Outcomes of a Parent-Administered Early Literacy Intervention Program

Caroline Schierle, M.A., Cynthia Zettler-Greeley, Ph.D., & Laura Bailet, Ph.D
Nemours BrightStart!, Jacksonville, Florida

Introduction
Children who enter formal school without the basic necessary pre-reading skills remain behind their typically developing peers throughout school (Scarborough, 2009), and up to 40% of children enter kindergarten without these fundamental skills they need to be successful (Flesing, Kant, & Rosier, 2007). These numbers can be reduced dramatically with early identification and intervention (Torgesen, 2002), especially through the use of effective interventions designed to explicitly teach early literacy skills to help prevent reading difficulties in young children (Bailet et al., 2009; 2013; Zettler-Greeley, under review). Further, interventions that include a parent component have stronger effects than those focused on children exclusively (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Justice & Kaderavek, 2004).

This study evaluated the effects of a parent-administered early literacy intervention program, both independently and in combination with supplemental classroom instruction for pre-kindergarten children identified as at-risk for reading failure in order to examine whether working with parents will further help close the gap at-risk children and their typically developing peers prior to kindergarten entry. 318 children and their families were randomly assigned to one of four research conditions: child classroom instruction only, parent training only, combined child classroom intervention and parent intervention, or a no-treatment control group. Both classroom instruction and the parent training workshops focused on five critical early literacy components: oral language, print awareness, letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and emergent writing.

Method

Participants
- 318 4-year-old children in Volunteer Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) programs in northeast Florida at-risk for reading failure and their families randomized to receive:
  - Classroom intervention (n = 74)
  - Parent component (n = 77)
  - Child intervention & parent component (n = 83)
  - Screening only (no treatment control) (n = 84)
  - Mean qualifying fall pre-assessment of literacy and language scores (n = 84)

Results

Parent Component Activities

- Try It Together activities completed:
  - Both parent groups – 44.28
  - Parent component only – 41.17
  - Child intervention & parent component – 43.56

- In the combined child intervention & parent component group, number of activities predicted:
  - Get Ready to Read- Revised (GRTR-R) outcomes (p < .01):
    - Print knowledge (AP = .060, p < .05)
    - Letter Names (AP = .088, p < .05)
    - Letter Sounds (AP = .052, p < .05)
    - Blending (AP = .066, p < .05)

- Parents reported completing 79.75% of the total recommended activities (94) across the three parent meetings.
- 204 feedback calendars were returned across three meetings.

Group Comparisons

- Rhyming outcomes were significantly impacted by child and parent intervention (p < .05).
- All groups improved in letter names knowledge, classroom intervention showed a significant effect (p < .05).

Discussion

- Significant group differences found for letter names, letter sounds, rhyming, and GRTR-R outcomes (p < .05).
- The classroom intervention program historically has strong effects on rhyming. This effect was replicated in this study.
- Combined classroom intervention and parent component group had significantly higher rhyming percentage gains than other groups.
- Parents reported doing the highest percentage of activities that focused on rhyming skills. This finding suggests that parents and children chose to do more rhyming activities, possibly because of familiarity with rhyming, level of ease teaching rhyming skills, and child engagement and enjoyment of rhyming activities. All three books included in reading activities also contained rhymes, exposing children to the sounds of rhymes in activities beyond just the specific rhyming activities.
- Parents’ active involvement in children’s literature is related to rhyming through letter and vocabulary knowledge (Fog and Mann, 2003). Rhyming also sensitizes young children to phonological properties of words (Mayse, 2001) and facilitates vocabulary learning (Read, 2012). An intervention that helps parents to improve child rhyming outcomes may have indirect effects on phonological awareness and oral language skills.
- Parents may have more success teaching certain skills which they feel familiar and comfortable with and may need more intensive training in teaching more difficult skills.

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References


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