

# Talk to me, Baby!

Supporting early language  
and literacy



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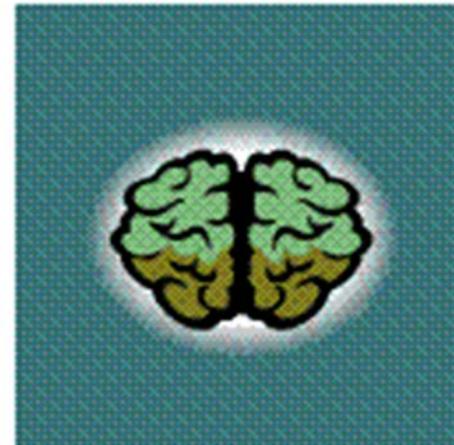
Manitoba 

# Today:

- review practical research-based strategies that will help to promote children's oral language development and emergent literacy, in intentional, play-based language rich environments.

# Brain Science

- “. . . the early years of child development set the stage for learning, behaviour and health throughout the life cycle”  
(McCain and Mustard)



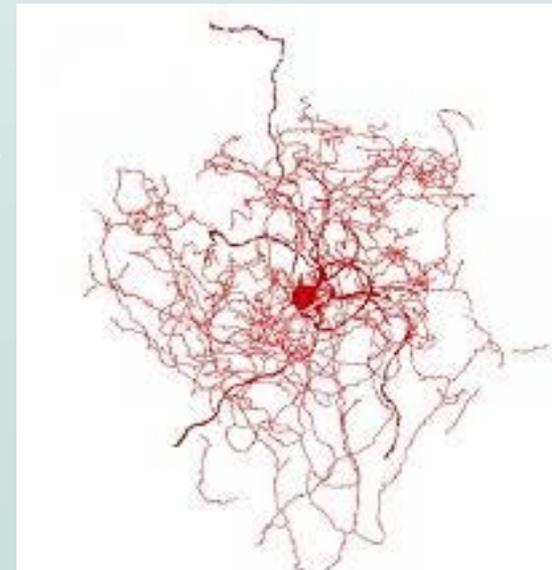
- **From birth through about age three years, over 700 new neurons form in the child's brain each second!**

(Center on the Developing Child,  
“Brain Architecture”).

# Serve and Return

- The back-and-forth process between parent and baby (or between teacher and student) is fundamental to the wiring of the brain, especially when children are young.
- “Serve and return interactions shape brain circuitry.”

(Center on the Developing Child,  
“Serve and Return”).



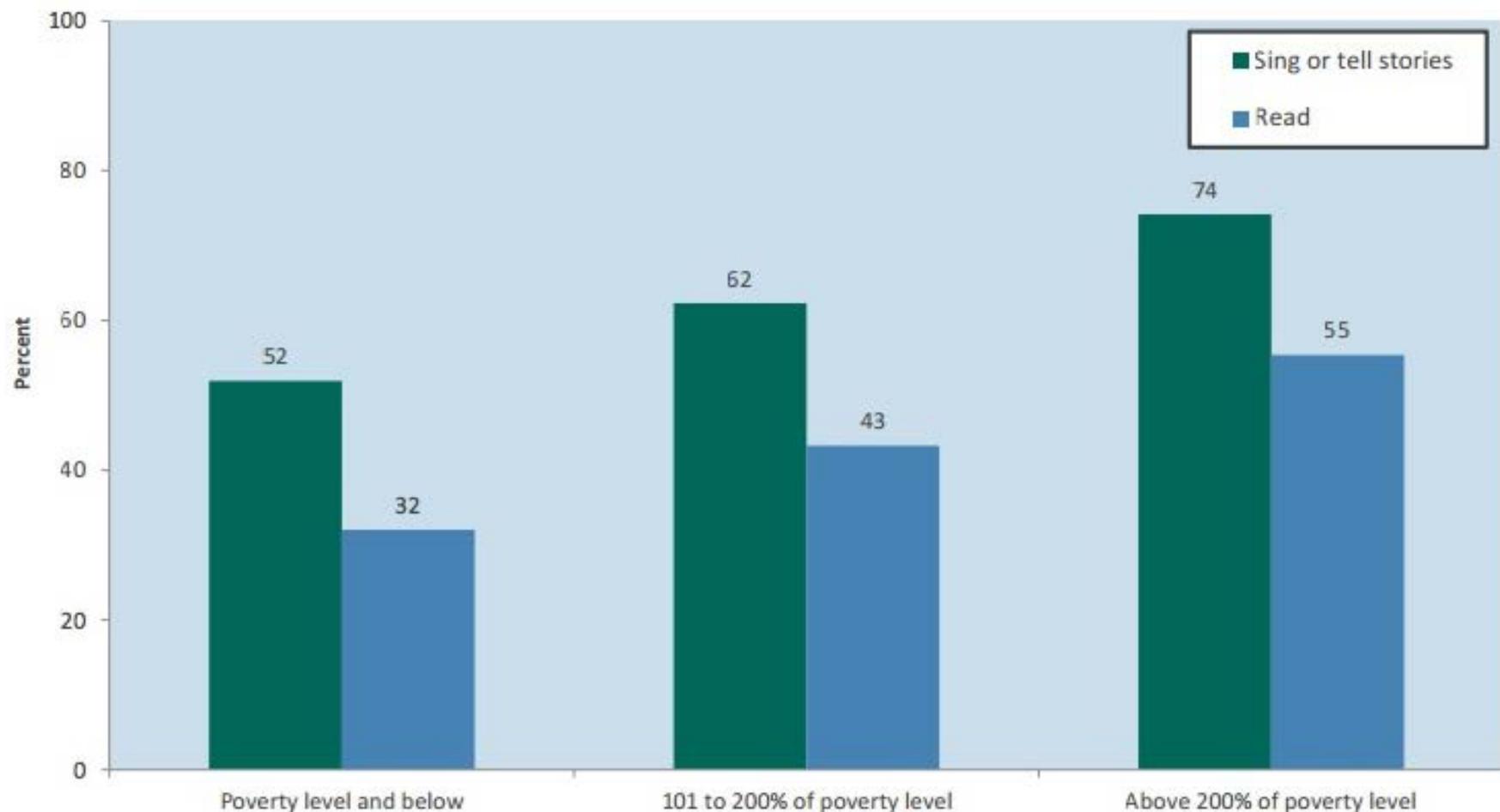
# Serve and Return

Also needed for children

- to regulate their emotions
- develop language
- gross motor skills (such as learning to sit, stand, and walk)
- fine motor skills (such as learning to hold a pencil and tie shoes).

# The 30M word gap

**Percentage of Children, Ages Birth through Two, Who Had A Family Member Read, Sing, or Tell Them Stories Everyday in the Past Week, by Poverty Level: 2011/12**



# Brain Science

- language and brain development consequences are tied to how often children engage in back-and-forth (serve-and-return) conversation with those around them, rather than how many words they hear.

# Interventions

- Oral language interventions for children in the 0 – 3-year old age range are more effective than interventions for 3 – 5 year-old children.
- intervening **earlier** rather than **later** is more advantageous for enhancing children's language development.
- The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) 2008  
[http://familieslearning.org/pdf/nelp\\_qa.pdf](http://familieslearning.org/pdf/nelp_qa.pdf)

# Oral language curriculum

- The use of a specific oral language curriculum does not impact children's developmental outcomes.



phonemic awareness?

focus on constrained skills?

letter knowledge?

# Oral language curriculum?

- Research shows the importance of **unconstrained skills** as predictors of long-term literacy outcomes (after third grade).
  - language skills (vocabulary, grammar, and discourse skills)
  - general knowledge of the world.

Reading and Language in the Early Grades

Snow, Catherine E. and Matthews, Timothy J. 2016.

# Talking to **You!**

- Teacher-child dialogue is the essential teaching and learning context.
- The nature and quality of teacher interactional style is the critical factor in predicting children's outcomes.

Oral Language in Early Childhood and  
Primary Education (3-8 years)  
National Council for Curriculum and  
Assessment, 2012  
<http://www.ncca.ie>

# Specific teaching strategies

- What makes a real difference to children's vocabulary and emergent literacy?

# Specific teaching strategies

- **scaffolding** and **narrative talk**
- label, describe, or comment upon objects, actions or events to which the child is currently attending
- These strategies are facilitative of children's language development.

# Scaffolding

- intentionally make instructional decisions and take actions that build upon (or scaffold on) children's prior knowledge and skills, to further their learning
- understand that children vary in the amount and kinds of supports that are needed at any time in their respective zones of proximal development

# Narrative talk

- simply means adults and children are having conversations.
- respond to a child's question by asking for more information, giving the child new information.

# Narrative talk

- plan conversations that introduce new vocabulary words that relate to the topic of learning and enrich children's language throughout the day.
- provide examples of words and their meaning within an authentic context (such as play) in which the words make sense to children.

# What is the Abecedarian Approach?

- High-quality, individualized, relationship-based care
- Playful interactions between adult and child, with learning embedded
- Specific attention to individual children's development
- **Language focus**
- Strength-based approach to families

# Language Priority

- Emphasize language in every event of the day
- Use strategies to surround events with language, and to elicit responses from children
- Expand conversations (“Extended Discourse”)
- Use warm tone and positive affect
- Respond to children’s language overtures

# Abecedarian approach

- uses the **3N Strategy** to promote oral language

**Notice:** I notice you found a stick.

**Nudge:** What could you do with a stick?

**Narrate:** Oh, now you've got a lot of sticks. And you are poking them in the ground. That looks like a fence!



# Teacher talk

- quality of teachers' talk influences students' opportunities to learn—in particular, to learn the unconstrained language and content skills relevant to literacy.

# Teachers talk, children grow

When teachers of young children...

- use more sophisticated vocabulary
- engage children more actively in talk about books
- use more complex syntax themselves

Children show larger vocabularies, more complex grammar, and better reading skills even as late as fourth grade.

Reading and Language in the Early Grades

Snow, Catherine E. and Matthews, Timothy J. (2016)

# Specific teaching strategies

- What else makes a real difference to children's vocabulary and emergent literacy?
- **Storytelling** and **Story Acting**  
(Vivian Paley)
  - engage children
  - help them develop language & literacy skills (as well as self-regulation & peer cooperation) within the normal pattern of early years classrooms.



### ***1.1.3 Experiment with Language and Form***

**Share experiences, feelings, and thoughts; use a scribe when appropriate.**

### ***3.3.2 Record Information***

**Represent and share information and ideas; compose with a scribe.**

In dramatic play, language becomes more vivid and spontaneous, enabling children to connect, with greater fluency and curiosity, the words and phrases they know to new ideas.

– Paley, *Child's Work* 73

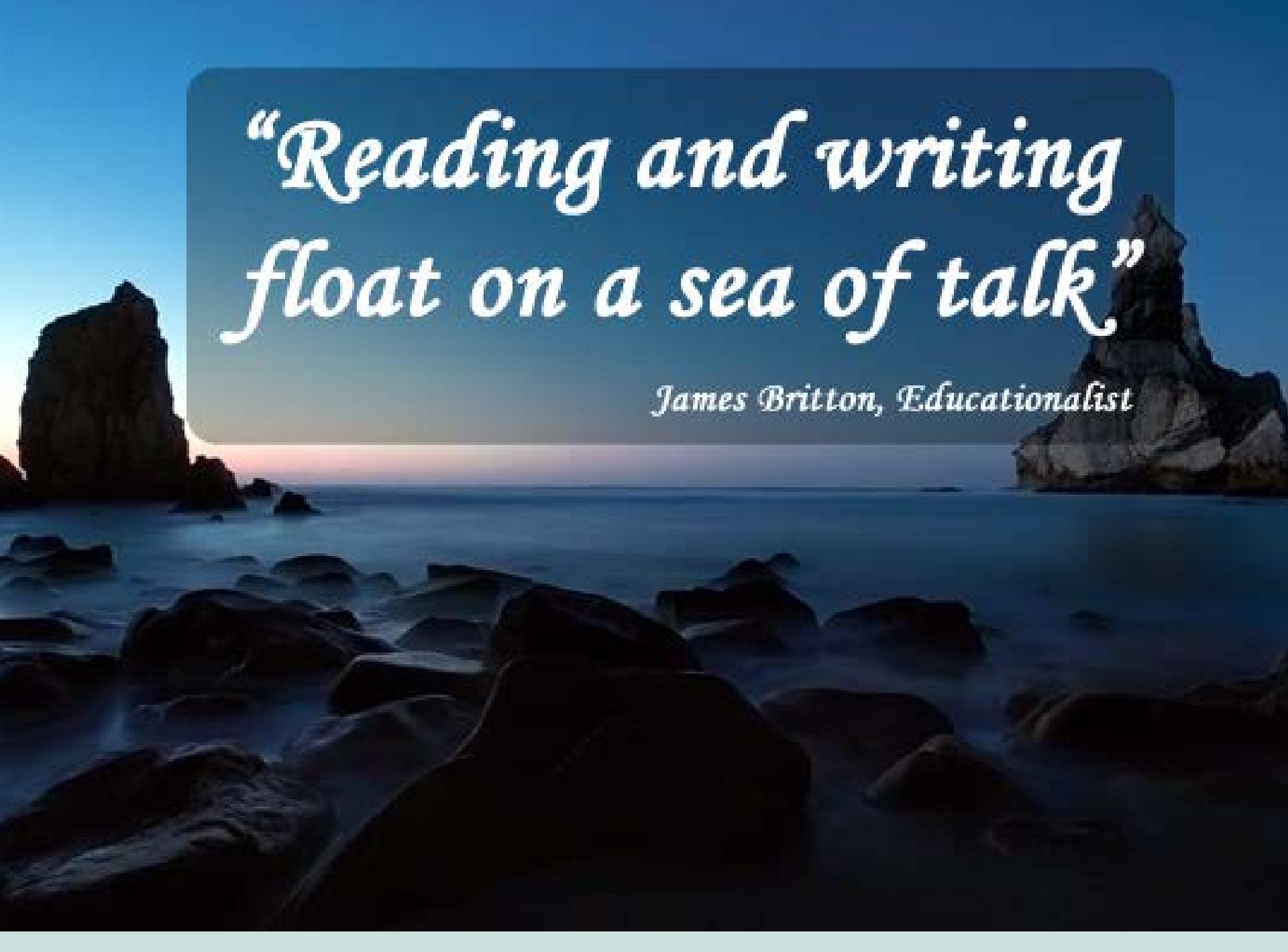
- Playful settings with a **balance** between child-initiated and adult-initiated activities are most conducive to children's oral language.
  - Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) 2002

- Studies confirm the increased complexity of language used by children in play-based programs.
  - understanding the structure of words
  - the meaning of words
  - vocabulary
  - ability to tell a story

# Pretend play and literacy

- Engaging in pretend play allows children to develop oral language skills, storytelling, vocabulary...as a means to early literacy development.

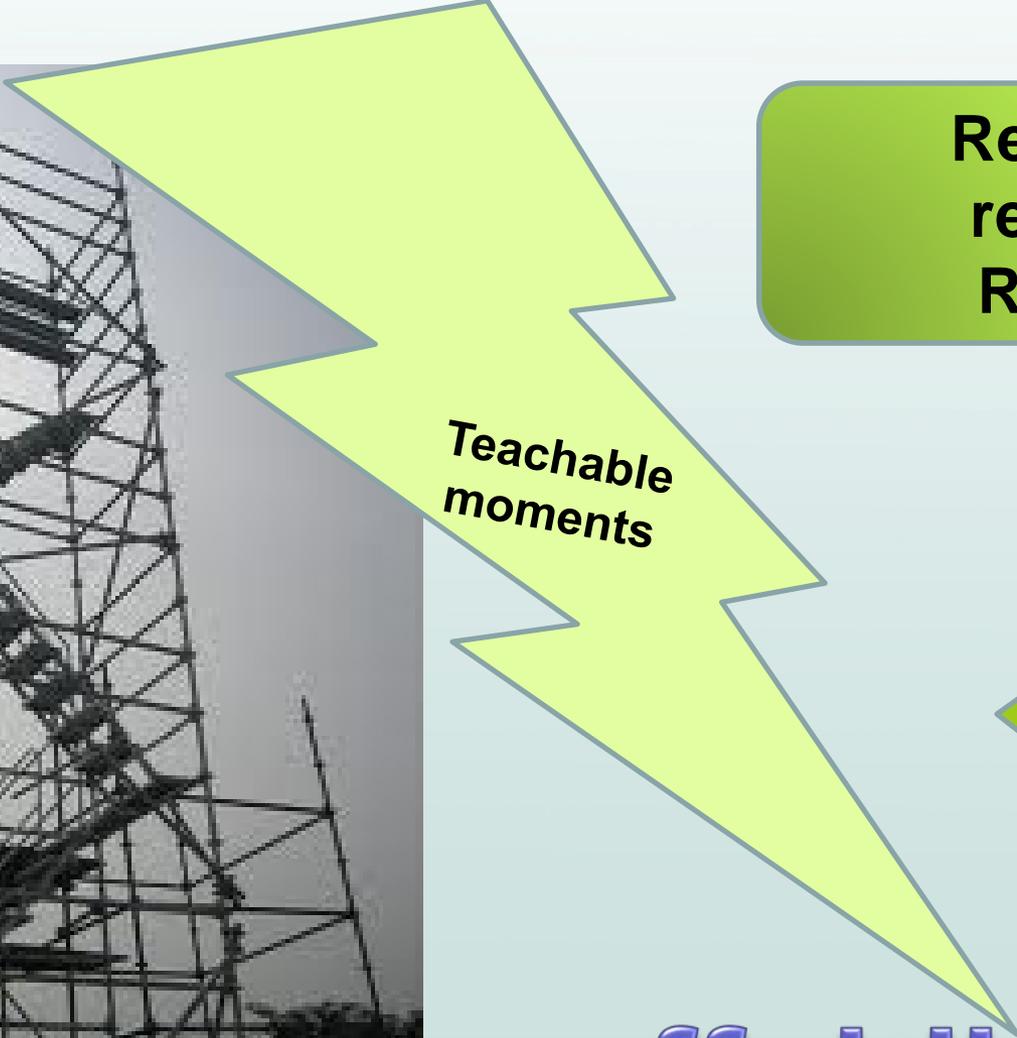
(Marie Clay, p. 31)



*“Reading and writing  
float on a sea of talk”*

*James Britton, Educationalist*

# How can we help?



Teachable  
moments

Read and  
reread...  
Repeat!

Talk  
talk  
talk!

scaffolding



# Final advice from Marie Clay

- Provide environments that are rich in talk, print, shared storytelling and reading
- Foster the development of vocabulary, early reading, and early writing for young children



# Keep in touch

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