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**Measuring the Effectiveness of Using Print Resources to Teach
Dialogic Reading Strategies**

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Measuring the Effectiveness of Using Print Resources to Teach Dialogic Reading Strategies

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Abstract

Dialogic reading has been found to have a positive impact on young children's expressive language. During dialogic reading parents share books with their children by asking open-ended questions and expanding upon their children's comments. The current study addresses whether parents can learn dialogic reading strategies from an at-home print-based reading program without receiving any additional in-person or video-based training. Therefore, it addresses the question of whether using a print-based dialogic reading program can positively impact young children's expressive language skills. At the end of the program, children who participated in the at-home dialogic PARTNERS reading program did experience significant gains in expressive language compared to children whose parents did not receive training.

Keywords: Dialogic reading, parent involvement, early childhood education, early literacy

Introduction

Reading aloud to young children is a long accepted research-based practice that provides a wide variety of benefits. Some examples include increases in oral comprehension (Aaron, 1997), language acquisition (Snow and Ninio, 1994), and children's increased interest in reading (Morrow, 1983; Galda & Cullinan, 1991). These are just a few of the well-documented benefits of reading aloud. However, even though reading aloud has many benefits, it should not be the only type of reading parents do with their young children because reading aloud often limits children's language expression and discussion skills. Children are often passive listeners during the reading process.

Shared reading is an alternative to traditional reading aloud. During shared reading parents or teachers share books with children asking questions and talking about the book being read aloud. The benefits of this interactive approach to reading has also been widely researched and written about (Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008; Reese, Sparks, & Leyva, 2010). Discussing books with children results in significant growth in children's print recognition (Evans, Williamson, and Pursoo, 2008), vocabulary and language comprehension (Penimonti & Justice, 2010), as well as increases in children's oral language (Cunningham & Zibulsky 2011) and early literacy (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008).

Dialogic reading, a form of shared reading that encourages parents to ask open-ended questions and expand upon their child's comments, has been found to have a positive impact on young children's expressive language (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000), concepts about print (Sim, Berthelsen, Walker, Nicholson, & Fieding-Barnsley, 2014), attitude towards and interest in reading (Lacour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013; Pillinger & Wood, 2014), on-task verbalizations (Blom-Hoffman, Jessica; O'Neil-Pirozzi, Therese; Cutting, Joanna; Bissinger, Elizabeth, 2007), and vocabulary (Lonigan, Fischel, Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994). Dialogic reading is designed to encourage children's active participation in the reading process (Whitehurst, Arnold, Epstein, Angell, Smith, & Fischel, 1994), while utilizing parents as teachers encouraging their child to use increasingly complex word choices as their child's language develops (Snow, 1983). The behaviors parents utilize during dialogic reading: asking evocative questions, providing specific feedback, and progressively changing interactions based on their child's developing abilities have consistently been found to be effective in encouraging young children's language development (Vally, 2012).

Current Study

There is much research to support the use of dialogic reading training with parents of young children because of the benefits already discussed. However, there is no research about whether parents can successfully implement dialogic reading strategies without undergoing formal training. The current study looks

at the effectiveness of an at-home dialogic reading PARTNERS (Parents as Reading Teachers Nightly Encouraging Reading Success) Program implemented in six preschools in the United States. The PARTNERS Program provides parents materials designed to teach them how to implement dialogic reading strategies using books sent home each week.

Materials

The books in the PARTNERS Program provide detailed and varied illustrations and simple storylines including culturally relevant items children are familiar with that can be used for discussion and retelling. The books selected also support preschool skills needed according to The Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5. Therefore, they were chosen because of their appropriateness to address cognitive development, logical thinking, language development, emergent literacy, and social / emotional development. The 35 books included in the program are all included on the Top 100 Children's Books of All Time by Children's Books Guide.

Along with the book, parents receive accompanying materials called notes for parents. The notes for parents provide sample questions, vocabulary words, and other topics parents can address with each book. The notes also provide extension ideas that encourage parents to get creative with the story including math, social studies, art, and writing activities. Activities and questions provided are written to meet the needs of children who have beginning, developing, and advanced language skills thus allowing parents the ability to decide which types of questions and activities are appropriate for their child.

The notes for parents teach parents to utilize dialogic reading strategies following the acronym DARE. DARE stands for discuss, ask, read, and encourage. Parents are asked to share stories with their child over multiple days spending at least 10 – 15 minutes with their child several days each week. The sample questions provided in the notes vary in complexity. They follow the Question – Answer Relationship strategy (QAR). The most basic questions are Right There, easily answered by children by looking at the illustrations or listening to the story. Author and You questions require children to combine what the story or pictures tell us with their own experiences. Think and Search questions require children to search for answers in the pictures or story. And finally, On My Own questions are the most advanced and require children to answer questions based on their own experiences or knowledge. Parents choose questions based on their child's readiness.

Participants

The parents and children who participated in the study were from six different private preschools in the United States. Currently, most public schools in the United States only offer preschool for children who have exhibited some sort of delay or area of developmental concern. Therefore, one should not assume that just because the preschools in the program were private that they

were elite or served only affluent families. Five of the preschools were considered to be programs designed for working-class families. One preschool program was at a park district, two were church based, and two were neighborhood preschools. The final preschool was a private early childhood learning center that served upper-income families. There were no significant differences between groups of preschool children's expressive language skills according to the initial language assessment given prior to the start of the program.

A total of 114 parents and their children participated in the PARTNERS intervention. Sixty-four parent / child dyads were in the control group and did not participate in the program. Therefore, there were a total of 178 parent / child dyads included in this study. The two groups were very similar. The primary language spoken in the home of both groups was English (Control 95% / Intervention 97%). A majority of the homes included both a mother and father (Control 93% / Intervention 95%). There were at least 10 children's books in each home (Control 98% / Intervention 98%). Most of the parents were college graduates (Control Mothers (85%), Fathers (68%) / Intervention Mothers (78%), Fathers (73%). Many parents reported reading to their children at least 6 times each week (Control 73% / Intervention 63%).

Methodology

Students' expressive language was measured prior to the program's implementation using the picture-naming portion of the Individual Growth Developmental Indicators (IGDI) test. Students taking the picture-naming test are presented with pictures on individual cards and name as many objects as they can in one minute. The objects on the cards are things young children often come in contact with (ex. cat, bed). The number of words correctly identified and the number of words attempted are recorded. Students' picture naming ability was assessed prior to the start of the study and twelve weeks later at the conclusion of the intervention. The picture-naming portion of the IGDI has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of language development in young children (McConnell, Priest, Davis, & McEvoy, 2002).

Results

Table 1 shows that there were no statistically significant differences between the intervention and control groups regarding the number of words children were able to identify correctly on the IGDI administered at the beginning of the program. However, the control group did attempt significantly more words ($p < .01$).

Table 1. Words Correct and Attempted Prior to Intervention

	PARTNERS Program (n=114)	Control Group (n=64)
Ave. Words Correct	22.69	23.61
Ave. Words Attempted	25.63	27.66 *

*p < .01

After the twelve-week intervention, the picture-naming portion of the IGD I was again administered to all children. Both children participating in the PARTNERS Program and the control group made significant gains from pretest to posttest on the number of words they identified correctly and the number of words attempted. This is to be expected considering that all of the children were enrolled in a preschool program and received basic language and literacy instruction daily.

Table 2. Words Correct and Attempted Pre / Post Test Comparison

PARTNERS Program	Pre-test	Post-Test
Ave. Words Correct	22.69	32.04*
Ave. Words Attempted	25.63	35.06*
Control Group		
Ave. Words Correct	23.61	25.73*
Ave. Words Attempted	27.66	28.71**

*p < .01

**p < .05

Although both groups showed significant improvement in the number of words they identified correctly and attempted, children who participated in the PARTNERS Program experienced significantly greater increases in expressive language related to words identified correctly ($p < .01$) and attempted ($p < .01$) compared to children whose parents did not participate in the program (Table 3).

Table 3. Between Group Comparison of Words Correct and Attempted After the Intervention

	<i>PARTNERS Program (n=105)</i>	<i>Control Group (n=52)</i>
Ave. Words Correct	32.04**	25.73
Ave. Words Attempted	35.06**	28.71

** p < .01

Discussion

Traditionally dialogic reading programs provide parents either in-person (Huebner & Payne, 2010; Lacour, McDonald, Tissington, & Thomason, 2013) or video-based training (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994; Blom-Hoffman, O’Neil-Pirozzi, Cutting, & Bissinger, 2007; Briesch, Chafouleas, Lebel, & Blom-Hoffman, 2008; Pillinger & Wood, 2014; Sim, Berthelsen,

Walker, Nicholson, & Fiedling-Barnsley, 2014) in order to teach dialogic reading strategies. Video-based training is an economical way to provide training to parents and to overcome obstacles such as parents being unable to go to school to receive training due to lack of transportation, childcare, etc. However, researchers have questioned the effectiveness of video-based instruction in teaching expressive language skills such as those taught during dialogic reading (Briesch, Chafouleas, LeBel, & Blom-Hoffman, 2008). Therefore, many researchers have instead used in-person training when studying the effectiveness of dialogic reading.

The current study looked at whether parents could actually learn dialogic reading strategies themselves through print resources sent home as notes for parents designed to walk parents through the dialogic reading process. The print resources provided parents with support to weekly address what they should do before, during, and after sharing a book with their child.

Each week parents received a book with the accompanying notes. Before reading aloud, the notes told parents to discuss the book with their child including things such as asking what their child sees in the pictures, what their child thinks is going to happen, and questions their child might have. After discussing the pictures, parents were told to ask their child questions based on their child's interests, words or concepts they want to address, or questions relating the story to their child's background knowledge or experiences. These activities provided parents an opportunity to really talk with their child about his or her observations, questions, and things that were key to the text. Next, parents were told to read the book aloud. Finally, after reading aloud, parents were told to encourage their child to make text-to-self connections between the story and his or her own life, experiences, and knowledge.

The notes for parents seemed to be an effective tool to help parents understand how to implement guided reading strategies with their child. Now, more than ever before, parents of preschool-aged children in the United States need to understand how they can help to prepare their children for kindergarten and elementary school. With the adoption of the Common Core Curriculum in a majority of the states in America comes much greater demands for children's language and literacy skills going into kindergarten. The PARTNERS Program was effectively able to help parents utilize dialogic reading strategies related to Common Core skills such as answering questions about text, making connections between information in a text and personal experiences, using simple sentences to share stories, familiar experiences, and interests and being able to speak clearly to be understood by an audience.

Limitations

Families involved in this study were very homogeneous. A majority would be classified as belonging to the middle-class, including well-educated parents whose native language was English. Researchers have found that although parental education and home learning environment positively impact children's literacy development, parent-child literacy practices and parental attitudes and

aspirations can have more of an impact upon children's literacy development (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Therefore, it would seem as though these results may be generalizable to other types of families. However, future research is needed including a wider variety of families to check this hypothesis.

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