

Project VIEWS2—Phase 1: Innovation in Early Literacy

Janet L. Capps
The Ohio State University
capps.14@osu.edu

Ivette Bayo
University of Washington
ibayo@uw.edu

Katie Campana
University of Washington
kcampana@uw.edu

Erika N. Feldman
University of Washington
feldmanerika@gmail.com

Eliza Dresang
University of Washington
edresang@uw.edu

Kathleen Burnett
The Florida State University
kburnett@fsu.edu

Abstract

The researchers propose to share first year results from VIEWS2, Valuable Initiatives in Early Learning that Work Successfully, a 3-year Institute for Museum and Library Service (IMLS) National Leadership Research Grant. Year 1 of VIEWS2, using a pre-post text experimental design was proposed to measure the early literacy outcomes for children birth to kindergarten who attend public library programs. Results stem from data collected by 20 iSchool student and faculty researchers in 40 libraries at 120 storytimes attended by 1440 children using innovative researcher-developed tools designed to observe children's behavior and adult program presentation. High positive correlation occurred between adult practices and developmentally appropriate children's outcomes at the group level. Some assumed best practices are in place, but some other research-based early literacy principles most important for children to learn to read successfully are relatively rare.

Keywords: public libraries, early literacy, IMLS National Leadership Research Grant, storytimes, informal learning environments

Introduction

From scrolls to codices to digital interactive eBooks, information leaders investigate ways to connect people to information through technology. While the written word continues to be the primary dissemination technological tool, illiteracy still separates people from information that can affect the quality of life. Early literacy storytimes in informal learning environments are one venue providing opportunities to change lives through literacy skill development. Central to early literacy is the idea that important reading skills need to be developed before the onset of formal literacy instruction (Sulzby & Teale, 1991; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Of these primary early literacy skills, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and oral language have repeatedly been shown to have predictive validity for later reading proficiency (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The development of these preschool skills has also been shown to have associated economic benefits, such as increased maternal earnings and increased lifetime earnings (Barnett & Masse, 2007). Public libraries and other informal learning environments have committed resources to improving early literacy opportunities for children; e.g., through staff training and enhanced storytime offerings incorporating research-based primary early literacy skills.

Overview of Research

The widespread national commitment of libraries to early literacy programs as well as the lack of research on the impact of these programs informed the development of VIEWS2, Valuable Initiatives in Early Learning that Work Successfully. A thorough literature search yielded no research project assessing the impact of early literacy storytimes in public libraries despite their ubiquity. This 3-year Institute for

Acknowledgement: Institute for Museum and Library Services: IXi-06-1 1-0254-11.

Capps, J, Bayo, I, Campana, K, Feldman, E, Dresang, E, & Burnett, K. (2013). Project VIEWS2-- Phase 1: Innovation in early literacy. *iConference 2013 Proceedings* (pp. 774-776). doi:10.9776/13377

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Museum and Library Service (IMLS) National Leadership Research Grant (October 2011 – September 2014) designed to find valid and reliable means to measure the early literacy outcomes for children birth to kindergarten who attend public library programs seeks to leverage public library and school partnerships to improve early literacy practices. The researchers involved in this grant propose to share initial VIEWS2 data and innovative approaches to investigating and evaluating early literacy within informal learning environments.

Research Design and Methodology

The design for Phase 1 and 2 of the research is a pre-post test quasi-experiment one, also not found anywhere in library research literature. Phase 1 collection included 120 storytime observations attended by 1440 children in 40 randomly selected Washington libraries (13 large, 13 medium, and 14 small). As can be seen from the map below, the 40 libraries in which the research took place are in virtually all geographic locations with the higher concentration where the population is the most dense yet are in many areas of the state. Three storytime types (Birth-18 months, 18-36 months, and 36-60-months) were observed. The children's reactions and librarian's delivery of each storytime were video-recorded and coded from the videos. The researchers developed a seminar that was delivered in winter 2012 to the graduate students that were collecting data and coding. Established validity and reliably trained 19 graduate students to use the BCPAF and PET tools. The data collection and coding occurred in spring 2012.



Figure 1. Locations of the 40 libraries.

Research Tools

Previously established protocols for a tool, Benchmarks Curricular Planning and Assessment Framework (BCPAF) (Feldman, 2011), developed to observe children at the group level and based on Washington State Department of Early Learning Guidelines, were used in Phase 1. A companion Program Evaluation Tool (PET) tool was developed by the researchers to assess the program delivered by library staff was also used. Both tools were based on the premise of early literacy inclusion in storytimes. The coded data from BCPAF and PET were analyzed using SPSS descriptive and correlational results to uncover relationships between program delivery and children's behavior. One of

the major findings from Phase 1 was the high positive correlation between the adult practices and developmentally appropriate children's outcomes at the group level. An addition finding was that some of the assumed best practices of librarians are in place in almost all of the storytimes, but there are some gaps to be filled, especially on some of the research-based principles that are most important for children to learn to read when they enter school.

Ongoing Work

During the second phase of VIEWS2, two additional tools will be used: the EL-Capstone instrument that summarizes adult early literacy concept awareness levels (Capps, 2011) and the Early Literacy Skills Assessment (ELSA) process developed by Highsmith. ELSA will be used in public libraries for the first time by VIEWS2 (See Campana & Dresang, 2012 for use of ELSA in home-based daycares). In line with the pre-post experimental design, the researchers will randomly select a group of the 20 of the 40 libraries and deliver an intervention to be based on the findings in Phase 1. Another cohort of graduate students will be reliably trained on using the instruments in the Winter 2013. The following Spring, the data collection process will begin again following the same process as in year one. This will help answer the research question of whether storytimes can be improved based on the information collected in Phase 1. Finally for the third phase the focus will be on how the grant will increase the early literacy link between school and public library.

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