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Collaborative Storybook Reading: Bring Parents and At-Risk Kindergarten Students Together

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Many students lack early literacy skills because they have not had opportunities to listen to or talk about stories, engage in word play, read with family members, or view literacy behaviors modeled in the home. The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program presents a model for providing interactive reading experiences for at-risk kindergarten students through the use of parent volunteers. The program was designed to increase student interactions with literature, while at the same time increasing the confidence level and literacy skills of the parent-volunteer readers. Program participants demonstrated increased ability to retell stories and participate in whole-class storybook reading sessions.

LEARNING TO READ can be a daunting task. Juel (1998) found that students who are at the bottom of the class in first grade, remain at the bottom of the class in 4th grade. In order to develop programs that will prevent reading and school failure, eight goals were created by the National Education Goals Panel (1990) and approved by Congress in 1994 to guide states and the federal government in the development of educational programs. Three goals are of particular importance to literacy development:

- all children in America will enter school, ready to learn
- every parent will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping their children learn; and
- every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

Often, students come to school without the basic skills necessary for later success. They lack the early literacy skills that have been shown to facilitate learning how to read (Allor & McCathren, 2003). Among the essential skills are:

- the development of both expressive and receptive oral language (Kamhi & Catts, 1999), and
- the understanding that print symbolizes language and holds information (Adams, 1990).

Durkin (1993) cites knowing that speech corresponds to spoken words, we read from left to right and top to bottom, the function of space in establishing word boundaries as essential components of learning to read. When words can be recognized and understood, and connections between the text and the reader are made, comprehension develops. Many students lack these skills because they have not had opportunities to listen to or talk about stories, engage in word play or read with family members or view literacy behaviors modeled in the home.

Parents play a crucial role in the literacy development of their children. According to Cochran-Smith (1986):

Children are not born knowing how to connect their knowledge and experiences in literate ways to printed and pictorial texts. Rather they must learn the strategies for understanding texts just as they must learn the ways of eating and talking that are appropriate to their cultures or social groups (p. 36).

Many students are not having home experiences necessary to develop early literacy skills that the school's expect and therefore are considered "at risk" for failure. In order to assist these students, teachers prepare lessons and activities designed to build specific literacy skills. Parents are encouraged to participate and support their children's learning. Unfortunately many parents fail to do so, not because of lack of love or support for their children, but because they do not believe that they have the knowledge and skills to help their children.

In response to the call for the involvement of parents in the schools, and the need to increase the literacy skills of students, family literacy programs have been developed. Parents have been encouraged to read to their children on a daily basis, talk to their children and to share literacy activities. In fact, most parents participate in these programs because they wish for their child to become successful academically (Brizius & Foster, 1993; Edwards, 1994, 1995). In many cases this means being able to read at a level that includes thinking critically, applying strategies to clarify vocabulary and ideas and to have the motivation to continue reading and learning (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999).

Storybook reading has been touted as a process for parents and children to read together. Many studies indicate that children who are early readers come from families where literacy activities such as reading aloud, and having books are valued and practiced (Morrow, 1983; Teale, 1978; Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995; Lancy, Draper, & Boyce, 1989). Additional activities that impact children's literacy development include being read to on a consistent basis, interacting with the reader through question and clarification dialogues where they negotiate meaning of the text together.

Yet evidence suggests that simply reading to a child is not enough to build a strong early literacy foundation. Morrow (1990) identifies ten interactive reading behaviors that have a positive impact on children's learning. These include:

- questioning
- scaffolding
- dialogue and responses
- offering praise or positive reinforcement
- giving or extending information
- clarifying information
- restating information
- directing discussion
- sharing personal reactions, and
- relating concepts to life experiences.

To these ten behaviors Hiebert (1981) and Holdaway (1979) add promoting a positive attitude toward reading through enthusiasm, animation and modeling. Thus it is the adult-child interactive behaviors during the reading sessions can scaffold children's literacy development and provide the context for the child to develop concepts about books and print including directionality and book handling (Clay, 1979).

What is apparent is that the process for interactive reading is more complex than simply reading words from a book to a child. Incorporating the behaviors mentioned above can be intimidating. When parents understand how to help their children and develop the necessary skills to do so, they are also improving their own language and literacy skills.

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program was developed to provide literacy support for kindergarten students who had limited home literacy experiences and to increase the literacy knowledge of parents. Parent volunteer readers were trained to conduct daily interactive storybook reading sessions with "at risk" kindergarten students. This project differs from other interactive storybook reading programs in that the same individual reads the story to the students each day. The parent readers were given a script to focus on specific elements of storybook reading from books not read to the students in the past. At the end of the

week, the parent reader would read the book to the entire class. Students were evaluated through the use of retellings as well as through teacher observation. Parent volunteers completed pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys regarding their literacy knowledge and practices.

Literature Review

Literacy development

The development of literacy skills has been linked to the experiences that children have before the enter school (Snow, 1983). She reported that the amount and quality of literacy activities of the home is one of the variables in the development of a child's school literacy. Children, regardless of socioeconomic level, who have been read to regularly at home from an early age possess an understanding, vocabulary, and interest in storybooks that they use as they make personal connections to new learning (Durkin, 1974/75; Strickland & Taylor, 1989). These storybook reading experiences that children have before their formal literacy instruction supports the ease with which they approach learning to read. Many children actually begin to read before they receive formal literacy instruction (Strickland & Taylor, 1989).

The term "lapreading" is used to describe the interactive experiences that children have at home as they listen to stories, pretend to read a book, and carry on conversations with an adult as they read a story together. According to Klesius and Griffith (1996), the benefits of lapreading have been articulated by many researchers. They include helping children develop a sense of how stories are constructed (Cochran-Smith, 1986; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Taylor & Strickland, 1986), allowing children to observe and practice the comprehension strategies of expert readers (Snow & Nino, 1986; Strickland & Taylor, 1989), and teaching children that language is symbolic, that the words and pictures are not things but representations of things (Holdoway, 1979; Snow & Ninio, 1986). During lap reading an adult's behavior varies with the child's familiarity with the vocabulary and information. Adults scaffold children's interactions with text through conversation, questioning, and predicating. The lapreading process is flexible,

responding to the age of the age, skills and experiences of the child and the complexity of the text.

However, all children do not enter school with substantive literacy understandings. Adams (1998) acknowledges that there are homes that do not encourage literacy learning. She states "these homes are best identified by neither income social class, parental education, nor race, but by the values and styles of social communities to which they belong" (Adams, 1998, p. 87). Children from these homes miss out on the "literacy coddling" other children experience. Thus, they enter kindergarten with significantly less knowledge than their well-read-to peers. These children may begin kindergarten with limited oral language development, literacy development, knowledge of the world and attentive behaviors. These students struggle when they enter school and are often considered "at risk" for academic failure.

These less-prepared children need quality learning interactions in order to close the literacy gap with their peers. Clay (1998) suggests that kindergarten programs should include additional literacy opportunities for those students who have missed out. These make-up opportunities include: being read to, participating in a talking environment, interactions with adults, and opportunities to repeat the familiar.

Kindergarten teachers face the task of closing the gap between those students entering kindergarten from literacy-rich homes who are able to complete five year old literacy activities and those students with little or no book experience. In order to close this gap, teachers must prepare instructional programs to reflect each student's level of literacy understanding. Clay recognizes the importance of this challenge when she describes students beginning formal education. "Every child who enters school can learn things about literacy, but we must reach into that child's existing ways of learning to discover at what level his or her literacy awareness can be tapped" (p. 205).

Interactive storybook reading is a school-based activity designed to closely replicate the lap reading experience, and which can be integrated into the kindergarten classroom to build the language and literacy understandings that are necessary for the development of effective

reading and writing skills (Kleisus & Griffith, 1996; Morrow & Smith, 1990; Wood & Salvetti, 2001). During the interactive storybook reading program the adult and child draw attention to the information in the illustrations, predict what would happen next, and share experiences related to the text ((Kleius & Griffith, 1996). As a result, the interactive storybook reading activity provides children with the language and literacy experiences that are necessary for the development of reading, writing, and other literacy skills.

Kleisus and Griffith (1996) have identified the behaviors that structure the interactive storybook process. These behaviors include clarifying information, demonstrating how to read, developing story structure, drawing attention to illustrations, extending vocabulary, informing, metanarrating (text or pictures), praising, pointing out text features and scaffolding strategies of a reader. These behaviors are fluid and respond to the age, skill, and background experiences of the child. When children have opportunities to participate in interactive storybook reading, they gain vital experiences and skills that form the foundation for later literacy development.

Instructional group size

Much of the research on the impact of storybook reading interactions has been devoted to the application and support of lap reading, a one-on-one experience of adult-child reading together where parent and child read and converse about the text and pictures (Kleisus & Griffith, 1996; Martinez & Rosner, 1985; Morrow, 1998; Taylor & Strickland, 1986). However, within the school setting, lap reading is not a realistic option. In classrooms where many students lack emergent literacy skills, one-on-one storybook reading is too time and labor intensive to be a realistic possibility. Small group reading opportunities, a practice much more feasible for school settings has been shown to be an effective practice. Klausmeir, Weirisma, and Harris (1963) found that groups of two to four students could accomplish some tasks better than students working alone. Morrow (1988) found that children who listened to stories in small groups achieved greater comprehension and engaged in more verbal interchange than students who did not participate in the storybook reading progress. She found that in small group instruction,

students serve as models for other children. In addition, the teacher can keep track of each of the students and encourage participation from those that may seem passive.

The research on the effects of cooperative learning (Buckholdt & Wodarski, 1978) suggest that young children use language and nonverbal signals to communicate. Comments and questions from children in the group serve as catalysts for further discussion. When transcripts of readings to groups of three children were compared to the transcripts of reading to twelve children were compared, Cochran-Smith (1984) found that the discussion was more complex and children participated more in groups of three than in groups of twelve. Morrow and Smith (1990) found that students in a reading group of three children obtained higher comprehension scores when compared to scores from one-on-one or large group settings.

Prior to 1990 there was no published research on an optimum group size for storybook reading. Morrow and Smith (1990) sought to determine the optimum setting for read aloud events through the analysis of read aloud activities conducted in one-one, whole class and small group (three students) instructional settings. Their findings indicate that children exhibited greater comprehension when stories were read in a small group (three students) setting as opposed to the one on one setting. As a result of the research on instructional group size, a group of three students was determined to be optimal for the purposes of the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program.

Parent involvement

The quest to involve parents in their child's education has taken many forms. Parents have been asked to assist their children in mastering academic concepts and preparing them for school assessments. Parents have been invited to school meetings, school activities, and parent-school councils. Two activities focused on increasing parent involvement are encouraging parents to pursue at home reading behaviors that encourage learning, and conducting at-school activities that support the parent-teacher relationship. Research shows when parents are involved in their

children's education, student achievement and attitudes are improved (Henderson & Berla, 1994, Olmstead & Rubin, 1983).

Although parents and other adults have been encouraged to participate in their child's education, many parents hesitate to do so. Parents from diverse cultures may be perceived as being less involved in their children's education. This perception is often due to differences in the ways parents relate to school and what they consider the acceptable levels of development (Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, 1993).

In response to this situation, family literacy programs have been developed to improve the literacy skills of adults and children, and encourage adults to practice the reading behaviors in family settings with their children. In turn, these activities will enhance these children's ability to do well in school (DeBruin-Parecki, 1999). Parents are encouraged to practice the reading behaviors with their children during storybook reading sessions at home. As a result, having positive opportunities to learn and practice literacy strategies enables parents to improve their own skills, interact with their children around literacy elements and dispel any of the negative feelings they may retain from their own school experiences.

To increase parent involvement, teachers must be able to create activities in which information can be shared with parents and suggesting ways in which parents can assist their children at home (Rich, 1993). Epstein (1983) found that when teachers were committed to increasing parent involvement, the parents felt that they should help their children at home and understood more about what their children were learning in school. Parental involvement includes activities the parent can do at home to foster student learning and result in academic achievement (Goldenberg, 1987; Scott-Jones, 1987). Sterns and Peterson (1973) found that when parents are able to teach their children, parental self-confidence is increased and results in greater student motivation for learning. When schools develop policies and programs that are sensitive to the community, more parents will become involved in ways that are perceived by the school as being engaged in the in the education process. Therefore, teachers must make the parents be comfortable with the school environment and their role in the school.

Literacy practices within joint storybook reading seem to promote the type of skills in order to ensure success in school. Parents and other adults can provide the additional instruction students need to learn to read.

Parents are a valuable resource for classroom teachers when utilized in a culturally respectful and effective manner (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). When parents participate in activities where they feel valued, the relationship with the school is a positive one. As parents feel more competent in carrying out school-based activities, their self-esteem increases. In turn, children of parents who are involved in school are more motivated to learn and demonstrate higher degrees of achievement.

Storybook readings are an important and daily part of the kindergarten classroom and are especially beneficial to the students with significantly less storybook knowledge than their well-to-read peers. However, a single kindergarten teacher is often unable to provide the elements of an enriched home literacy experience. A collaborative storybook reading program carried out by parent volunteers and shared with the kindergarten class can provide 'at risk students' with vital literacy experiences. Students who read in small group settings of 2-3 students, have multiple opportunities to read the same book and participate in an interactive dialogue that allows each child to be actively involved in the construction and interpretation of the meaning of the story will progress in their literacy development.

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program

Rationale

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program was designed by several teachers from a culturally diverse, small urban school. Many students came from families where languages other than English were spoken or where parent education was limited. The teachers wanted to provide essential early literacy experiences to those students who have missed out on such experiences prior to entering school. These teachers found that students in their classes came to their kindergarten with a wide range of pre-kindergarten experiences. Several students were already

reading, and some students knew how to handle a book and could retell a story based on the pictures. Other students seemed to have few literacy experiences. During shared reading time these students did not follow the text, failed to name the letters of the alphabet, and were not able to name favorite books.

Since additional funds were not available to support an intervention program, the teachers determined that intervention would be carried out within the context of a classroom-based program through the classroom teacher and parent volunteers. A master's project by Lorie Hickerson (2002), presenting the development of a site based Storybook Reading Program, served as a resource. In this community, parent involvement was low, yet this low participation rate was not from a lack of interest, but rather from a lack of understanding of the role of parents in the instructional process. In some cases, parents were only familiar with the concept that the teacher is in charge and the parents do not belong in the school setting. Many of these students came from non-western European cultures including Asian, Hispanic, African American and East Indian. Some students came from single parent or low-income families where the task of earning a living consumed most of the adult energy. Other students came from immigrant families who were not acquainted with schools in America and found them quite intimidating.

Although parents had often received information on what to do with their child in order to develop literacy skills, missing was the vital components of how to carry out these tasks and why these tasks are important. The teachers determined that a program where parents would be trained to deliver instruction to students and then participate in the classroom read aloud time could benefit the students by building skills, while providing parents with the skills and confidence to play a greater role in the education of their children. It was assumed that the knowledge received in this program would become a part of the parent's repertoire of behaviors and will be used with other young family members.

The parents in this school community were supportive of the teachers and wanted to help their children to succeed in school. A program where parents would be trained to deliver instruction to students and then participate in the classroom read aloud time could benefit the

students by building skills, while providing parents with the skills and confidence to play a greater role in the education of their children.

The collaborative storybook reading program was constructed to provide quality, small group, and interactive lap reading experiences at school for those students who entered kindergarten without having such experiences. These students were identified as failing to exhibit age appropriate literacy behaviors and are in danger of not meeting the standards for promotion. Parents were given interactive training sessions which provided them with an opportunity to see typical small group interactions and conversations, discuss the role of the adult reader and view the use of the interactive storybook reading plan and the bookmark guide. During this session the teacher reviewed instructional processes such as making predictions, carrying out a picture walk and picture talk, and creating a retelling. The characteristics of the different types of text including folk tale, fable, fantasy, realistic fiction and nonfiction were presented. Participants were introduced to the structure (components) of stories including character, setting, problem, goal, events, and resolution.

Student participants

At the time of the first report card period, early November, kindergarten teachers identified the students who were not meeting the kindergarten benchmarks for the time period. In many cases these students had not mastered letter names or sounds, could not identify the parts of a book, had little knowledge of the purposes of print and rarely chose to read books during activity time. Teacher's observations indicated that during teacher directed shared reading and whole class read aloud time, these students seemed unengaged, did not follow the print as it was read aloud, participate in discussions, respond teacher's questions during or after the read-aloud sessions. Most of these students did not choose to visit the book corner during activity time, could not name a favorite book, or retell a story.

Fifteen boys and twelve girls participated in the program. Of the twenty-seven students, eight came from families where a language other than English was spoken. The family composition of the students varied,

some lived with a single parent, some with two parents and others in extended families with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Parent volunteers

Parent volunteers were recruited from the kindergarten classrooms as well as the larger school community. Each volunteer had expressed a desire to work with children, an interest in learning about quality children's literature, and a commitment to participate in the project for several weeks. More important was the desire of the volunteers to apply their learning from the project to the implementation of storybook reading at home with their children. Many parents had indicated on their family information sheet that they lacked confidence in assisting their children in the process of learning to read. Others wanted to increase their knowledge of learning how children learn how to read. Seven parents had students in the program; the remaining parents were from the kindergarten and first grade classes.

The teachers determined that a highly structured parent education program was essential to build confidence and skills. The program needed to extend beyond "just reading a book" to a group of students. If storybooks could be used as a means to build students literacy skills, the parents own literacy development would be strengthened as learned how to question, clarify and engage the listener in the storybook reading process. Thus, the training sessions prior to the program were carefully scaffolded to build parent knowledge, allow opportunities for practice and provide a place for parents to discuss their learning.

The key to involving parents is creating an environment in which parental contribution is valued. When the program was introduced to the parents, the teachers emphasized that parents were an integral part of the classroom community as the Friday storybook readers. On Fridays there was time for the parents and the teachers to get together to share insights about the students and any other information necessary. Thus parents were not working in isolation and could see the impact of the collaborative storybook reading program.

Parent preparation

Sessions were created to prepare parent participants for the implementation of the collaborative storybook reading program. Included in the training would be an overview of the literacy process and the role of this program in the development of literacy skills. In addition to how to carry out the program, teachers discussed why the elements in the program assist young students in the development of literacy skills.

Specific parent preparation took place over three sessions prior to the beginning of the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program. Additional sessions were held on Fridays after the shared storybook reading session carried out by each parent in the kindergarten class. Since it was important that the instructional climate developed produce little or no anxiety, parents were welcomed to the training sessions by the kindergarten teachers. The teachers spoke about their literacy program and the desire to assist students who seemed to be struggling. Some teachers shared the struggles that they had learning to read and write. Everyone had the opportunity to raise questions and comment on the project. A variety of multicultural children's books spread throughout the room created a relaxed feeling.

The first meeting of the parents included the participation of several teachers who modeled reading of children's storybooks. Following the reading parents brainstormed a list of their observations. Rather than being passive listeners, the parents became participants in the storybook reading process. Time was left for discussion and questions. It was important that parents have some investment in the processes in addition to assisting the teachers and the identified students. Towards this end, parents set personal literacy goals for themselves. Goals to be accomplished at home included obtaining more books for their children to read, spending more time reading with their children and just talking to their children about the day's activities. Other goals included being on time to their reading session, practicing before reading aloud so as to read the long words correctly and to convey the meaning from the author, and reading aloud with expression to a small group of children.

The second and third sessions highlighted teachers modeling the interactive storybook reading process with a group of kindergarten students. During the modeling session the teacher demonstrated the following strategies: drawing attention to and labeling pictures, demonstrating reading behaviors, making observations, using questions, clarifying information, extending vocabulary and developing story structure. The preparation program incorporated the recommendations from *A Child Becomes a Reader* (Ambruster, Lehr, and Osborne, 2003) for parents to incorporate in the parent child reading sessions:

- Make reading a pleasure
- Show enthusiasm as you read with your child
- Read to your child often
- Talk with your child as you read together
- Encourage your child to explore books (pp. 14-15)

The interactive sessions gave the parents an opportunity to see typical small group interactions and conversations, discuss the role of the adult reader and view the use of the interactive storybook reading plan and the bookmark guide. During this session the teacher reviewed instructional processes such as making predictions, carrying out a picture walk and picture talk, and creating a retelling. Highlighted were the characteristics of the different types of text including folk tale, fable, fantasy, realistic fiction and nonfiction. Participants were introduced to the structure of stories including character, setting, problem, goal, events, and resolution.

During each session, time was allocated to the viewing of high quality children's literature. Award winning books such as *Tar Beach* (Ringold, 1991), *Make Way for Ducklings* (McCloskey, 1941), *Strega Nona* (dePaola, 1975), *The Keeping Quilt* (Polacco, 1988), *Wolf's Chicken Stew* (Kasza, 1987) from the school and classroom libraries were shared with parents for their perusal. Serving as a resource, the teacher leader was able to show parents elements of story structure, character development, and use of language. Groups of books by well known authors and illustrators were shared. Parents could borrow the books to read with their children at home.

Each Friday, the parent volunteers met to review the week's activities, ask questions and compare experiences. These discussions were participant lead; a teacher remained in the room but was not a party to the discussion unless invited. Over the course of the project, the focus of the discussions moved from how to get certain children involved to using ones voice to help create a visual image of a specific character, asking questions, and showing students how the author uses pictures and words to convey meaning. During the second part of the Friday meeting the teacher presented the book for the following week. Since each storybook to be read was purposely chosen for the project, the lesson plan was updated with specific information about the book to be read.

For the first three weeks a teacher read the book aloud to the volunteers and modeled the components of the Five Day Plan (Hickerson, 2002). Following the modeled lesson, parents had the opportunity to practice reading aloud and participate in a discussion regarding the reading process. As the project progressed, the parents took turns introducing the book for the following week. Volunteer were able to take their book home and practice, thus becoming more familiar with the text as well as their role as a reader. As the project progressed, the parents took on a greater role in the Friday sessions. The parents, rather than the teacher, were selecting the critical attributes of the book to be highlighted during the storybook reading sessions. These sessions became a forum where parents could exchange of ideas and share ways to make the joint storybook sessions work better.

Planning

The Lesson Plan Overview and the Storybook Notes were developed from several sources including Morrow's 1988 study of low SES students in one-on-one storybook reading sessions in school settings. Information on the interactions that take between adults and children in lap or storybook reading activities (Klesius & Griffith, 1996) was added to the data reported by Morrow (1998) and incorporated into the lesson plan, storybook notes, and daily reading plans.

Research has demonstrated that it is not simply the reading of the storybook that increases literacy, but it is the interaction between the

reader, the listener and the text that creates understanding and the development of meaning (Flood, 1977; Heath, 1983; Teale, 1983). Therefore the guidance provided by the adult reader is critical to the development of student's literacy skills. The lesson plan outline shared with, modeled for, and practiced by the parent readers included the elements of questioning, predicting, scaffolding, attention to print, praise, student talk including sharing of personal experiences and imitation of the author's language.

The Lesson Plan Overview, displayed in Table 1, was presented to the parents during the first training session and reviewed in each subsequent session. It was important that the parents see the storybook reading process as in its entirety before breaking the process into daily components. On Fridays, when the parent read the book of the week to the entire kindergarten class, they included many elements of the lesson plan in their read-aloud.

Table 1
Lesson Plan Overview

Getting Ready:

- Show of the cover of the book to the children
- Encourage predictions
- Discuss author and illustrator
- Allow children to discuss experiences related to the book
- Discuss the type of text (folk tale, fantasy, fable, realistic, fiction, nonfiction)

Read:

- Encourage children to react to and comment on the story as they listened to you read
- Rephrase text to support understanding
- At appropriate points ask the children to predict what will happen next

Revisit the Story:

- Review the story components (character, setting, problem, goal, events, solution)
 - Help students make connections between events in the story and events in their own lives
 - Encourage "attempted" retellings of the story
-

In order to structure the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program sessions two additional instructional plans were created. The Five Day Plan (Appendix A) outlined the material that should be covered each day in the 20-30 minute session and included the language that the parents could use in engaging the students. This daily plan was copied onto cardstock and laminated so it could accompany the parent reader. One of the purposes of the project was to prepare parents with the strategies for assisting their children in developing literacy. The Lesson Plan Overview and accompanying lessons plans when used in conjunction with the training sessions would enable the parents to be successful in the reading process.

Knowing that the full lesson plan may be too cumbersome, the essential elements of the plan were placed on a bookmark (Appendix B) and laminated. This bookmark was used to remind the readers of the plan for each day. As the project progressed, the parents found that they had internalized the procedures and referred to the bookmark on a less frequent basis. By the end of the project the students could generate the outline for the daily reading session.

Session implementation

The classroom teacher and the parent volunteer chose the time for the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program. In many cases this took place before or after recess or during independent work time. At the appointed time, the parent would enter the room, gather the students and go to their reserved storybook reading place. The reserved areas were away from distractions, but not isolated. A reserved sign created by the target students was prominently placed so that the area would not be disturbed.

During the collaborative reading session, the parent reader would scaffold students learning through model asking and answering questions in order to obtain meaning. Other times the parent would use a think-aloud protocol to demonstrate to the conversational nature of stories. Pictures often became the focal point for discussions about the story and were used as the basis for the prediction of forthcoming events.

The interactive sessions lasted from 20-30 minutes. At the end of the collaborative storybook reading session, the students were quietly returned to their classroom to resume their activities.

Each day the parent reader completed the daily elements outlined in the lesson plans. On Fridays at least one student from each group was tape recorded as he/she completed an attempted reading. This reading was reviewed for attention to story grammar, use of pictures and the language of the author. After the Friday session, the parent read the book to the entire class. The students in the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program considered themselves special as they had already heard the book before.

Program Assessment

The Collaborative Storybook Reading Program had two foci: the development of emergent literacy skills in kindergarten students and the participating parents' development of storybook reading and other skills to foster emergent literacy development. Twenty-seven students and nine adults participated in the program. Both foci were evaluated.

Retellings

Before the project began, each student participant was audio taped completing a retelling of a story read by the classroom teacher. Since the story had not been presented in the classroom and the student indicated that the story had not been heard before, the student could not rely on prior experience or background information to complete the retelling. This retelling was transcribed and then scored using the picture-governed component of the Rating Scale for Emergent Reading Levels (Sulzby, 1985) (Appendix C). Teacher observations of the students during the whole class shared reading time were recorded; student performance was rated as 1, 2, or 3 (Appendix D).

Classroom assessment data included: letter names, letter sounds, concepts about print, high frequency words and developmental spelling collected for each participant. Teachers also indicated the level of student involvement in other literacy based classroom activities such as writing,

free reading in the library corner, and dramatic play using reading and writing scenarios.

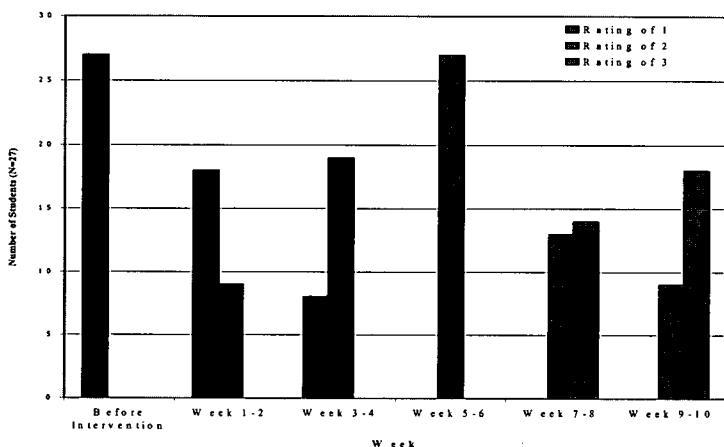
In addition, parent volunteers completed a questionnaire about their experiences with the literacy process (Appendix E). The intent was not to gather specific knowledge about each parent, but to obtain a general sense of the parents' literacy skills and their perception of themselves as literacy facilitators for their children.

Throughout the project the children's comfort with the story, knowledge of story structure and language of story was assessed through retellings. According to Morrow (1987) there is a positive relationship between the amount of exposure a child has had to stories and the quality of their retellings. As children have more experiences, especially those that are structured with opportunities for active engagement of the reader and listeners, there is an increase in the length, accuracy, use of the language of the book and completeness of the retelling.

At the end of each week, one or two students were asked to complete a retelling of the story read during the week. This retelling was recorded and analyzed according to the picture governed attempts section of Sulzby's Rating Scale for Emergent Reading Levels (Appendix C). As the students' exposure to the storybook language structure, and content increased, the retellings became more complete and reflective of the story. Students began to incorporate the language of the author, character attributes and expressions into their retellings. On the average student scores on retellings increased from 1's to 2's and 3's. Although the level of sophistication of the retelling varied among the students, all did gain in their efforts.

Each student participated in an initial retelling, four retellings of stories during the program and a final retelling of a story at the end of the program. The evaluation of the retellings are presented below (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Evaluation of Student Retellings

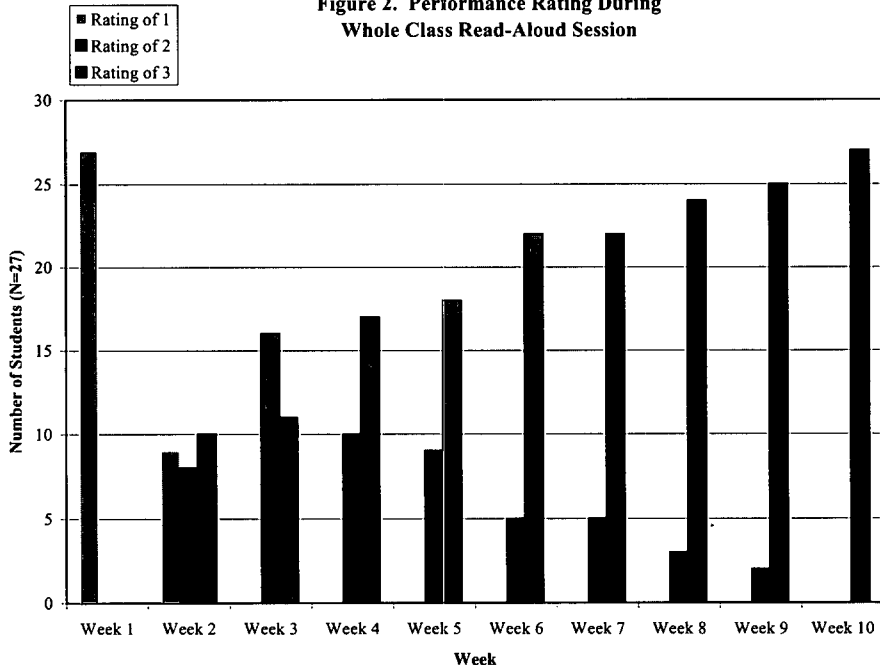


Teacher Observation

A second area of assessment was of the students' interactions and behaviors during the Friday classroom whole class reading experience. Before the Collaborative Storybook Reading Program began, the target students were observed and rated by the classroom teacher. These students received a "1" rating. Each week during the project, the classroom teacher observed the target students and rated their behaviors on a scale from 1-3. Over the course of the project the student's ratings by their classroom teachers consisted of 2's and 3's (See Figure 2).

Classroom assessment data indicated continued growth in the acquisition of letter names and sounds, concepts of print, and high frequency words and developmental spelling. This project concluded prior to the formal district assessment of these elements. A change in target student's involvement in literacy activities was apparent to the classroom teacher. Some students were choosing to read books from the classroom library; others were recreating the storybook reading process for their classmates.

Figure 2. Performance Rating During Whole Class Read-Aloud Session

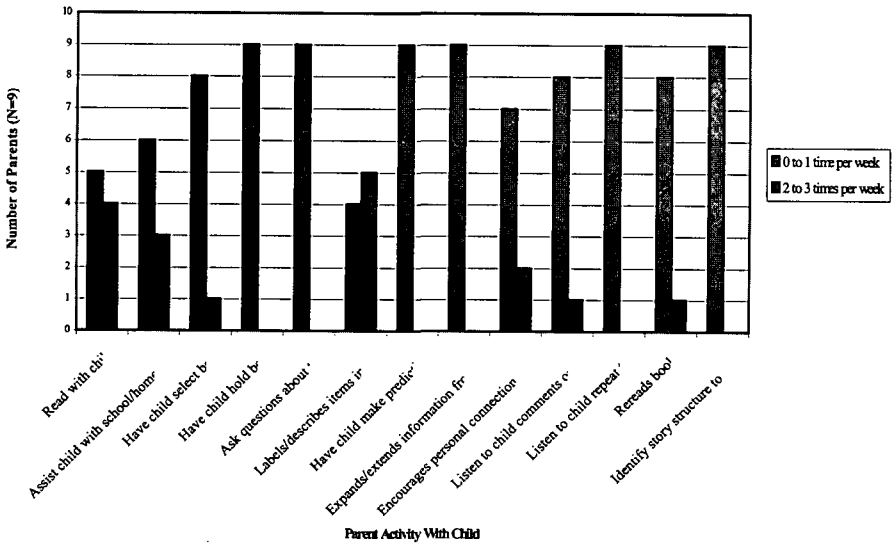


Questionnaire: Self Perception of Parents

Data from the parent questionnaires completed prior to the beginning to the Collaborative Storybook Reading program indicated that of the parents did not read with their children or assist their children with homework very often. In addition they did not feel comfortable assisting their child with schoolwork or with the reading process. Before the program began, over half of the parents indicated that they did not read with their child more than once a week. Most of the parents indicated that they did not employ interactive reading behaviors including questioning, predicting, labeling, linking ideas in the text to themselves, or provide additional information before they began the program (See Figure 3).

One of the most important outcomes of the project was the increased skill and self-confidence exhibited by the parents. Each parent felt that they had learned how to read interactively with their child. The parents learned how to question, predict, identify story components, and create interactive conversations about text. Parents reported that they read to their child more frequently than before the project and engaged in reading strategies to scaffold their child's reading. At the end all of the parents indicated that they used all of the interactive strategies as they read with their child, and all indicated that they were comfortable assisting their children with learning how to read and do school work (See Figure 4).

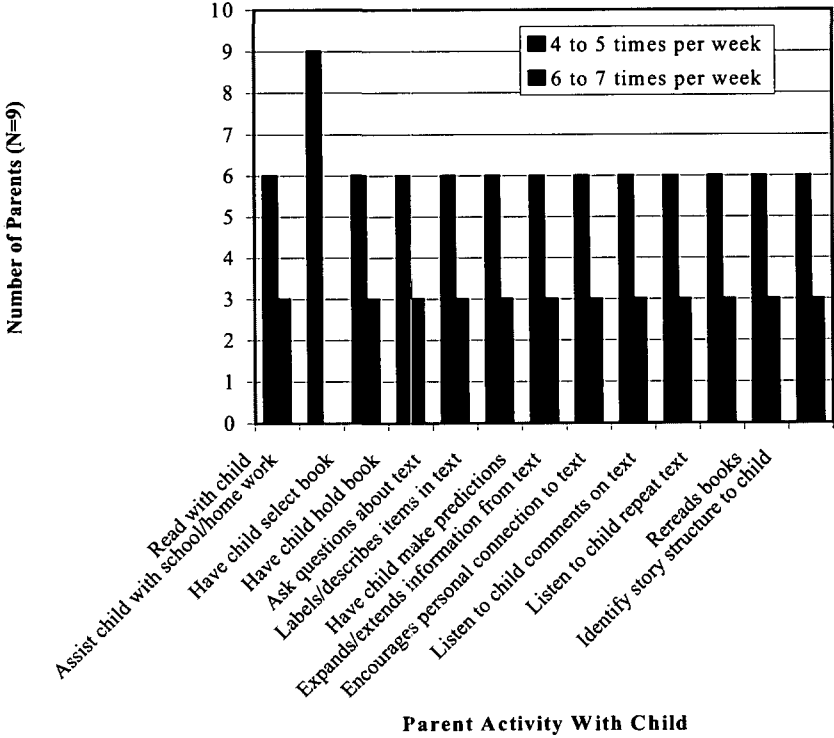
Figure 3. Data From Parent Questionnaires Before Program



Conclusions and Recommendations

To succeed in school, children must be able to read. Reading, in turn, is the product of early literacy skills acquired, at least in part, through skill-building interactions with parents. Children who come to school without the benefit of these early foundations are in danger of falling behind and never climbing on the literacy bandwagon.

Figure 4. Data From Parent Questionnaires After Program



In an effort to keep those at-risk children up with their peers, teachers designed a program, interactive storybook reading, that mimics the lap reading experiences that are an essential part of the skill building process. They enlisted the assistance of, and trained, the parents of those children to assist in the process with the dual goals of giving the parents the skills and confidence to assist their children in school, while giving the students the building blocks missing from their educational foundation.

The interactive storybook reading program resulted in significant improvement in student ability to retell a story. Their interest and attention to stories being read aloud in class increased. The students began to mimic what readers do - predicted story events, understood and discussed story structure, began to repeat text and vocabulary, and began to understand that reading is the process of communicating with the author. The students approached the skill level of those who had early literary experiences.

For the parents, the program provided a strong structure for carrying out the collaborative storybook process. Parents had opportunity to watch the process in action, to practice before they worked with children, and to talk to teachers and to one another. The parents built a support network among themselves, a community of parents. Because the parents brought the stories they were reading into the classroom, the parents became a part of the class.

At the outset, the goal was to develop a program for struggling readers that did not require an infusion of funds or specialized personnel. This program can be replicated in other settings and adapted to fit the needs of the target students. Several factors were instrumental to the success of the program and can serve as the structure for future programs. These factors are presented below:

- Daily read aloud sessions with the same students and reader.
- Opportunity for the reader to read to the target student's class.
- A quiet, comfortable place away from distractions for the collaborative reading session.
- Small groups of 3-4 students for the reading sessions.
- Tape recording of retelling enables students' to hear themselves talk.
- Schedule sessions so as not to interfere with the instructional program.
- Provide students with the opportunity to choose the book to be read.
- Provide opportunities for parents to share with each other.

In the future, I would like to use the collaborative storybook reading program with second language learners and first graders. I would like to follow students who have been in this program for two or three years to see if they retain the gains made here and reach parity with their peers. Further efforts should be undertaken to try the program with a larger group of students with an eye toward instituting a school-wide parent literacy program.

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Appendix A

Five Day Reading Plan

Day 1

Discuss the title, author, illustrator and other books.

Identify things known by exploring the cover.

Make predictions about the story.

Read through the book.

Have students make predictions throughout the reading.

Encourage discussion and questions.

Encourage the gathering of information from the illustrations.

Day 2

“Picture Walk and Talk.” Using the pictures, guide the students in retelling the story.

Try to capture the language of the author.

Read the story.

Encourage lots of discussion and clarification.

Use questions whenever possible. Draw information from the students.

Have students label the items in the picture. Can you find ___?

Day 3

Look at the book page-by-page, or two page by two page spread.

Have the students discuss what they know (remember). Then read each page to confirm the parts they remember and to clarify any confusion.

Encourage the students, using questions/comments, to make connections between events in the story and their own life.

Read and enjoy the story.

Day 4

Look at the pictures and discuss story components:

“Who are the characters in the story?”

“What is the setting?”

“Where does this story take place?”

“What is the problem?”

How was the problem solved?”

Encourage the students to do an attempted reading, retelling.

Read and enjoy the story.

Day 5

Tape record one of the students to complete an attempted reading-retelling. Note your observations.

Read “Book of the Week” to the entire class. Teacher will observe the target students.

Place the “Book of the Week” in a special place in the room.

Appendix B

Five Day Plan Bookmark

Day 1

Title of the book, author, illustrator.
Discuss cover and make predictions.
Read story and encourage student comments.

Day2

“Picture walk – picture talk.” Read the story.
Have students discuss that label items in the pictures.

Day 3

Lead students in a page-by-page discussion of the story using the pictures.
Read the text to confirm information shared in picture discussions.
Discuss connections between events in the book and events in students’ lives.
Read and enjoy the story.

Day 4

Using the pictures in the story, define the following story the components: characters, setting, problem, goal, events, and solution.
Invite students to do an attempted reading.
Read and enjoy!

Day 5

Tape-record an attempted reading.
Read story to the entire class.
Place the “book of the week” in a “special place” visible to students.

Appendix C

Rating Scale for Emergent Reading Levels (Elizabeth Sulzby, 1985)

Picture Governed Attempts

- Rating 1
Story not formed.
Speech that accompanies each page appears to be in response to a discrete page.
Language not tied together for naïve audience to understand.
Attends only to pictures and points out specific items by giving names or commenting on them.
Gives re-enactment as if action in picture is occurring now.
- Rating 2
Story formed/oral language-like.
Can understand a complete story, but language is contextualized to the pictures.
Story is context dependent.
May give dialogue for characters, but does not use dialogue carriers.
- Rating 3
Story formed/written language-like.
Story created may depart from actual story, but shows a clear sense of audience and contains major portions that are de-contextualized or sufficiently specified to be understood without the pictures.
Child creates patterns similar to those in book, language is de-contextualized and intonation is reading-like.
Child shows awareness and partial memory for stretches of the text; child shows self-correction behaviors that indicate he/she is trying to retrieve the actual story.
Does not attend to print, but may understand that adults read print to tell the story.

Print Governed Attempts

- Rating 4
Refusal.

Refuses to read on the grounds that they know print rather than pictures are read to tell the story.

Rating 5

Aspectual.

Focuses on one or two aspects of print to the exclusion of other aspects such as sounding out words or memory of text.

Rating 6

Holistic/strategies imbalanced.

Tends to omit unknown words, excessively substitutes other words from repertoire, sounds out words excessively, may complain that text is too hard.

Rating 7

Strategies balanced (Independent Reading)

Child may read word-perfectly at times or may make numerous miscues, but makes self-corrections that show wide range of knowledge by skipping over words. Accurate in reproducing wording and author's intended meaning.

Appendix D

Teacher Observation of Student Performance During Whole Class Read Aloud Session

The classroom teacher evaluated each student during the Friday whole class storybook reading sessions. The students' behaviors were rated according to the scale below.

1. Performance indicates difficulty understanding the story, has difficulty focusing, and appears to lack interest in storybook reading or is unwilling to participate.
2. Performance matches that of other students, listens attentively, and participates when called upon.
3. Strong performance, appears to understand the story structure, makes personal connections, and actively participates.

Appendix E

Parent Questionnaire

Birthplace _____

Grade of student _____

Education _____

Number of times you read with your child each week:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Number of times you assist your child with homework each week:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Indicate your level of comfort in assisting your child learning to read:

not comfortable	barely comfortable
comfortable	very comfortable

Please describe the reasons for your level of comfort:

Indicate how frequently you carry out the following with your child (times/week):

Have your child select the book to read:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Have your child touch/hold the book:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Ask your child questions about what you are reading:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Label items of interest and describe what they are and what they do:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Ask your child to predict what will happen next:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Expand the information in the story or extend the information provided in the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Talk about information that relates to the text; make personal connections to the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Listen to your child comment on the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Listen to your child repeat parts of the text:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

Reread books several times:

01-1- 2-3 4-5 6-7 8-9 10 or more

I would feel more comfortable helping my child if I was able to.....

I would like to have communications from my child's teacher in the areas of.....