

## RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE SUMMARY

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### *Read it Once Again* Instruction with Two Groups of Students

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a preschool early literacy curriculum (*Read It Once Again*) across two groups of students. Participants were preschool children with disabilities in self-contained classrooms and children at risk for disabilities served in state funded prekindergarten programs. Teachers in the intervention classrooms implemented *Read It Once Again* instruction in small groups on a daily basis. Teachers in comparison classrooms implemented the ongoing preschool curriculum as a “business-as-usual” no-intervention condition. There were no pretest group differences on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Preschool Language Scales for both groups of children; however, there were statistically significant effects on picture naming and rhyming progress-monitoring measures for preschoolers with disabilities who received the intervention. These results suggest that *Read It Once Again* may be effective for improving early literacy skills of preschool children with or at risk for significant early learning problems.

Young children who have disabilities or at risk for disabilities are at increased chance for academic and social problems and may lack the prerequisite skills to be successful in kindergarten (Dennis & Horn, 2011; Hay & Fielding-Barnsley, 2009; Massetti & Bracken, 2010; Missall, McConnell, & Cadigan, 2006; Howes et al., 2008; Zill & West, 2001). There is sufficient evidence, however, that if early childhood educators support early language and literacy skills in the preschool years, young children are more likely to succeed in reading achievement in the later elementary-school years. (Mashburn, Justice, Downer, & Pianta (2009); Missall et al., 2006; National Early Literacy Panel, 2009). Strong oral language and emergent

literacy skills can lead to advantages in reading, writing, and spelling (DeBaryshe & Gorecki, 2007). The development of early literacy and language skills should be a primary component of the early childhood curriculum.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of an early literacy curriculum, *Read It Once Again* (RIOA: <http://www.readitonceagain.com>) on language and early literacy skills of children with or at risk for disabilities. We addressed the following research question: To what extent does preschool teachers' use of the *Read It Once Again* curriculum increase young children's early literacy skills?

## SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODS

### Participants

Participants were 65 children identified as at-risk who attended three half-day (morning and afternoon) 4-K classrooms located within two public elementary schools, and 85 preschool children with disabilities (PCD) in nine different self-contained preschool special education classrooms. The average age at the beginning of the study of the children identified as at-risk was 4 years 5 months (range = 4 years 0 months to 5 years 0 months); more than half of the students (56%) were girls; most were from Caucasian (62%) ethnic backgrounds (15% African American, and 23% other); and 17% had a language other than English spoken in the home. The average age at the beginning of the study of the children identified with a disability was 4 years 6 months (range = 3 years 0 months to 6 years 0 months); most (71%) were boys; most were from Caucasian (61%) ethnic backgrounds (25% African American, and 14% other); and, 12% had a language other than English spoken in the home. Disability categories included developmental delay (61.1%), Down syndrome (12.9%), other health impaired (10.6%), speech/language impairment (5.9%), autism (3.5%), learning disabilities (3.5%), and hearing impaired (2.4%).

### Curriculum

Intervention teachers implemented the *Read It Once Again* curriculum which (<http://www.readitonceagain.com>) was designed to promote a language and literacy rich environment using classic children's books (e.g., *Corduroy*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*) (Schaper, 2002). *Read It Once Again* reinforces rhyme, rhythm, and repetition while addressing the development of essential early literacy and language skills that have been identified by the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP): phonological awareness; rapid automatic naming of objects or colors; writing; and phonological memory (NELP, 2009). Each storybook unit is centered on one popular children's book. Unit activities focus on repetition and consistency including daily readings of the book; daily recitations and sequencing of a related Mother Goose rhyme; and, story-related music and activities that address cognitive (e.g., sorting, matching, visual discrimination skills), fine motor (e.g., using scissors, crayons, and pencils to complete pictures and make puzzle pieces) and gross motor (e.g., acting out the story and related songs), socialization (e.g., dramatic play with story props), and adaptive skills (e.g., making related snacks and dressing in story character costumes). Family involvement is supported through

letters that are sent home at the beginning and end of each unit, and a personal copy of the storybook that is sent home with each child at the end of the unit.

Daily activities (e.g., reading the story, reciting the Mother Goose rhyme) were usually 15-20 minutes in length. Each teacher completed required activities (e.g., reciting the Mother Goose rhyme, reading the story, using other related music and rhymes, and incorporating cognitive and motor activities) every day and others at least once a week (e.g., review rhymes from previous units; add, change, or rotate story props in the dramatic play center; paint pictures of objects or characters from the story; incorporate snacks or related foods), or once a unit (e.g., parent letters, “Packet Day,” sending home a copy of the story).

In the comparison classrooms, teachers maintained their “business-as-usual” early childhood curriculum. All teachers included activities that supported socialization, cognitive, fine and gross motor, language/early literacy, and adaptive skills in their classroom curriculum. All teachers read children’s books to their students and included music in the classroom.

## Research Design

We used a quasi-experimental design. Data included pre- and posttest assessment of (a) receptive language on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007), (b) receptive and expressive language on the Preschool Language Scales, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (PLS-4; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2002, 2004), and progress monitoring assessment of (c) expressive language on the Picture Naming-Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI; McConnell, 2003; <http://ggg.umn.edu>) and (d) rhyming on the Rhyming-Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development Indicators (McConnell, 2003; <http://ggg.umn.edu>).

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

### Effects of *Read it Once Again* on At-Risk Students

Assessment data showed that there were no significant improvements in receptive or expressive language on the PPVT (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) or the PLS (PLS-4; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2002, 2004), nor were there significant improvements in picture naming or rhyming on the Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development Indicators (McConnell, 2003; <http://ggg.umn.edu>) for at-risk students participating in the “business-as-usual” curriculum. There were also no significant improvements in receptive or expressive language on the PPVT (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) or the PLS (PLS-4; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2002, 2004) for at-risk students participating in the *Read it Once Again* curriculum; however, there were significant improvements in picture naming and rhyming on the Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development (McConnell, 2003; <http://ggg.umn.edu>) for at-risk students participating in the *Read it Once Again* curriculum.

## Effects of *Read it Once Again* on Students with Disabilities

Similarly, assessment data showed that there were no significant improvements in receptive or expressive language on the PPVT (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) or the PLS (PLS-4; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2002, 2004), nor were there significant improvements in expressive language or rhyming on the Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development Indicators (McConnell, 2003; <http://ggg.umn.edu>) for children with disabilities participating in the “business-as-usual” curriculum. There were also no significant improvements in receptive or expressive language on the PPVT (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) or the PLS (PLS-4; Zimmerman, Steiner, & Pond, 2002, 2004) for children with disabilities participating in the *Read it Once Again* curriculum; however, there were significant improvements in picture naming and rhyming on the Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development (McConnell, 2003; <http://ggg.umn.edu>) for these children.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Early childhood curricula and supplemental instructional activities that promote early literacy development in preschool children are critical for their success in kindergarten and beyond. Results of this study on the impact of the *Read it Once Again* curricula on four-year-old children with or at risk for disabilities are promising. The children who received the *RIOA* intervention made more gains in picture naming and rhyming than the children who received the “business-as-usual” preschool curriculum. Although more research is needed to evaluate the impact of *RIOA* on literacy development in preschool children, there is enough evidence to support that the storybook units with packaged materials are beneficial in supporting children’s early reading and language development. Implications for using the *RIOA* materials in early childhood programs serving children with disabilities or at-risk for disabilities are as follows:

1. The full impact of *RIOA* on children’s literacy development may take longer than 12 weeks (4 book units). There are currently 30 units available and extending the use of storybook units over a longer period of time should prove a more powerful intervention.
2. *RIOA* reinforces rhyme, rhythm, and repetition while addressing the development of essential early literacy and language skills. Teachers are encouraged to implement these activities by focusing on daily readings of the book, daily recitations and sequencing of a related Mother Goose rhyme, as well as story-related music activities.
3. Early childhood educators should integrate daily *RIOA* unit activities that enhance all areas of development, including cognitive skills (e.g., sorting, matching, visual discrimination skills), fine motor (e.g., using scissors, crayons, and pencils to complete pictures and make puzzle pieces) and gross motor skills (e.g., acting out the story and related songs), socialization (e.g., dramatic play with story props), and adaptive skills (e.g., making related snacks and dressing in story character costumes).
4. Family involvement should be supported through letters that are sent home at the beginning and end of each unit, and a personal copy of the storybook should be sent home with each child at the end of the unit.

5. Early childhood educators should use ongoing progress-monitoring measures such as the Early Literacy IDGI (McConnell, 2003; <http://ggg.umn.edu>) to measure children's progress.

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