

The Starling by VersaMe

The Starling is a wearable device, similar to a FitBit. Instead of counting steps, though, the Starling counts words.

The Starling is intended for age's birth through four and is meant to encourage parents to speak more to their child.

Chris and brother were inspired to create the Starling based on their previous experience in adult education. After working to train adult workers who lacked basic language and arithmetic skills in a previous business, they saw the need for earlier intervention. After researching and looking at different models Chris and his partners discovered the three decades of research about the importance of early language exposure on a child's brain development because brain development is front loaded so early in a person's life.

The invention of the smart phone is a big unknown in the area of parenthood research, but many signs point to it decreasing the amount of parent-child interaction, and therefore decreasing the amount of early language exposure some children may receive. The Starling, though, gives parents a system of accountability by introducing the ability to measure the number of words spoken to their child in a day.

The general population is unaware of the massive impact that early language intervention on a child's long-term success and well-being.

Many of the early beta testers of the Starling were surprised to find how "silent" they were around their children. Many stated that they thought they were speaking to their children much more than they actually were.

Chris came to an "aha" moment with concept for the Starling after trying to work with children in the K-12 sector for many years. After reading an article in *The Economist* magazine about the importance of early language intervention he realized why 50 years of education reform was not impacting our society. This is due to the fact that 90% of a child's brain development is completed by the time they begin kindergarten. He and his partners realized to fix education it requires getting outside and ahead of our education system.

The algorithms of the Starling have been designed to count the words that matter to a child's development such as words in a song sung to the child, mother-ese, and words of interaction. The Starling, though, disregards words that research has shown not to count as important such as background talk the child is not paying attention to, television, and others.

The entire purpose of the Starling is to positively encourage behavior change in the parent-child / caregiver-child interaction.

The Starling has been designed to work in a parent-child / caregiver-child environment. The hardware is certainly capable of being used in an educational environment, but the algorithms will need more development before it can be used effectively in this environment. Chris anticipates that it will be about three more months of algorithm development before the Starling is ready to be successful in the education or daycare setting.

The Starling listens and counts, but it does not record any words or conversations to protect the privacy of the parent-child relationship.

The Starling will give caregivers a chart of the amount of words received over the course of the day. The typical times when word counts are higher are in the morning and evening. This is due to the fact that children usually take a nap midday, but also the fact that the parent / caregiver may be working during the day. The parent can simply press a button on the device and a small light will show orange if the child has not hit their word goal for the day, and green if the child has reached their goal. Goals will be able to be set to make them scalable and achievable.

The Starling is helping to close the gap in our societies understanding of the long-term positive effects of early language intervention by giving caregivers and parents immediate feedback on their words spoken.

The Starling is designed to be used with ages birth through four, but Chris and his team anticipate that if a Starling is used with a child from a newborn age that the use for the Starling may not be as important by the age of 3 because the child will be highly verbal by that time and soliciting verbal engagement from the caregiver / parent.

VersaMe has just moved into manufacturing with the Starling and it is currently available for pre-order for a large discount of about 50% off at versame.com/crowdfunding. The VersaMe team anticipates having the product for order by April 2016. There will be continued updates to the Starlings capabilities to expand its abilities to work in different environments as well as measure different sets of data. The very next capability that VersaMe plans to add to the Starling is the ability for the device to differentiate between a child or adult voice or the ability to differentiate between a male or female voice.

If you have any questions regarding the Starling or feedback you can send it directly to chris@versame.com.