



Pierce County Library System Library System

Emergent Readers Literacy Training and Assessment Program

Executive Summary

Prepared for:

The Pierce County Library System Library System

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The Pierce County Library System [WA] Emergent Readers Literacy Training and Assessment Program was designed to focus on early literacy principles to help children attending in-home childcares to emerge better prepared for school. The research phase of the Pierce County Library System Emergent Readers Literacy Training and Assessment Program, patterned after a similar study carried out by the Carroll County [MD] Public Library, began in the spring of 2010 and continued for a full year until the spring of 2011. The program consisted of an intervention targeting in-home childcare providers and a study of the intervention effects on the caregivers and on the children in their care. The intervention, lasting six months, provided the caregivers with training workshops, early literacy kits, newsletters and additional one-on-one interaction with Pierce County Library System staff

A pretest-posttest experimental design was used for this study. The providers were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Of the 31 providers who started the program, 18 were assigned to the control group and 13 to the treatment group. This division resulted in 53 children in the control group and 33 in the treatment group. There were two data-collection components to the research study: (1) pre- and post-intervention surveys covering early literacy knowledge and practices were given to in-home childcare providers and (2) The Early Literacy Skills Assessment (ELSA), developed by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation was conducted with the three and four year olds in these in-home childcares before and after the intervention.

ELSA assesses the children in the areas of comprehension (narrative skills), phonological awareness, alphabetic principle (letter awareness), and concepts about print (print awareness). The terms in parentheses are those used in Pierce County Library System training and in the American Library Association's Every Child Ready to Read Program, but they have identical meaning to the ELSA early literacy principles. The child assessment instrument is a picture book in which 24 questions that probe early literacy skills are embedded and is used by an assessor with one child at a time. While reading the book, the assessor pauses at pre-determined points to ask the child scripted questions. Based on the child's answers, the assessor quickly records a score on a standardized form.

As would be expected, a small amount of attrition occurred among participants during the study. At the end of the study 25 of 31 (80%) providers remained and 63 of 83 (75%) children were still in the study. The study consisted of the following sequential components:

- Obtaining of childcare provider volunteers for the study assisted by the Tacoma-Pierce County Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR);
- Training of six Pierce County Library System staff to conduct the ELSA assessments by University of Washington Information School researchers;
- Pre-assessment of the children in the study (control and treatment groups) by Pierce Co staff;
- Random assignment of childcare providers to control and treatment groups;
- Presurvey of childcare providers;
- Training of childcare providers in the treatment group by Pierce County Library System early learning librarians on definitions and activities related to the early learning principles;
- Continued support of the treatment group providers through newsletters, interviews, a mid-course sharing session;
- Post-assessment of children in the study (control and treatment) by Pierce Co staff;
- Postsurvey of childcare providers;
- Analysis of data and reporting by University of Washington Information School researchers and a statistical consultant.

The results of the study were extremely positive in relation to the Pierce County Library's training of childcare providers.

- For the children in the treatment group significant pre and posttest differences were found on 3 of the 4 skills: alphabetic principle (letter knowledge), phonological awareness, and concepts about print (print awareness). Alphabetic principle (letter knowledge) and phonological awareness are the two principles identified by the National Early Literacy Panel's extensive research review to have the most predictive power for success in reading when children enter school.
- For the children in the control group no significant difference between pre- and posttest scores on any skills was found.
- Children's ELSA scores can be aggregated into three levels for each skill: Level 1 Early Emergent, Level 2 Emergent, and Level 3 Competent Emergent. More children in the treatment group were at Level 3 Competent Emergent on the posttest compared to those

in the control group on all 4 skills. More children in the treatment group were at Level 2 Emergent on the posttest compared to those in the control group on 3 of the 4 skills. Fewer children in the treatment group were at Level 1 Early Emergent on the posttest compared to those in the control group on all 4 skills.

- Looking another way at growth on skills, more treatment group children moved up 1 or 2 skill levels between pre and posttests than did control group children.
- For the treatment group providers there was a statistically significant positive change in number of narrative skills, phonological skills, and print awareness activities used in their childcare settings. For the control group providers there was no statistically significant change (positive or negative) in the pretest-posttest results in any of these three areas.
- Childcare providers in both groups responded to questions demonstrating a rich environment for children to prepare for school with books, frequent stories read, library use, encouragement of interactive play, and parental communication. However, only the treatment group providers exhibited a statistically positive change in number and variety of pretend play activities they provided
- Childcare providers in the treatment group on the midterm survey and at the midterm gathering at the library gave numerous examples of how the children had improved in their early literacy skills according to their observations.

Implications of the study are that public librarians can provide training in early literacy skills that have positive results for children, Public librarians, school officials, parents, teachers, and other community members can have increased and research-documented confidence that early literacy principles taught and used by public librarians can and do make a difference in children's readiness for reading.