Postdoctoral Fellow at the Medical University of South Carolina and a postdoctoral affiliate at the University of Kansas. Dr. Ghali's programmatic research focuses on responsive measurement of multilingual children's morphosyntactic and lexical skills at the interface of multiglossia and literacy. Specifically, Dr. Ghali partners with local communities to develop language assessments to address over- and under-identification of language disorders in multilingual families. Currently, Dr. Ghali investigates lexical processing in multilingual children with and without language disorders via eye tracking. Dr. Ghali's research program is focused on the development of reliable tools for early assessment of language disorders. Dr. Ghali is also serving her second consecutive term on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (Office of Early Childhood) Provider Partnership Cohort, composed of stakeholders across Missouri's flagship early intervention program, Missouri First Steps.

Dr. Rebecca Landa

Rebecca Landa, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-CL, ASHA-H, is the founder and executive director of Kennedy Krieger Institute's Center for Autism Services, Science and Innovation (CASSI™). She is Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Dr. Landa's clinical work, experience training professionals and pre-service interventionists, and her developmental science, intervention, and implementation science research have resulted in advances such as the establishment of guidelines for clinical practice, demonstration of efficacy of the Early Achievements intervention approach, and development of innovative communication/ language measures. As part of her commitment to narrowing the research-to-practice gap, Dr. Landa also established Bundle of Learning® and developed an LMS-based early communication intervention module for speech-language pathology graduate students and practitioners.

Hesper Holland, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Hesper is a speech-language pathologist with over 20 years experience working in a variety of settings including education, home health, and a university clinic. Currently she serves as an Assistant Professor and Assistant Program Director at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Lubbock, TX. Areas of professional interest and research include preschool-speech and language disorders, AAC, and treatment and assessment of individuals with complex communication needs.

Brittany Hall, PhD, CCC-SLP, LSLs Cert. AVT

Dr. Brittany Hall is an Assistant Professor and Program Director in the Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. Dr. Hall's research focuses on early language development, aural habilitation, and the application of evidence-based practices in clinical settings. This research directly informs her commitment to improving communication outcomes for young children, as she strives to translate research findings into effective clinical interventions.

Dr. Hall has a strong background in clinical practice, having worked as a speech-language pathologist in school, private practice, and university clinic settings. She enjoys mentoring the next generation of speech-language pathologists and is dedicated to advancing the field of communication sciences and disorders.

Moderator

Dr. Hia Datta is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) at Molloy University, New York. She also serves as the Ph.D. and Undergraduate Program director for CSD in Molloy University. She obtained her Ph.D. from CUNY Graduate Center and completed her post-doctoral fellowship at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. Her research is focused on brain bases of language processing using Event Related Potentials in children and adults as well as

individuals with aphasia as well as diversity, equity and inclusion as it relates to CSD. She teaches courses in Neural Bases of Communication, Adult Neurogenic Disorders, Cultural Linguistic Diversity in CSD and Research.