

CAN AN EARLY AND BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO DIALOGIC READING ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF SHARED READING EXPERIENCES OF AT-RISK FAMILIES?

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INTRODUCTION

The first three years of a child's life have an enormous impact on the development of basic language and cognitive skills, laying the foundation for literacy and learning. Because parents are their child's first teacher, they need to be aware of the importance of, and how to create, a language- and literacy-rich environment in the home. Parents need simple, common-sense strategies they can use to help their children get ready to read and learn for the rest of their lives. Because children from home environments considered to be vulnerable or at-risk may begin to fall behind their peers from the very beginning, it is particularly crucial to provide the appropriate support and guidance to their parents.

The purpose of this study is to describe the effectiveness of the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop, an early dialogic reading program, in assisting parents with strategies to improve their shared reading experiences with their pre-school children. The 90-minute workshop was followed by a focus group session two weeks later in order to: (a) investigate the extent to which strategies taught in the workshop were implemented in the home environment, and (b) investigate the utility of the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop in helping parents develop strategies that enhance their shared reading experiences with their children. Findings may improve our understanding of the effectiveness of the program and indicate ways in which it can be strengthened in order to enhance the reading readiness of children from at-risk families.

METHODOLOGY

Participants. Nine local community agencies were contacted in order to recruit participants for this study. Seven workshops were delivered and six focus groups were conducted. A total of 37 parents participated in this study.

Workshop. The *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop is based on the principles of dialogic reading where the adult encourages the child to engage in the reading process through questioning and extension (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). Parents were shown how to prompt their child to comment on objects, actions and events pictured on a page, with the intended purpose of building their child's receptive and expressive vocabularies.

Data Collection and Analysis. Two weeks following the workshop parents were invited to participate in a focus group session. Discussion was facilitated through semi-structured open-ended questions. The sessions were audio-taped, transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes.

RESULTS

Without exception, all participants found the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop helpful in providing book-sharing strategies. Some parents said that they had been doing similar prompting before the workshop, but now found they prompted more regularly and consistently.

Although the PEER sequence was not referred to directly, many parents spoke about how they now prompt their children while reading. All of the CROWD prompts were used, however, most reported that they found the wh-prompts and distancing prompts most common (Figure 3).

Parents were also spending more time reading with their children – "now after this workshop we can spend a lot of time with this book," "before we spent around 5 minutes ...now we spend about 15 minutes to discuss the book."

Most importantly, parents found that their children were more engaged while reading. For some this translated into increases in vocabulary, reading ability and language development – "for me it was a big help because I was concerned about her vocabulary," "Sasha doesn't speak, ... she doesn't say words, so we made animal noises [while reading] ... now yesterday she said her first sentence," and "my son's vocabulary has increased by six words in the last two weeks."

PEER sequence CROWD prompts

Prompt	Completion
Evaluate	Recall
Expand	Open-ended
Repeat	Wh-prompts
	Distancing



Figure 1. Workshop strategies.

Figure 2. Workshop participants prompting one another.

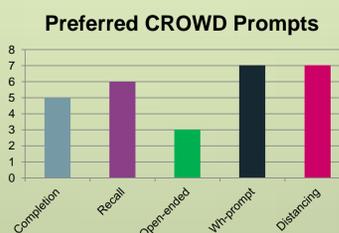


Figure 3. Preferred shared reading prompts.



Figure 4. Workshop participants looking at books.

DISCUSSION

A preliminary analysis of the data indicates four emergent themes:

1. Sharing books builds relationships.
2. Reading is more fun for the child and the parent/more time is spent reading.
3. Children are more engaged and focused.
4. Reading readiness is enhanced through strategies presented at the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop.

The data shows that both parents and their children benefited from the interactive sharing of books. Many commented on how reading positively affected their relationship with their child and one mother felt that – "through [reading] books [to my child] I learned to be a mother."

Because reading became more fun for both the parents and children, more time was spent reading.

Interactive reading was more engaging and several parents commented that their child was now more attentive.

Furthermore, their children were more excited about reading, and some parents noticed an improvement in their child's vocabulary and ability to express themselves.

A few suggestions were made for future workshops:

1. Expanding the child's response by rephrasing and adding information should be emphasized.
2. Information on how to read to young children with exceptionalities (e.g. autism, ADHD) should be presented.

CONCLUSIONS

How we read to preschoolers is as important as how often we read to them. When most adults share a book with a child, they read and the child listens – dialogic reading that engages the child has been shown to enhance the reading experience.

The purpose of the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop is to provide parents with simple strategies they can use when reading with their young children. Parents agreed that early reading is important, and all felt that their child had benefited from the workshop. The increased exposure to, and engagement with, reading has provided them with a foundation for future learning.

REFERENCES

- Hargrave A. C., & Sénéchal M. (2000). A Book Reading Intervention with Preschool Children Who have Limited Vocabularies: The Benefits of Regular Reading and Dialogic Reading, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15, 75-90.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the effectiveness of the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop in assisting parents with strategies to improve their shared reading experiences with their pre-school children. The first three years of a child's life have an enormous impact on language development and cognitive skills. Parents, their children's first and most important teachers, need simple, common-sense strategies to use while reading with their children. Forty-five parents attended one of seven workshops delivered to local community agencies of which 37 agreed to participate in a follow-up focus group. Four themes emerged from a preliminary analysis of the data: 1) sharing books builds relationships; 2) reading was more fun for the child and the parent, and more time was spent reading; 3) children were more engaged and focused; and 4) reading readiness was enhanced through strategies presented at the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop.

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