

An Evaluation of Factors That Promote and Impede Implementation of Best Practices in Early Literacy in Various Early Childhood Settings

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This study was supported by a grant from the Bush Foundation



Introduction

- Early childhood development – or the acquisition of skills and competencies in language, social-emotional interaction, general knowledge, and early literacy is an essential underpinning for success in school and later life.
- The benefits of early intervention to promote school readiness are enormous for the individual child, for her or his family, for their schools, and for society at large. Issues that impact skill development include:
 - the quality of the services that are provided to the child and their family,
 - the coordination of services and support to the family, specifically those professionals who provide services to the child and the family, either directly such as instruction or indirectly such as transportation (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000).
- By developing a system of coordinated services, all invested parties or individuals focus on the primary goal of providing services and support to ensure success.



Purpose



- The range of placements for young children has expanded in the past decade. Given this expansion and the emphasis that has been placed on promoting early literacy, (Good Start, Grow Smart, 2002; NCLB, 2001), examining how service care providers not only select but implement curricula that has an early literacy focus as well as addressing other developmental domains is important. Issues that need to be explored include:
 - how policy was established with an emphasis on early literacy,
 - how those elements intrinsic to early childhood education are incorporated within this early literacy mandates (i.e. developmental appropriate practice, promoting all developmental domains

National Trends



- Initiatives to promote language and literacy development have been a consistent focus of past and current administrations. Currently, the Good Start, Grow Smart(2001) have proposed various mechanisms to promote literacy development, particularly with at-risk populations. Other national agencies (NAEYC) have developed recommended practices and/or recommendations related to specific instruction of language and literacy.



National Recommendations

- ❑ Comprehensive and consistent system of early childhood professional preparation
- ❑ Sufficient resources to: ensure adequate adult-child ratios, instructional materials (books, computers), and ongoing and appropriate assessments
- ❑ Strengthening Head Start
- ❑ Increase public investment in early child care and education

Regional and Local Trends



- States have utilized funds in various ways to address the national mandates. In Minnesota, early learning standards were developed with specific indicators of progress that include:
 - a family focused approach to skill development,
 - a common conceptual framework and guidelines for planning curriculum, instruction and assessment, and
 - resources for community and policymakers to use in assessing the impact of current policies and resources on the optimal development of young children.

Minnesota Department of Education: Early Learning Services (2005)

Method



- A literature review was conducted on the following topics:
 - Recommended policy focusing on the promotion of early language and literacy skills both at a national and local level,
 - Components of early literacy development for children birth to age six
 - Interventions used in various early childhood settings to promote early literacy and language skills
- A series of interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators of several Twin City area child care centers in order to determine their professional development needs



Best Practices of Early Language and Literacy

- In order to determine what skills sets are essential to early literacy development, sources that addressed policy initiatives and professional development were examined.
- Each of the procedures was deemed as best practices for teaching early literacy skills.
- These procedures were selected based on frequency and consistency of citation in both policy mandates as well as curricula with a literacy component, and early literacy activities associated with professional development.



Best Practices of Early Language and Literacy

- **Print rich environments**-using labels, sign and other print in the environment
- **Principles of Reading**-strategies and methods to teach and enhance literacy via text
- **Concepts of Print**-strategies and methods to teach how letters and words are used to convey meaning
- **Phonemic Awareness**-recognition of sounds in words, rhyming and alliteration and segmentation and blending of sounds
- **Using Oral Language**-strategies and methods to promote expressive and receptive language in a conversational context



Early Childhood Settings that support early literacy and language development

- The types of child care settings and their mission of working with young children is as varied as the individual children that they serve. With the nationwide initiative to promote early literacy for all young children, examining the structure of child care settings along multiple dimensions is essential to understanding how these settings address early literacy development. There are two categories of care, congregant and home based. Six settings are described as well as how they incorporate/implement the best practices associated with early literacy.

Congregate Group Settings



- **Center Based Day Care** are primarily custodial care with variation in standards of care that can be accredited or licensed and can serve children from birth through elementary age.
- **Pre-School-Early Childhood Programs** designed for children from 2.5 years old to age six. These programs may be organized around a specific educational approach or theory and other school readiness skills.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start** are comprehensive child development programs that serve children from birth to age 5, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.



Home-Based Settings



- **Early Childhood Family Education** offers a variety of classes and resources for parents and children birth through kindergarten age. ECFE helps build healthy families and sets the stage for parent involvement and children's success in Kindergarten to Grade 12 education.
- **Family Home Care** takes place in the home of a provider with local regulation or licensure standards. There is a limit of children who can be served by a provider and the age range is from birth to school age.
- **Family, Friend, and Neighbor** is informal and legally unlicensed home-based child care provided to children under age 12 and is usually used in conjunction with other arrangements. A relative of the child is usually the primary care provider.

Strategies to Promote Delivery of Language and Literacy Skills in Congregant and Home Based Settings



- ❑ Funding
- ❑ Informed curricular decision making
- ❑ Mandated requirements for promotion of literacy and language
- ❑ Provide a range of professional development activities that are site specific and take into consideration the setting and the skill level of the provider



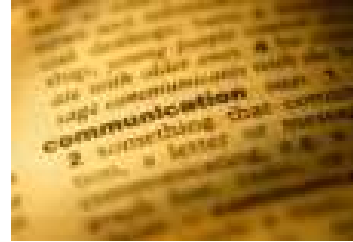
Factors that Impede the Delivery of Language and Literacy Skills in Congregate and Home Based Settings

- ❑ Funding
- ❑ Limited Professional Development Activities
- ❑ Staff qualifications
- ❑ Range of and access to professional development activities specific to literacy
- ❑ Lack of administrative commitment
- ❑ Curricular choice



Professional Development Needs to support Early Language and Literacy Development

- Themes that emerged from the series of interviews that were local child care providers were:
 - Home settings are unique-Providers in home settings need site specific support and training in order to promote ELL skills
 - Behavior “trumps” literacy-need for training that links ELL skill development and behavior support
 - Culture is critical-create a working environment from the top down (administrative level) that will support ELL (e.g. resources, expectations, motivation, leadership)



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- ❑ **Connections count**-promote networking between centers and home based settings that would increase the sustainability of an ELL program
 - ❑ **Make it real and make it fun**-hands on trainings that are site specific (classroom/home) and interactive that are practical and enhance the skill level of the providers

Discussion

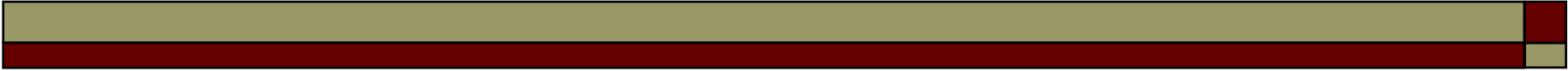


- The information gathered from the interviews supports the literature review findings.
 - Early language and literacy is valued
 - The needs of congregate settings –vs- home care are unique and varied approaches to professional development are needed
 - Investment, administratively and financially, is essential in order to promote early language and literacy skills

Next Steps



- ❑ Determine which of the best practices should and could be implemented effectively in all settings
- ❑ Identify effective and varied methods of support to care providers to promote skill development
- ❑ Social validation is critical to determine effective methods
- ❑ Increase public commitment to early childhood by funding the exploration and implementation of high quality and innovative practices



Promoting Literacy Skills of Children in Family, Friend and Neighbor Settings

A study to determine the effect of a consultant-delivered coaching procedure to promote language and literacy development with children at-risk for delays in six Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) sites is currently underway.

- Specific skills that are promoted included vocabulary development, use of complex language, phonological awareness, and knowledge of the mechanics of text. In addition social validity and treatment fidelity will be measured.
- Using a multiple baseline design, caregivers are taught to promote specific language and literacy development via shared storybook reading, socio-dramatic play activities as well as during child-adult informal interactions.
- Children are assessed to determine current functioning in language and social development.



- Care providers are taught to promote language and literacy skills using nine predetermined theme based activities. There are themed activities that include books, toys relevant to the book (e.g. costumes, manipulatives) and a set of cards that provide the care provider with suggestions to promote specific skills given the theme and the age of the child.
- Other permanent props are provided to create a literacy rich environment including text images and picture and text books. Both live and video taped sessions are coded to determine the use of thematic best practices carried out by the care provider.
- It is anticipated that the results will provide: 1) empirically validated data on effective methods to teach care providers in FFN settings, 2) the use of an intervention to promote language and literacy skills with children at-risk for delays as well as those children who are in high risk populations, and 3) a model for providing resources to improve quality and outcomes for children in FFN settings.