
DIALOG FROM THE FIELD

Parent¹ Participation in Family Programs: Involvement in Literacy Interactions, Adult and Child Instruction, and Assessment

Andrea D. Parecki and Sabra B. Gear
Old Dominion University

The purpose of this article is to describe optimal parent participation in family literacy programs and parent-child literacy interactions, most specifically during interactive reading. Family literacy can be interpreted in many ways, resulting in diverse models of implementation that take place in Head Start programs, community agencies, schools and other venues. Since early literacy starts in the home environment where parents, across cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, want their children to learn successfully, family literacy programs that enhance parent-child interactions can directly assist many parents in supporting their children to become proficient readers. Implementation and outcomes of program activities on children's early literacy development, and how these activities interact with existing family literacy practices need to be determined through reliable and valid methods. Consequently, this article addresses variables within two inter-related family literacy components — parent participation in family literacy programs and parent-child interactive literacy activities (ILA), specifically interactive reading —and ways to assess these variables, providing data that program staff can use to inform improvements. This article focuses on the quality of classroom practices that will result in parents' development of knowledge and enactment of related skills to support their children's language and emergent literacy skills.

Keywords: parent/family involvement in school; literacy; parent/adult-child relationship; methods/measures development

Family literacy can be interpreted in many ways, resulting in diverse models of implementation that take place in Head Start programs, community agencies, schools and other venues. Most family literacy interventions include specific program components for parent participation in family literacy programs and for parent-child literacy interactions (Darling & Lee, 2003; Santos Laanan & Cox, 2006). However, data are infrequently collected in family literacy programs on

¹ The term parent is used throughout this article. The authors recognize that often children live with caregivers who may not be their parents. Rather than constantly using the term parent/caregiver or parent/family member or a more elaborated term, we have chosen to use parent alone.

the content and processes of parent participation, or the quality of parent-child interactions (Van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers, & Herppich, 2011). Implementation and outcomes of program activities on children's early literacy development, and how they interact with existing family literacy practices need to be determined through reliable and valid methods.

Language and literacy development patterns are clearly established in early childhood. Although it is developmentally appropriate to follow a child's lead, parents can initiate language and literacy activities within family routines and across settings. Well-timed recommendations and parental support to foster early language and literacy skills can help propel children toward being on track with their age mates. Parents can promote their children's language and literacy development in a myriad of ways supported by empirical literature.

From a child's birth, parents can enhance the quality and quantity of parent-child verbal communications by actively listening, responding, repeating, and expanding upon their children's uses of language (Dodici, Draper, & Peterson, 2003; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hester, Kaiser, Alpert, & Whiteman, 1995). Parents can tell stories and read picture books to their babies and young children (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006; Duursma, Pan & Raikes, 2008). Further, parents who join story sharing at the library (Campbell, 2004), family literacy groups (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009; Jay & Rohl, 2005), and early literacy support programs (Waldbart, Meyers, & Meyers, 2006), read interactively with their children more often (Darling & Westberg, 2004; Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie, 2003). Parents can increase the amount and quality of their dialogue during interactive book reading (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). Parent-directed explicit instruction such as rhyming (Bradley & Bryant, 1983), alliteration (Justice, Kaderavek, Bowles, & Grimm, 2005), and scaffolding of phonological awareness skills can positively influence their children's later reading abilities (Al Otaiba & Smartt, 2003). Parents can reflect on their own literacy beliefs and behaviors, and how these can support their children's development (Bingham, 2007). Finally, parents can enrich early language and literacy experiences by increasing the number of demonstrations of affection and nurturance for their children (Merlo, Bowman, & Barnett, 2007). Parents are the secret ingredient---able to balance high challenge and expectations, to kindle motivation, and to supply bountiful support, crafting the best recipe for their children's reading acquisition and attainment.

Apart from the evidence of the potential to positively influence children and their families, mounting a feasible, efficient, and cost-effective family literacy program is not a simple task. Ongoing concerns in the field of family literacy revolve around securing sufficient funding and accountability, recruiting and retaining parent participants, measuring progress and outcomes, establishing the relevancy for families from diverse backgrounds, and identifying goals and objectives (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009). Concerns about the role of parents as interventionists, teaching their children early language and literacy skills, stress the need to examine intervention methodologies developed and demonstrated to be beneficial to parents and children while targeting early language and literacy development. Since early literacy starts in the home environment where parents, across cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, want their children to learn successfully, family literacy programs that enhance parent-child interactions can directly assist many parents in supporting their children to become proficient readers. The purpose of this article is to describe optimal parent participation and parent-child communication. This article addresses variables within two inter-related family literacy components—parent participation in family literacy programs and parent-child interactive literacy activities (ILA), most specifically interactive reading—and ways to assess these

variables, providing data that program staff can use to inform improvements. This article focuses on the quality of classroom practices that will result in parents' development of knowledge and enactment of related skills to support their children's language and emergent literacy skills.

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Many parents would like more time with their child to promote learning. Due to busy schedules, a parent-child literacy interaction is often the only time they have to devote to a specific child (Anderson & Morrison, 2007). To ensure that parents have this time, many parent education programs choose to run a shorter, less comprehensive program focused on teaching parents interactive reading strategies (Anderson & Morrison, 2007; DeBruin-Parecki, 2007; Saracho, 2008; Waldbart et al., 2006). Such programs can also provide tools parents can use to promote their children's language and interpersonal skills, such as conversational turn taking.

Parent education programs are especially powerful when they value uniqueness of family backgrounds. Programs such as the Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) are "guided by the belief that parents and teachers would come to understand each other and develop mutual understandings of ways to support children's early development..." (Anderson & Morrison, 2007, p.72.). Mutual understanding occurs with acceptance of diverse cultural backgrounds and agreed upon paths toward successfully meeting program goals. Parent-child interaction time tends to be child-led and play-focused, which can sometimes conflict with parents' cultural beliefs and the home behaviors that accompany them (Powell, Okagaki, & Bojczyk, 2004).

Although parent education is a component of most family literacy programs, educators typically receive little direct guidance in finding resources to use in addressing parents' interests or covering topics on child language development. Most parent education programs use pre-written curricula, such as the Bavolek Model of Nurturing Parents (Bavolek & Bavolek, 2001), the Bowdoin Method of Parenting (Bowdoin, 1993), or *The Incredible Years* (Reid, Webster-Stratton, & Beauchaine, 2001), a program shown to display cultural sensitivity across multiple ethnic groups. Other programs prefer to use culturally specific instruction such as *Enhancing Nurturing Parenting Skills in African-American Families* (Artis & Moody, 1995). *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP)* (Dinkmeyer, McKay, Dinkmeyer, & McKay, 2008) and *Parent Effectiveness Training (PET)* (Gordon, 2000) are also widely used programs.

Some programs combine a variety of resources, such as those from different government agencies, various existing curricula, and popular books. Parenting literature (e.g., Baumrind, 1971) may also be consulted. Parent training is implemented both at home and in early childhood education centers. Program assessment typically includes surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, rating scales and testing instruments. Cultural sensitivity concerns have been raised in the area of program assessment, and in the implementation of methods and strategies provided in parent education program, including those that support children's language development.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Parent educators can facilitate parents' use of language and literacy strategies in communicating with their children. The Parent and Child Together (PACT) family literacy component can be structured to provide parents opportunities to interact with their children across home- and

center-based settings. Parents and children can practice reading and other literacy skills with support from parent educators who honor parents' roles as their children's first language teachers (Darling & Lee, 2003). Emphasis can be placed on new words, and this cannot only increase language development, but also build essential background knowledge. PACT time typically includes playing with toys and games, drawing pictures, telling and writing stories, going on outings, and reading (Cooter, 2006; Saracho, 2009).

Researchers (Hart, 2000; Hart & Risley, 1995; Peterson, Carta, & Greenwood, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2005) have reported that these activities provide essential settings for developing language skills. Hester, Kaiser, Alpert, and Whiteman (1995) demonstrated that milieu teaching, a naturalistic approach that uses environmental stimuli such as toys for prompting parent-child conversation, is vital for children with special needs. The next section will describe interactive reading as an important effective, evidence-based focus for enhancing parent-child interactions.

Interactive Reading

Research and practice over the past 25 years point to the value of interactive reading for young children (e.g., Bracken & Fischel, 2008; Bus & van IJzendoorn, 1995; Wasik, 2001). When implemented with strategies that support learning, interactive reading can be instrumental in promoting the skills and motivation to become an effective reader (Baker, Mackler, Sonnenschein & Serpell, 2001; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004; Morrow, 1990). Interactive reading is defined as reading aloud that includes conversation, relies on the give and take of turn taking, and engages children in the learning process (DeBruin-Parecki, 1997). Interactive reading has served five important purposes for children (Baker et al., 2001; DeBruin-Parecki, 2007; Gear, 2010; Hood, Conlon & Andrews, 2008; Mol, Bus, deJong, & Smeets, 2008): (a) actively engaging understanding of a book's meaning through predicting, inferring, and drawing conclusions; (b) expanding knowledge and use of new vocabulary; (c) familiarizing with concepts about print; (d) developing awareness skills of letter and sound knowledge and correspondences; and (e) motivating a desire to read. Interactive reading with children occurs across settings carried out by a diverse cast of readers including, but not limited to, parents/guardians, siblings, grandparents, and teachers. Interactive reading can be engaging, instructional, and fun. Strategies used to support the interactive reading process are the key to its success (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009).

Why Supporting Interactive Reading is Important

Infusing specific behaviors during joint book reading promotes academic success for children (Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000; Paratore, 2003), particularly for those who are read to frequently with readily available books and materials (Neuman, 1999, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 2000). Children of parents or caregivers who demonstrate excitement (Sonnenschein & Munsterman, 2002) and partnership during interactive reading (DeBruin-Parecki, 2007, 2009; Martin & Reutzel, 1999; Whitehurst et al., 1988) tend to enter school better prepared for learning to read, knowing more vocabulary, and better able to converse with peers and teachers (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Richman & Columbo, 2007; Sénéchal, 1997). Children can learn phonological awareness skills

through interactive reading, concepts about print, alphabetic knowledge, and comprehension (Bracken & Fischel, 2008; DeBruin-Parecki, 2007). Even with the knowledge that effective interactive reading can promote development of future success for readers, there is still the underlying issue of how diverse ethnic and socio-economic groups interpret and engage in joint reading behaviors. With this in mind, it is still important to provide all populations with culturally sensitive instructional methods and strategies for interactive reading practice.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND STRATEGIES FOR INTERACTIVE READING

This section provides guidelines for educators implementing interactive reading with program participants, and describes ways of empowering parents as teachers, listeners, and partners in the education of their children. Instructional settings, content, methods, and strategies, are also described to create a framework for optimizing parent involvement in family literacy.

Basic Guidelines for Parent Instruction

Parent educators must acknowledge that parents and children learn and grow from complex, dynamic family systems situated in diverse cultural communities (Dudley-Marling, 2009; Paratore, 2005). Educators must establish and maintain open dialogues, build meaningful relationships with parents, and use practices that positively impact child learning. Establishing a quality parent-educator partnership will provide opportunities to flexibly adapt to the changing dynamics of each family system and to foster children's early literacy development.

Children's literacy development requires establishing a quality partnership that focuses on a family's strengths (Carter, Chard, & Pool, 2009). Identifying each member's unique strengths, values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations is essential. Educators must also become aware of their own expectations, value and belief system, and strengths. Skills that partners need to develop include actively listening to ideas, and achieving reciprocity in communication, or a free flow of meaningful dialogue (Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano & Daly, 1995; Sheely-Moore & Ceballos, 2011). Cairney (2002) identified this collaboration where partners share equally in their efforts, responsibilities, and decision-making processes as crucial for positive child outcomes.

Achieving a high level of successful outcomes necessitates developing goals for children's early literacy skills (Neuman et al., 1995). Goals target one or more of the following early language and literacy skills for child development: listening, talking, identifying and labeling objects, sounds, letters, and numbers, reading, drawing, and printing. Positive experiences for parents and their children depend on certain outcomes such as accessing a wide range of children's books, increasing use of reading strategies, creating a close parent-child communication bond, and increasing parent self-efficacy and high expectations (Camilleri, Spiteri, & Wolfendale, 2005).

Parent Empowerment

Carter et al. (2009) developed a family strengths model to facilitate opportunities for parents to embed language and literacy activities within daily routines. This model provides parents with opportunities to increase learning through modeling language and literacy interactions with their children, and recognizing their achievements. Steps begin with identifying family strengths, routines and daily opportunities for practicing reading, writing, and oral language skills. Intended outcomes include: a) improved literacy skills in the child's oral language, vocabulary, print awareness, and sound and letter knowledge; and b) improved literacy beliefs and attitudes through shared enjoyment of interactive literacy activities (ILA).

Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, and Kim (2010) emphasize listening to families, affirming their existing practices, and building upon these with evidence based methods (e.g., shared reading, adult-child dialogic reading, didactic instruction, and technology assisted instruction). Considered below are the instructional settings, methods, strategies and content that form the context in which parent empowerment is developed.

Instructional Settings, Methods, Strategies, and Content

Settings. Sénéchal and Young (2008) identified three settings of parent-teacher partnerships: school-based, home-school conferencing, and home-based. Thus, teachers must first identify each instructional setting to be included in an interactive reading program. Then, they must match each setting to a specific teaching method for implementation. Finally, teachers need to include strategies for generalizing parent-child interactive reading across diverse settings.

Instructional methods and strategies. Neuman et al. (1995) explain the need for using instructional methods and parent supports that are culturally responsive. They recommend inviting parents into the school to participate in their children's reading activities, and extending school interactive reading sessions to home settings. They also recommend using video recorded reading sessions for coaching parents in reading strategies that they can practice with their children, such as labeling pictures and scaffolding children's use of oral language.

Teaching parents to embed early literacy strategies while reading with their child produces greater reading outcomes (Darling & Westberg, 2004). Parents can use strategies that teach their children to associate letter names with letter sounds, blend beginning and ending word sounds, teach new vocabulary words, and encourage language use. Providing parents with meaningful lessons that encourage these strategies is extremely helpful. Instruction and coaching parents in the use of strategies needs to be meaningful, effective, goal directed, and developmentally sequenced.

Other ways of teaching parents about interactive reading involve the collaboration of school personnel, modification of materials, and tapping into family-friendly ways to produce proficient readers. Come and Fredericks (1995) recommend establishing parent-child workshops where instructional supports are devoted to increasing the quality of parent-child interactions in reading. Participating in a book exchange program can increase family access to high quality literature, as does inviting parents to read with their child in classrooms and libraries.

Instructional content. DeBruin-Parecki (2009) emphasizes that the quality of parent-child interaction is vitally linked to the program's instructional content and processes, and its assessment. Therefore, high quality, culturally relevant instructional content that supports interactive reading is an essential piece that teachers can provide to facilitate successful parent and child outcomes.

"Family Literacy Nights/Noches de Lectura Con la Familia" (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009, p. 388) details a family literacy program that can be implemented for adults and children with cultural- linguistic diversity and socioeconomic disadvantage. The program also provides professional development for the parent educators. The curriculum is completed within a manageable length of time, providing content instruction to support interactive reading. Weekly lessons for parents target specific, observable behaviors linked to increasing parent and child outcomes identified by the Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory, an assessment tool to be discussed further in a later section (ACIRI; DeBruin-Parecki, 2007). Parents learn to read interactively while maintaining physical proximity to their children, engaging their children's interest by encouraging them to hold the book and turn pages, exhibiting a sense of audience, posing and responding to their questions, relating the book's content to authentic experiences, prompting questions and pausing to answer questions, using visual/picture cues, predicting, retelling, and elaborating on concepts and ideas (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009). Teaching parents to converse by listening and responding to children promotes active engagement and extends learning opportunities (Gjems, 2010). Extended learning opportunities through productive conversations can increase children's vocabulary and background knowledge.

Vocabulary size has been identified as a powerful predictor of oral and reading comprehension, but there is debate about the most effective ways to help build children's vocabulary. Some believe children should first learn words when they are encountered in books and follow that with direct instruction in vocabulary, while others feel they should learn the words prior to hearing them read aloud in context (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2003; Neuman & Dwyer, 2009). Reading to children increases their background knowledge (Wan, 2000). When hearing stories or conversations, children with more background knowledge find it easier to understand the meanings of new words by making connections to words and concepts that they already understand (Nash & Snowling, 2006). Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development, children explain how they understand a new word by connecting to their prior experiences and knowledge. The role of the teacher or parent is to assist the child in making these background knowledge connections by expanding on their personal examples and facilitating productive conversations. While there is strong evidence of the importance of specific instructional content and process, there are also challenges to overcome before teaching can begin.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN PARENT EDUCATION

There are innumerable challenges in the implementation of parent education in family literacy programs. There are issues that range from low parent education levels to lack of parent implementation of taught strategies. In addition, there are concerns related to cultural sensitivity and understanding, as well as how to work with parents of children with special needs.

Working with Low Income Parents

Parents may face numerous challenges associated with economic disadvantage, including low levels of education, disenfranchisement from schools and educational programs due to their own past failures and treatment, multiple jobs, single-parent households, residence and/or relationship changes, drug use, lack of food, health problems, and higher levels of depression that may make it difficult for them to assist their children in learning (Ackerman, Brown, & Izard, 2004). These challenges can create barriers to attendance in family literacy programs. Not all parents with low income face these challenges, but many do. Children of parents, facing multiple challenges, are placed at a higher risk for academic failure and may also confront disability. Family literacy programs must find ways to work with each parent's situation in the best manner possible to assure they attend and learn how to improve learning for their children.

Working with Parents of Children with Special Needs

Parents of children with special needs face unique problems, as individual differences in young children's early literacy skills tend to persist over time, often growing larger as they begin school (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000). Children with delays in cognition, communication, social-emotional, or sensory-motor development need individualized intervention to help ameliorate or compensate for their unique needs and to prevent academic failure (Bruder, 2010). Effective interventions for enhancing the emergent reading skills of individual children can be developed, enlisting parental input, by matching each child needs to each learning goal and providing a balance of learning challenges, raised expectations, combined with supportive learning environments, and scaffolding instructional strategies.

Child development experts have emphasized interactive reading as an effective, family-focused intervention to foster children's early literacy skill development (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009; Huebner, 2000; Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). Recent research (Gear, 2010) found parents can readily implement an interactive "phonodialogic" reading intervention with their preschool children placed at risk for reading disabilities due to socioeconomic disadvantage or delayed development. Parents demonstrated a high degree of treatment fidelity with their children over the brief nine-week period. In turn, children were able to respond meaningfully and imitate parents' modeling of reading strategies. Results showed that children progressed in phonological awareness outcomes: rhyme identification and production, blending and/or segmenting of initial word sounds. Parent-trainer support took the form of modeling, interactive reading practice with feedback once per week, providing a variety of children's books, and simple bookmarks labeled with the reading strategies. This study expands opportunities for parents to improve their children's literacy skills through interactive reading with family-focused support. This type of family-focused intervention is also crucial for children with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, who are placed at a greater risk of being identified with disabilities (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Gutierrez & Orellana, 2006). They will be addressed in the next section.

Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

Literacy is directly connected to one's cultural and personal identity. Members of diverse cultures may not agree on what is considered literate behavior, and this influences how families engage in literacy learning activities (Wasik & Hindman, 2010). Three main cultural diversity issues are at stake. One revolves around methods used to teach parents of varied SES backgrounds and cultures, and the lack of understanding often shown for their culturally-specific ways of learning. The second centers on a non-valuing of what is important and salient for diverse families to learn. The last issue is one of disrespect for cultural customs and traditions that may conflict with mainstream culture and an outward attempt by many educators to convert families to a better way of learning.

Auerbach (1989, 1995) suggests implementing a more culturally-focused program that considers literacy to be an integral part of daily life. Some suggestions include: investigating home language use, exploring current family literacy practices, exploring cultural issues through writing, modeling whole language activities parents might do with their children, validating culturally specific literacy forms, exploring parenting issues, educational experiences, and their language and literacy expectations for their children, addressing community, workplace and health care issues, practicing advocacy when dealing with schools, and exploring political issues.

In her work with African-American populations, Gadsden (1996) concludes that programs with the greatest chance for success encourage cross-cultural exchanges of ideas among participants, community members and staff, develop mutual respect, and acknowledge diversity, both socially and academically. She also recommends infusing these factors into the curricula developed collaboratively with the program participants.

As family literacy programs grapple with honoring cultures and preparing children for schools, they frequently compromise to achieve both goals. Programs must move away from a deficit notion of adults who are less formally educated and families that practice literacy in alternative ways (Compton-Lily, 2007; Johnson, 2009; Riojas-Cortez, & Flores, 2009; Rodriguez-Brown, 1994). Recommendations to help children progress in language and literacy skills to become successful academically include infusing native language in conversations and in materials, and educators becoming more culturally competent. Because measurements of children's progress and parent implementation of interactive reading are two important indicators of a successful family literacy program, they should be combined to inform effective practices.

Parent Fidelity in Implementing Interactive Reading at Home

Parent fidelity in implementation is one of the most crucial components in determining the effectiveness and sustainability of interactive reading. Measuring parent fidelity requires a useful definition of parent fidelity, and a means of collecting accurate and reliable data for analyzing parent behaviors during parent-child reading interactions. Troia (1999) defined treatment fidelity as a procedure that researchers and practitioners use to ensure intervention or treatment conditions are implemented faithfully. Parent fidelity data are usually collected through one or more of a variety of procedures, such as reading logs, portfolios, checklists, interviews, video- and audio recordings, and direct observation measures (Prins & Toso, 2008). These parent fidelity data are then analyzed and interpreted using quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the extent of parent implementation of interactive reading.

Because of the challenges in measuring, collecting, and analyzing parent fidelity data, it is difficult to know if parents are indeed implementing the literacy strategies they are taught to use with their children (Van Otterloo, Van der Leij, & Veldkamp, 2006). For example, many parents are uncomfortable being observed or recorded in their homes. It is also difficult to know if the parent-child reading sessions observed during home visits accurately represent everyday reading. Moreover, because parents may choose to read to their children at varying times, it can be problematic to have an observer at the home when reading occurs. Some programs work to solve this problem by observing parents reading with their children while at the program site (DeBruin-Parecki, 2009).

Parent fidelity data provide evidence that parents implement the literacy strategies learned in the programs they attend. Increases in children's target literacy skills related to parent fidelity data can be more likely attributed to the effects of the interactive reading, improving internal validity of the program outcomes. Parents can place greater confidence in their own behavioral changes that influenced their children's progress. Realizing they can positively influence their children's literacy growth can be empowering for parents, and can motivate them to participate more fully in the program. Substantive support for parent education that is causally connected to successful outcomes can also determine continued funding (Huebner, 2000). The following section focuses on the strong need for accountability in Family Literacy programs using specific, objective measurable outcomes. Presented below are some examples of tools that are currently being used to measure interactive reading behaviors and practices.

MEASURING INTERACTIVE READING BEHAVIORS

Measuring interactive reading is not an easy task. Most observational tools were developed for research purposes and are too complex and exacting to transfer to practice in the field (e.g., OMLIT Read Aloud Profile; Judkins et al., 2008). There have been attempts to measure interactive reading focusing on either the adult or the child. Many tools are written by individual programs as observation forms. Described below are two research-based tools that have provided an historical basis for measurement of interactive reading, the Parent as Reader Scale (PARS; Guinagh & Jester, 1972) and the Mothers Reading to Infants Observational Tool (Resnick, 1987).

MEASURING ADULT READING BEHAVIORS DURING INTERACTIVE READING SESSIONS: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Parent as Reader Scale

Guinagh and Jester (1972) developed the Parent as Reader Scale (PARS) to assess the quality of the mother-child interaction during reading and determine the quality of the mother's teaching ability, strictly focusing on the mothers' behaviors. The items on the scale were selected to reflect dimensions of the mother-child interaction that were related to positive growth in the child. There are 10 different rating scales assessed by scores ranging from one to five. The highest score possible is a 50. This instrument's target audience is low SES populations to

determine which important reading and teaching behaviors parents may not be using with their children. PAR was designed for training parents to read more effectively during storybook time.

Mothers Reading to Infants: An Observational Tool

Resnick et al. (1987) developed the Mothers Reading to Infants tool to observe four categories of maternal behaviors during reading to infants: mother's body management, management of book, language proficiency, and attention to affect. The instrument includes well-researched behaviors such as labeling, praise, description, and affect, identification, making text relevant to life, and inviting participation. There is also a stronger emphasis on physical behaviors such as holding the child close, removing distracters, and sharing the book than on skill development behaviors such as predicting and identifying. Most notably, Edwards (1995), has used this tool to determine behaviors parents are taught in Parents as Partners in Reading.

SOLVING THE CURRENT DILEMMA OF INTERACTIVE READING MEASUREMENT

The two instruments presented above, the Parent as Reader Scale (PARS; Guinagh & Jester, 1972) and the Mothers Reading to Infants Observational Tool (Resnick, 1987) focus exclusively on rating adult behavior, but not on the corresponding behaviors of the child. While it is important to understand the literacy skills of adults and children separately, this tells little about how they read together. If the quality of adult-child interaction promotes greater literacy understanding and skill development, it is important to document what goes on during this interactive process. If an assessment can provide information about an adult and a child as well as their interactions, a teacher can link the knowledge gained to the development of more effective practices for both of them. The instrument presented below, the Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, 2007), delivers information about an adult/child interactive reading dyad that includes quantifiable measurement for accountability purposes.

The Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory

The ACIRI (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, 2007) is an observational instrument implemented in English or Spanish to assess joint storybook reading behaviors under natural conditions. The ACIRI was primarily created to provide teachers working with adult-child dyads a means of evaluation to inform instructional decision-making. Use of the instrument is also intended to enable parents/guardians to learn about areas for improvement in developing their child's literacy skills. A secondary purpose is to provide program evaluation data.

The ACIRI (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, 2007) contains areas for both quantitative scoring and qualitative data. For the adult and child portions, observed interactive behaviors are defined by three categories: (1) enhancing attention to text, (2) promoting interactive reading and supporting comprehension, and (3) using literacy strategies. Each category consists of four interactive behaviors, for a total evaluation of 12 specific literacy behaviors for adult and child. Administration of the ACIRI (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, 2007) takes 15 to 20 minutes depending

on the complexity of the book and number of observed behaviors the teacher discusses following the observation. The adult is always involved in discussing the observed results.

The procedure for using the ACIRI (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, 2007) consists of four steps. First, the adult and child pick a book from a selection of age-appropriate books matched by the teacher according to the adult's reading skills, the child's development, and cultural background. Wordless picture books are available to encourage participation of adults with low conventional literacy skills. Second, the adult and child read together while being observed by the teacher who notes adult and child behaviors on the inventory and writes comments as the reading progresses. Books can be read in any language as long as the teacher is fluent in the parent's reading language. Third, when reading is complete the teacher studies comments and discusses them with the adult in a nonthreatening, helpful manner, linking teaching directly to the ACIRI. Fourth, after the dyad leaves the teacher reads over comments and numerically scores behaviors, entering scores in appropriate columns. Numerical scores are intended for program evaluation and not shared with participants. Although the ACIRI (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999, 2007) can be quantitatively scored for program evaluation, the qualitative data collected for instructional purposes can also support numerical scores. Written comments provide teachers with a detailed description of what occurred. Numerical scoring is based on a 0–3 scale: zero indicates "no evidence of the behavior"; one indicates the behavior occurs "infrequently"; two indicates the behavior occurs "some of the time"; and three indicates the behavior occurs "most of the time." As the adult and child read together, the teacher makes observational notes. A combination of comments and check marks indicate the number of times a behavior occurs. Parent and child reading behaviors are indicated separately by scores on each individual item, mean scores on the three broad categories, and by the total ACIRI mean score.

The ACIRI is reported to have a high overall reliability calculated by an alpha coefficient of .80 (DeBruin-Parecki, 2007). Inter-rater reliability was calculated at 97% in the original study (DeBruin-Parecki, 1997). Construct validity is relevant to joint storybook reading behaviors based on the research and theoretical literature. Interviews with teachers who piloted this tool and continued to use it afterward provide support for its social validity for teachers, parents and children.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

First and foremost in implementation of Family Literacy programs is enlisting parent participation. To do this, programs must demonstrate usefulness to parents and promote their attendance using convenient scheduling, meals, transportation, child care, and materials as motivators. The majority of parents attend Family Literacy programs in order to assure their children's future success in school (Cairney, 2002; DeBruin-Parecki, 2007; Hill-Clark, 2005). Because future success is a valuable outcome, programs must provide parents with the tools to make this happen. These tools include gaining a clear understanding of their child's progress, learning how to select age-appropriate activities and books, and knowing how best to interact with their children given varying circumstances that surround reading together. It is also incumbent upon those programs that work with diverse families to provide culturally sensitive instruction, as well as instruction that addresses children with special needs. Often times, this requires recruiting and retaining teachers with particular language skills or special education training. One of the biggest challenges for educators teaching interactive reading in Family

Literacy programs is accountability for effective outcomes. This article has described a recommended tool used strictly for promoting effective interactive reading measurement and successful outcomes, the Adult/Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI) (DeBruin-Parecki, 2007).

The ACIRI is a unique instrument in that it provides information about an adult and a child at the same time, and allows for qualitative and quantitative pre/post scoring. This assists programs in multiple ways. Post scores can assist in demonstrating the level of parent fidelity relative to the interactive reading strategies practiced. The scoring allows programs to make data available for accountability purposes to determine progress of individuals and across an entire program. Because parents do not need to see these numerical scores, they are less apt to become embarrassed or intimidated when discussing results. The comments written while observing a parent and child reading together give teachers useful information to share with adults in a non-threatening and helpful way. Teachers can identify areas of strengths and suggest areas for improvement by focusing on specific strategies and using clear examples taken directly from the ACIRI. Teachers can form relationships with parents by modeling strategies to increase children's pre-reading behaviors. Identifying where parents can benefit most from support informs instruction so it is focused and productive. Finally, learning which parents use strategies effectively allows teachers to empower them as role models for others.

CONCLUSION

While it is clear that family literacy programs vary by purpose and population, Head Start agencies have long known the importance of these programs and of assessing family involvement (Kallemeyn & DeStefano, 2010). For family literacy programs to be successful, it is vital to include family members as active participants, and also to have them involved as partners in the process of assessment. This requires local programs and individual educators to work harder to learn about their participants' backgrounds and needs. Recognizing each family as unique motivates collaboration with educators to promote children's language and literacy development through interactive reading, leading to greater success when children enter school.

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