

Parent Interventionists in Phonological Emergent Reading

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Running head: PARENT INTERVENTION, EMERGENT READING,
PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

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Parent Interventionists in Phonodialogic Emergent Reading

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe an activity-based intervention, dialogic reading with embedded explicit phonological awareness strategies, that parents can apply in their home settings with their young children. Helping young children learn phonological awareness skills are vitally important to the development of early reading (Ziolkowski & Goldstein, 2008; Anthony & Lonigan, 2004). Though there is ample empirical evidence on the contribution of phonological awareness to children's reading skills, including parents as interventionists in the emergent reading development of young children has received noticeably less attention. The theoretical underpinnings of this phonodialogic approach to early reading, specifically phonological awareness, activity-based intervention, and dialogic reading will be briefly discussed. This article also describes the process through which parental phonodialogic reading may have the potential to create an observable positive treatment effect on young children's phonological awareness skills.

Parent Interventionists in Phonodialogic Emergent Reading

“It is not a small or unworthy task to learn ‘*what the book says.*’” (Thorndike, 1917)

Introduction

Reading proficiency is a national priority. Since the passage of The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB; P. L. 107 – 110), there has been a major emphasis on student reading programs (Nunnery & Ross, 2007; Ross, et al., 2004), kindergarten through third grade, to ensure that every student achieve in reading at or above grade level, by the end of the third grade year. Effective instructional methods and materials to prevent reading failure and to remediate reading problems are essential activities in support of this national mandate.

Reading is an elaborate language process and is not an easily learned task. Reading requires the ability to decode written language and activate reasoning to construct linguistic meaning (Perfetti, 1984; Stanovich, 1994; Thorndike, 1917; Walcutt, 1967). Furthermore, proficient reading results from the assimilation of a core of language knowledge and the application of a set of related skills, including phonological awareness, through which further educational and lifelong experiences evolve.

Identifying the role that phonological awareness plays in learning to read is “probably the most significant advance in the scientific study of reading and related skills” (Pogorzelski & Wheldall, 2005, p.1). Phonological awareness has been demonstrated to have a clear and consistent relationship with later conventional literacy skills and is a strong predictive variable in literacy development (National Institute for Literacy, 2008). Many researchers have demonstrated that children as young as 3- to 5-years-old can begin to learn the process of developing phonological awareness, including

rhyiming and alliteration, blending, and segmentation (Burgess & Lonigan, 1998; Gillion, 2005; Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony, & Barker, 1998; Lundberg, Frost, & Peterson, 1988; Rvachew, Ohberg, Grawburg, & Heyding, 2003). Further, an additional intent of NCLB 2001 is to improve student reading achievement by strengthening the coordination among family literacy programs, early literacy programs, and schools.

Among the children identified at highest risk for developing later reading difficulties are children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Foster & Miller, 2007; McLoyd, 1998; Neuman, 2007; Neuman & Celano, 2001; Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Children whose early language awareness and literacy socialization needs have not been met in their home environment often enter school behind their peers in key aspects of cognition, including phonological and print awareness, oral language, and vocabulary (Hart & Risley, 1992, 1995; Justice, Bowles, Pence, Khara, & Skibbe, 2009; Marvin & Miranda, 1993; Marvin & Wright, 1997). When a child's early language and literacy skills are compromised, parental support and educational interventions are crucial to overcome these challenges. Parental involvement in the education of young children, who are either at-risk or have been identified with a disability, is considered a necessary component in the delivery of effective and efficient intervention (Bailey et al., 2006; Guralnick, 2002; IDEA, 2004).

Phonodialogic Emergent Reading

This article will present an activity-based intervention--dialogic reading with embedded explicit phonological awareness strategies--applied as a preventive approach that can be implemented by parents in their home settings. Helping young children learn phonological awareness skills, such as the ability to identify alliteration and rhyme, and

the ability to blend and segment onset and rime, are vitally supportive of emergent reading development (Ziolkowski & Goldstein, 2008; Anthony & Lonigan, 2004). Though there is ample empirical evidence on the contribution of phonological awareness to children's reading skills, including parents as interventionists in the emergent reading development of young children has received noticeably less attention (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1994). Accordingly, the topography of the theoretical underpinnings of this intervention will be reviewed. Specifically the relationship between early language development and the role of phonological awareness in emergent reading, the role of dialogic parent-child reading activity as a context for learning and readiness for school, and the importance of a parent's ability to use prevention intervention strategies with his/her child to prompt and scaffold the child's language, emergent reading development, and phonological awareness will be presented. This will be followed by a description of the strategic steps that parents can apply at home within the context of an interactive storybook reading intervention.

Phonological Awareness

The research to date demonstrates that phonological awareness is a component of phonological processing and it has typically been defined as the ability to identify and manipulate increasingly smaller units of sound segments that comprise words (Lonigan et al., 1998). Along a developmental continuum, children's improvement in the ability to use deeper levels of their phonological awareness skills (e.g., phonemic vs. syllable) tends to better predict their early reading achievement (Anthony & Lonigan, 2004; Pufpaff, 2009). Due to the developmental hierarchy of these emergent reading skills, younger children around three- to five-years of age may find shallower units (e.g., onset

and rhyme) easier to identify and manipulate (Fox & Routh, 1975; O'Connor et al., 1993; Yeh, 2003). While there is considerable research in clinical and classroom settings with children at-risk for reading disabilities (e.g., socioeconomic disadvantage, developmental delays), a promising segment of this empirical evidence (Skibbe, Behnke, & Justice, 2004) focuses on adding explicit phonological activities to parent-child shared storybook reading.

Activity-Based Intervention

Studies in activity-based intervention provide the theoretical foundation for an effective family-focused approach to teaching emergent reading skills that includes a rigorous measurement system based on behavioral principles (Hancock, Kaiser, & Delaney, 2002; Losardo & Bricker, 1994; Macy, 2007). Enhanced quality in parent-child interaction can help parents become interventionists in facilitating their children's language, communication, and behavior (Delaney & Kaiser, 2001; Hemmeter & Kaiser, 1994; Hester, Kaiser, Alpert, & Whiteman, 1995). Thus, an activity-based intervention combined with dialogic reading strategies has the potential to teach parent interventionists to facilitate the development of their children's phonological awareness through everyday opportunities to read together.

Parents as Interventionists

Childhood learning patterns are clearly established in the early years (Novick, 1993). Although it is developmentally appropriate practice to follow a child's lead, parents do not need to wait for children to demonstrate a need to learn to read before they initiate language and literacy activities. Well-timed recommendations and sufficient support for parents offered proactively about how to begin helping their children develop

early language and reading skills can help propel them toward catching up with their peers (Alpert & Kaiser, 1992; Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, Volpe, Cutting, & Bissinger, 2006). Parents are the secret ingredient---able to balance high challenge and expectations, to kindle motivation, and to supply bountiful support, crafting the best recipe for their children's reading acquisition and attainment.

Dialogic Reading

Dialogic reading is a means of scaffolding children's language and literacy skills through the interactive reading of picture or storybooks (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Whitehurst et al., 1994). It is an activity-based intervention that parents can use with the intention of teaching specific emergent reading skills to their children. In doing so, parents ask their children questions, provide positive and informative feedback, and modify their comments and questions in adjusting to the children's responsiveness, growth, and in meeting their instructional goals.

The correlation and group design research base on dialogic reading is relatively extensive (Arnold et al., 1994; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999; Zevenbergen et al., 2003), but rarely used is single-subject experimentation (Hockenberger et al., 1999; McNeill & Fowler, 1999; Ziolkowski & Goldstein, 2008). Moreover, there have been many dialogic studies examining children's early language and literacy skills, such as concepts about print, letter knowledge, and verbalizations (Aram, 2006; Blom-Hoffman et al., 2006; Duursma et al., 2008; Hargrave, & Senechal, 2000; Justice et al., 2005). A largely neglected language domain to be addressed through dialogic reading is phonological awareness.

Although this line of research has not specifically addressed using dialogic

reading to target children's phonological skills, Whitehurst and colleagues (Arnold et al., 1994; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; Whitehurst et al., 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999; Zevenbergen et al., 2003) have conducted a series of randomized trials demonstrating the effectiveness of this intervention on increasing the rate of children's language acquisition, increasing expressive vocabulary, and increasing narrative skills for children from lower-, middle-, and higher-income backgrounds.

According to Whitehurst et al. (1988), there are three general guidelines for organizing dialogic reading as an intervention. First, the parent uses questioning and related strategies to encourage the child to talk about the picture book, rather than limiting the child's use of language by narrating the book as the child listens. This first guideline is a necessity as the intention of this approach is to create a contextual dialogue with the child through which the parent scaffolds learning objectives. For example, asking 'wh-' type questions will usually evoke more complex child responses, than questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no' or a single word response. Questions that begin with these words, for example 'where,' 'what,' 'when,' 'who,' 'why,' and 'how,' tend to request more information from the child, such as "What is happening to Ernie?"

Second, the parent uses positive and informative feedback to answer the child's responses. Within the feedback, the parent embeds imitation and modeling, language recasts and expansions, and elaborations that highlight the differences between what the children have said and how they can extend their understanding into words, phrases, and sentences. This second guideline is a necessity as it builds the quality of the parent-child interaction, which can be naturally reinforcing to both parent and child.

Third, the parent's criteria for mastery of the child's learning goals need to show progressive growth that is sensitive and tailored to the children's developing abilities. This third step is crucial as it provides a means for measuring and monitoring the child's progress and goal attainment. It also provides parents with the flexibility and information to become aware of subtle, but strategic adjustments they can make to better meet their children's needs and improve progress toward goals. Taken together, these three parameters provide the structure for parents to begin to think and instruct as an interventionist.

In support of these guidelines two sets of strategies are presented to teach parents to implement phonodialogic reading with young children of preschool age across an eight-week intervention period. Teaching parents to implement a dialogic reading intervention with fidelity requires a systematic approach to improve their rates of success (Briesch et al., 2008). The uses of two acronyms encompass these strategies, which address the need for structure in implementing the intervention with integrity and may improve the rate of its success. The two acronyms that outline the strategy sets summarized in Table 1 are as follows: (1) PETER the rhyming strategy; and (2) PIPER the alliteration strategy. The acronym PETER is a way to remember the set of phonodialogic reading strategies that includes identifying and producing rhyming words. The acronym PIPER is a way to recall the strategies that include identifying and producing alliterative words.

Table 1. PETER – PIPER Phonodialogic Reading Strategies

PETER	PIPER
<p>Prompt your child’s picture labeling, and predicting about the story by asking your child what the story might be about, and what might happen in the story.</p>	<p>Prompt your child’s picture labeling, and predicting about the story by asking your child what the story might be about, and what might happen in the story.</p>
<p>Eavesdrop and evaluate your child’s responses, asking your child to help you identify all the rhyming words. For example, point to the word ball and say, “This is the word ball. Ball rhymes with the word _____.” Pause for at least three seconds to allow your child time to complete the rhyme. If your child does not respond in three seconds, complete the rhyme for your child and repeat the question again.</p>	<p>Identify initial letter sounds of words by asking your child to help you complete a sentence. For example, say “Ball begins with the /b/ sound. ‘B’ makes the /b/ sound in the word_____.” Pause for at least three seconds to allow your child time to complete the word or sound. If your child does not respond after three seconds, complete the word for your child and repeat the question again.</p>
<p>Talk about the tale and ask your child to tell how the story events relate to your child’s true life experiences.</p>	<p>Pose purposeful questions such as ‘who’ ‘what’ ‘when’ ‘where’ ‘why,’ and ‘how,’ to prompt your child’s responses.</p>
<p>Expand and elaborate on your child’s responses, eliciting more details about the story.</p>	<p>Expand and elaborate on your child’s responses, eliciting more details about the story.</p>
<p>Reinforce your child’s right responses with positive remarks and praise, and repeat the reading on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Reinforce your child’s right responses with positive remarks and praise, and repeat the reading on a regular basis.</p>

Summary

In reviewing the currently available studies on phonological awareness, activity-based intervention and dialogic reading, it is apparent that no single subject studies found to date have examined the specific contribution of parents employing dialogic reading for increasing phonological awareness skills of their young children at risk for reading disabilities or reading difficulties due to either developmental delays or socioeconomic disadvantage. Thus far, studies of dialogic reading strategies applied either by parents, teachers, or research assistants have not thoroughly examined the degree to which these techniques could have an effect on the many skills involved in phonological awareness. Therefore, it is important to establish whether dialogic reading can have an effect on key emergent reading skills, such as phonological awareness, because these early skills have been shown to have reciprocal causal effects on later reading acquisition and proficiency (Perfetti, Beck, & Bell, 1987). Whether making simple changes to the intervention (e.g., adding explicit prompts for blending and segmenting onset, rime, and letter sounds) would result in substantial growth for children's phonological awareness development, appears to be worth examining because the strategies can be easily taught to parents and the dialogic reading activity is inherently parent and child friendly.

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