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Can an Early and Brief Introduction to Dialogic Reading Enhance the Quality of Shared Reading Experiences of At-Risk Families?

In my job as an ELS, I am always wondering if what I do make a difference. I frequently offer one off workshops, without knowing if anything really resonates with the audience. In April of 2010, I was invited to a meeting at Queen's University's Faculty of Education's Community Outreach Centre. The Centre put out an invitation to community agencies to apply for funding to support research projects supporting learners at risk in literacy, mathematics and science and technology between September and May. Each project funded or implemented by the Community Outreach Centre **was based on a partnership among members of Queen's Faculty of Education and community agencies.**

Goals:

- Teach parents how to share developmentally appropriate books in ways that support their child's literacy needs.
- Address parent concerns about book sharing experiences with their children
- Examples of developmentally appropriate books

All based on a workshop called BOOKTALK, which was created by ELS working in Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington, Hastings-Prince Edward, Northumberland and Trenton, to support families with children on the wait list or already receiving therapy from preschool speech and language services through their respective counties.

Who Was Involved?

Community agencies, in particular, those who serve at risk families. They were all consulted before the proposal was submitted to ensure that it was carefully thought out and that all concerns were addressed. Identified and communicated with community agencies to see who is interested in working together to present this workshop to at-risk families (Children's Aid Society, OW/LEAP, Native Friendship Centre Aboriginal Community Action Program for Children (ACAPC-A), LINC, LBS - UPP, Better Beginnings, Better Futures, Faculty of Education, Ontario Early Years Centre – child care)

ELS – Susan and I recruited 9 agencies to promote our workshop. We set up dates and created promotional materials for each community agency. Each agency was responsible for advertizing and promoting the workshop and focus group to their clients.

Community Outreach Centre – recruiting research assistant and teacher candidates

Research Assistant – determining how to measure the effectiveness

Teacher Candidate – through gradual release of responsibility went from sitting in the audience to delivering the workshop. Also, created many useful resources for parents which were given out in the focus groups.

Risk Factors – Compiled by Jennifer de Lugt

Low **maternal education** - Cadima, McWilliam, Leal, 2009; National Household Education Survey, 1995

Family **income** below the poverty line or those families economically at-risk - Bailey, 2006; Cadima, McWilliam, Leal, 2009; Lesaux, Vukovic, Hertzman, Siegel, 2007; National Household Education Survey, 1995;

First language other than English - National Household Education Survey, 1995

Families with a history of dyslexia or **reading disabilities** - Lewis, Freebairn, & Taylor, 2000; Snowling, Gallagher, & Frith, 2003; Snowling, Muter, & Carroll, 2007

Language and speech disorders

Families with **minority** background - Li, 2001; National Household Education Survey, 1995

Low **occupational status** of parents - Cadima, McWilliam, Leal, 2009

Households with **3 or more children** - Cadima, McWilliam, Leal, 2009

2 or more **negative life events** in the last 2 years - Cadima, McWilliam, Leal, 2009

The Budget

Estimated number of families to attend workshops = 9 workshops x 16 families/workshop = 144 families

Gift cards: 9 x \$25 = \$225

Books: \$1440 – ended up having enough for book bags

Transportation: Estimated 70 families requiring assistance: 70 x \$20 (taxi chits) \$1400

Childcare: workshop and focus group \$1350

Handouts \$108

Administrative costs \$520.15

Researcher \$8500

TOTAL \$13, 583

Preparation

- **Revised the Book Talk workshop** to create Read Together, Talk Together workshop. Kept in mind suggestions from feedback forms.
- Recruited teacher candidates and RA.
- **Created a workshop schedule** – at Queen’s University’s Faculty of Education, students are required to complete an alternative practicum, where they work in an educational setting that is not necessarily a classroom. We had 2 students working on our project. We needed to make sure that all the workshops took place during their 3 week practicum with us. Lining up childcare.
- **Trained teacher candidates** – We were responsible for supervising two teacher candidates for 3 weeks. On the first day we gave them an overview of Read Together, Talk Together workshop, specific topics: Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT), National Strategy for Early Literacy, Reading and Parents Program (RAPP), Community Profiles for KFL&A, English as a Second Language, each agency, running a workshop, adult education, EDI – which many teacher candidates have never heard of! Throughout their practicum, they helped prepare for the workshops, purchased food, created resources, blogged.
- **Publicity** – creating posters for partnering agencies and following up with them, strip flyers were handed out
- **Purchasing for Book Bags**: Books, pointers, bookmarks, pencils – Scholastic Warehouse Sale; Stickers – Smile makers; **Food** – No Frills (fruit and veggie trays, cheese and crackers, juice boxes, water)

Workshop:

1.5 hours – each took place at the community agency participants were referred from.

~45 people came to 7 workshops - A few less than we had anticipated on (n=144). Due to special circumstances, 2 of the workshops were cancelled.

Before starting the workshop, participants were informed about the research component of the project and the benefits of participating. They were asked for their consent and informed about the focus group that would follow in 2 weeks. Everyone who attended was included in the draw for the \$25 gift card.

Dialogic Reading Workshop highlights – if you would like a copy of the presentation, please email me.

Focus Group - 1 hour, 6 groups, 37 participants – Questions from the focus group are on the last page.

The Book Bags - Grocery bag, pencil, stickers, pointer, 1 fairy tale, 4 other books, at-home activities for each book as well as CROWD prompts

Results

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.

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.”

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

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.”

A preliminary analysis of the data indicates four emergent themes:

- 1. Sharing books builds relationships** - 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.”
- 2. Reading is more fun for the child and the parent/more time is spent reading** - Interactive reading was more engaging and several parents commented that their child was now more attentive.
- 3. Children are more engaged and focused** - Children were more excited about reading, and some parents noticed an improvement in their child’s vocabulary and ability to express themselves.
- 4. Reading readiness is enhanced through strategies presented** at the *Read Together, Talk Together* workshop.

Focus Group Questions

Opening questions:

- Tell us the name and age of your child.
- Now, please tell us if your child likes books, and what their favourite book is.

Strategies Implemented at Home (What?):

- **Describe how reading to your child has changed since you took the workshop.**
- Probe: What do you do differently now?
- Are you confident in your ability to **select** good books for your child
- Are you confident in your ability to **share** good books with your child?

Effectiveness of the Read Together, Talk Together workshop (How):

- Describe how you read a book to your child.
- **Describe any changes you have noticed in how your child responds to you reading.**
- **Describe any changes in your child's interest in books since you took the workshop?**
- Describe what your child seems to like best about reading.
- Describe any changes you have noticed in your child's vocabulary.
- **Describe your favourite strategy and explain why it is your favourite strategy.**
- What does Read Together, Talk Together mean to you?
- How would you describe the PEER strategy to a friend?
- How would you describe the CROWD strategy to a friend?
- **Describe the prompts you used most frequently.**
- Probe: Explain why you used them (are they easier to use, does your child respond well to them?)
- **In what ways did you find the workshop helpful?**
- In what ways did you find the workshop *not* helpful?
- Imagine now that you are the instructor of the workshop; describe how you would teach it.
- **Describe some of the challenges you encountered when you tried to use some of the workshop strategies.**
- If you were offered a follow-up workshop at a later date, would you attend, and why or why not?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?