

SymPaper#2: Tender Shoots: Beginning reading outcomes

Dr Elizabeth Schaughency¹, Kelsi Linney¹, Dr Jane Carroll¹, Jessica Riordan¹, Dr Shika Das¹, Prof Elaine Reese¹

¹University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

Biography:

This paper follows a collaborative project involving researchers and research students in the Department of Psychology and whānau of children attending participating kindergartens and education and care centres in the community. Elizabeth Schaughency is a clinical psychologist, with expertise in clinical child psychology and interests in providing ways to support important adults in children's lives foster children's developing competencies. Kelsi Linney assisted with evaluating benefits of preschool participation for beginning reading as part of her masters research. Jessica Riordan and Shika Das assisted with development, implementation, and evaluation of project activities as part of their PhD research. Jane Carroll is a registered speech-language therapist and teacher, and Elaine Reese area is a developmental psychology researcher, bringing a multi-disciplinary perspective to designing, carrying out, and evaluating Tender Shoots.

Abstract

OBJECTIVES/PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

We evaluated benefits of a shared reading and oral language preventive intervention with parents and preschool children for children's literacy skills one year after participation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/EVIDENCE BASE

Oral language competencies during early childhood are related to later reading success. Oral language competencies include those related to understanding what is said or heard, important for reading comprehension, and those related to the sounds within words (phonological awareness), important for learning to crack the code of text for reading and spelling. Shared reading and oral language interactions (conversations, word play) with adults provide opportunities for children to be introduced to and practice oral language competencies.

METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH DESIGN

Parents of 3 ½ to 4 ½ year-old-children ($n = 70$) were recruited through early childhood centres and randomly assigned to one of three conditions, shared reading emphasizing meaning-related extra-textual talk or phonological awareness or non-reading activities for preschool children, which they implemented for six weeks. Reading conditions included one parent education session, used the same set of books, provided parents two books per week, and encouraged scaffolding higher level skills through repeated readings and verbal interactions outside reading. The non-reading control provided weekly suggested activities and resources. At follow-up, children ($n = 62$) were 5 - 6 years-old, in their first year of primary school and reading instruction.

RESULTS/OUTCOMES

Analyses, controlling for age and baseline alphabet knowledge, indicated benefits of participation on literacy measures, relative to the non-reading control, particularly for the phonological awareness condition.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Findings support benefits for children's beginning reading. Future work should examine other benefits, including, but not limited to, children's oral language skills and later reading comprehension. Additional work should examine extensions to work with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, children with learning support needs, and supporting early childhood practice.