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Parent-Child Book Reading: Using Home Literacy Units to Foster Language Development in
Children who are DHH

by

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A project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education

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2015

Introduction

Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) often experience delays in language and literacy, making rich language opportunities with parents in the home very important (Lederberg, Schick, & Spencer, 2013). Parent-child book reading promotes language and vocabulary development in children through word-object associations and expanding vocabulary (Farrant & Zubrick, 2012). Additionally, parent-child book reading is enhanced when parents are taught how to use engaging book reading techniques with their children (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1991). While many studies have been conducted to evaluate parent-child book reading in the home, few have focused on children who are DHH or sought to develop materials and books targeted to children who are DHH.

This project was designed to test available resources by developing literacy units that facilitate language and vocabulary development in children who are DHH. Literacy units were distributed to parents who have child who are DHH. Each unit contained a book, related activities, and instructions for parents to encourage language while reading to their children. Following the use of a literacy unit, parents filled out a feedback form to evaluate the success of the literacy unit. The ultimate goal of this project was to create an available resource to enrich parent-child learning opportunities during the early intervention years.

Academic Readiness

Language Delays

Approximately 5 percent of children who are DHH are born to parents who are deaf and subsequently learn sign language to communicate. The remaining 95 percent of children who are DHH are born to hearing families who desire that their child has access to visual or spoken language. These parents and children require additional support to develop language necessary to

communicate within their families (Lederberg, Schick, & Spencer, 2013). With the development of newborn hearing screening and advanced technology, these children can be fitted early with hearing devices and receive the access to sound needed to develop spoken language (Yoshinaga-Itano, 2004).

Because children begin hearing sounds before birth, children who are DHH – even with early identification and amplification – receive less auditory input than children who are typically developing. In addition, speech is perceived differently through hearing aids than through normal hearing. Late access to sound and sound distortion can affect the amount of language children who are DHH have, as well as the quality of their language production. Because of this, spoken language is one of the most important areas affected by hearing loss and most children who are DHH experience delays in language and literacy (Lederberg, Schick, & Spencer, 2013).

Core Standards

Language delays can create academic roadblocks that affect children who are DHH for their entire lives (Kaiser & Roberts, 2011). To overcome these roadblocks, children must develop linguistic and cognitive skills early in life to make academic learning possible (Shanahan, 2008). Utah's Early Childhood Core Standards (UECCS) outline academic skills a child should have upon entering preschool to improve transitions between academic settings, increase academic readiness, and reduce achievement gaps. Although adaptations may be made for children who are DHH, UECCS was designed to be inclusive of all children (Menlove et al., 2013).

One of the content areas included in UECCS is English Language Arts. The English Language Arts standards state that upon entering preschool, a child should engage in shared

reading experiences and, with guidance and support, connect new vocabulary in a text with known words and experiences (Menlove et al., 2013). This content area also states that parents can support English Language Arts learning by reading with their children daily from a variety of literature genres and re-reading their children's favorite books or other literature (Menlove et al., 2013). Using these standards as a guide, educators can help children who are DHH reach academic goals close to their typically developing peers (Menlove et al., 2013).

Literacy Foundations

Context for Literacy Development

Literacy development has a high dependence on language competence. Because children who are DHH are at risk for developing language competence, there can be an increasing gap in literacy skills between children with and without hearing loss (Easterbrooks, Lederberg, Miller, Bergeron, & Connor, 2008). Children who are DHH can be taught literacy skills in a similar way to typically developing children; however a larger focus on language and additional experiences is necessary. In addition, The National Institute for Literacy (2008) found that it is more beneficial for enhancing children's language development to intervene early in their lives. Lev Vygotsky, a 20th century theorist, claimed that knowledge builds on itself and that prior knowledge must be activated (Reed, 2003). This can be accomplished to teach literacy skills through pre-reading, re-reading, and explaining books as parents read to their children (Reed, 2003).

Vocabulary Development

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was convened by Congress in 1997 to research how children learn to read and determine which methods of teaching reading are most effective. The

NRP identified five focuses of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies (Shanahan, 2006). Vocabulary is one of the focuses they identified and an essential element to reading instruction. The larger a reader's vocabulary, the easier it is to make sense of the text. Vocabulary is focused on word recognition and word meaning. Vocabulary words must be connected to meaning to be effective for children to use. Children identify words as they read, learn other related information, and consequently expand their language (Shanahan, 2006). Vocabulary is especially important for young children who are DHH as they develop language because a "vocabulary explosion" occurs at around 18 to 20 months (Farrant & Zubrick 2012).

Vocabulary is learned incidentally, but it is also beneficial to teach vocabulary explicitly. Children who are DHH have a more difficult time learning incidental vocabulary, making explicit instruction even more important (Easterbrooks, Lederberg, Miller, Bergeron, & Connor, 2008). Parent-child book reading provides a pristine opportunity to teach vocabulary explicitly to children. The National Reading Panel found that talking to children about words in a book ahead of time and repeating the words often can increase children's vocabulary and understanding of the book (Shanahan, 2006). In addition, the vocabulary explosion that occurs in young children can contribute to joint attention skills between parents and infants that often occur through reading (Farrant & Zubrick 2012). Farrant and Zubrick (2012) found that joint attention and parent-child book reading were significant predictors of increased vocabulary development in children between the ages of 9 and 34 months.

Parent Involvement

Parents as Partners

In early-childhood education, parents are seen as partners and their children's first and most influential teachers (Menlove et al., 2013). They strongly influence their children's language development through home-based interventions (Edie, McNelis, & Wisconsin Council on Children and Families Inc., 2008). Parents are motivated to help their children and desire what is best for them, making parents their child's best teacher and an ideal language facilitator (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). Parents can help facilitate language development in children who are DHH by responding to child communication, giving a large amount of high quality linguistic input, and by using language support strategies (Kaiser & Roberts, 2011). As parents and professionals work together, they can produce the best possible learning outcomes for each and every child (Menlove et al., 2013).

Parent-Child Book Reading

One activity that parents can use to facilitate language development is to engage in parent-child book reading. The National Institute for Literacy states that, "shared-reading activities are often recommended as the single most important thing adults can do to promote the emergent literacy skills of young children" (Lonigan, Shanahan, Cunningham, & The National Institute for Literacy 2008, p. 153). In addition, parent-child book reading is an ideal situation for children to practice their language skills (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning and development states that children discover the world around them through experts, such as parents and teachers (Hindman, Skibbe, & Foster, 2013). As parents read with their children, they create social and contextual support for the development of language just as Vygotsky's theory suggests (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999).

Parent-child book reading promotes language and vocabulary development through word-object associations and expanding a child's existing vocabulary (Farrant & Zubrick, 2012).

Increasing the amount of book reading in the home can enhance the language comprehension and expressive language skills of preschool-age children. Shared book reading offers social and contextual supports as parents use books to support new concepts and verbal participation. In addition, books can provide exposure to new language and vocabulary, giving parents the opportunity to use more complex language when reading books with their children (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999).

Dialogic Reading

Passive reading of a book is not enough to support children's language development (Chen, Pisani, White, & Soroui, 2012). Dialogic reading is a type of shared book reading that involves interactive dialog between a parent and their child (Crain-Thoreson & Dale 1999). While using dialogic reading, parents follow the child's lead, ask questions, and expand and repeat children's utterances (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). Dialogic reading can also include techniques such as labeling and discussing illustrations or describing the characters in a story and the actions they take (Hindman, Skibbe, & Foster, 2013). Information that is learned in books can be reinforced through teaching songs and nursery rhymes or doing other activities related to the story (Chen, Pisani, White, & Soroui, 2012).

Whitehurst (1988) found that dialogic reading has a direct and immediate effect on children's language acquisition. His study involved teaching parents to alter the frequency and timing of various aspects of child-directed speech during story time. Whitehurst found that parent instruction in dialogic reading facilitated preschool children's vocabulary development (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). Whitehurst states that although his study was done with children who are typically developing, the success of dialogic reading could also prove to be useful for children with language delays (Whitehurst et al., 1988).

Teaching Parents

Dialogic reading strategies must be taught to parents in order to be effective (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). Teaching parents how to facilitate and support language is an important element in home-based intervention (Kaiser & Roberts, 2011). Without experience, parents may choose a book that is too easy or too hard, passively read while their child listens, or not provide enough wait time to allow their child to communicate during shared book reading (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999).

Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1999) found that when parents were taught a dialogic reading technique they slowed their reading, increased their use of statements and questions, and demonstrated more expansions of their children's utterances. In addition, Kaiser and Roberts (2011) found that parent-implemented language interventions had a strong effect on the receptive and expressive language of children with language impairment. These results show that the development of language skills is enhanced when parents are taught how to use engaging book reading techniques with their children (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999).

Conclusion

Children who are DHH often experience delays in language and literacy which can create academic roadblocks (Lederberg, Schick, & Spencer 2013; Kaiser & Roberts, 2011). The early years in these children's lives are an important time for children to learn language and vocabulary to bridge the gap caused by hearing loss (Farrant & Zubrick 2012). Because parents are seen as partners in education and their child's ideal language partner, home-based

interventions can be a successful way to facilitate language development for these children (Menlove et al., 2013; Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). As parents who have a child who is DHH are taught how to read books with their child and use a dialogic reading technique, they can improve their child's language development (Crain-Thoreson & Dale, 1999). To aid in parent-child book reading, a resource is needed to help parents learn to engage in successful parent-child book reading techniques. An ideal resource would help parents create meaningful reading experiences during the early years of their child's life.

Project Defense

From this graduate thesis project, literacy units were created to use during parent-child book reading to support language and vocabulary development for children who are DHH. Literacy units contained a book, related activities, and instructions for parents to encourage language while reading to their children. These literacy units were meant to be a resource for parents with children who are DHH to enrich at-home learning experiences during the early intervention years.

Project Focus

The goal of these units was to create meaningful at-home language and literacy learning opportunities for children who are DHH. While these units primarily focused on vocabulary development, other important aspects of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and oral language opportunities were integrated into use of the literacy unit as well. Through use of these units, parents were taught how to embed reading comprehension opportunities into natural routines and contexts for their children who are DHH.

Project Description

Literacy Units. Each literacy unit consisted of an accordion-style folder organized by tabs. The units all contained an introductory letter, list of listening and spoken language strategies, and a vocabulary list specific to each unit. A sheet containing dialogic reading strategies to encourage vocabulary, literacy, and language development was included with each unit's book. Strategies included questions to ask while reading, vocabulary words to define, ways to have the child help read the story, and listening and spoken language strategies. Examples of listening and spoken language strategies used in the unit include auditory first, auditory closure, sabotage, auditory bombardment, and closed sets. Printouts of all the strategies and activities were put together in a packet for each family to keep with them in their home, even after the unit was returned.

Each unit was associated with a specific book and theme for vocabulary. A description of each unit's theme and activities is presented below:

Unit 1: Action Word Vocabulary

- Book: *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle
- Experience Book: Children take pictures of themselves and their family members performing various actions and paste them in a book that is already put together. This book can be kept at home and read with the child.
- Song: Children sing *If You're Happy and You Know It* with the words changed to contain different actions and animals.
- Game: Children roll dice with a different action on each face of the die, and then perform the action they land on.

Unit 2: Body Part Vocabulary

- Book: *Blue Hat, Green Hat* by Sandra Boynton

- Experience Book: Children take pictures wearing their clothes the wrong way and paste them into a book that is already put together. This book can be kept in the home and read with the child.
- Songs: Children sing *The Hokey Pokey* and *I Have a Little Nose* (sung to the tune of *Mary Had a Little Lamb*) to practice body part vocabulary.
- Game: Children listen to directions to stick colorful stickers on different body parts, and then give directions for other family members to do the same.

Unit 3: Animal Vocabulary

- Book: *When the Leaf Blew In* by Steve Metzger
- Game: Parents cut out cards with different animals and actions on them. Children draw a card and pretend to be the animal doing the action.
- Song: Children sing *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* to practice animal vocabulary.
- Mobile Device App: Parents download an app on their mobile device to play different animal sounds and let their child guess what animal they hear.

Targeted Areas. This project addressed important academic areas for children preparing to enter preschool. Using these literacy units in the home provided important exposure to literacy skills addressed in Utah’s Early Childhood Core Standards (UECCS). Primarily, these units provided an opportunity for children to engage in shared reading experiences. Vocabulary is one of The National Reading Panel’s (NRP) five focuses of reading and was targeted in these units in multiple contexts and through multiple exposures. All of these areas were targeted in a home environment using parent-child book reading and interactions during normal daily routines. Parents learned skills and strategies that provided their children with important opportunities for

language and literacy development. The strategies that were taught through these units can be used on any book and with any activities that parents engage in with their children.

Project Feedback. A total of seven families used literacy units for a period of one to three weeks. Four families requested to use an additional unit after completion of one unit, so the units were distributed a total of eleven times. Three of the seven families are currently receiving tele-intervention services and were excited to have something tangible they could use in their home with their child. One family particularly enjoyed the choice of book for the Animal Vocabulary unit because it included a variety of strong action and animal vocabulary. Many families enjoyed the activities that involved movement such as “The Hokey Pokey” or the Animal Action Cards. One mother specifically stated that that action cards “were a great way to have a very energetic, active, engaging, vocabulary building game,” and was excited to have a copy of the cards to keep in their home.

Multiple parents mentioned that they enjoyed involving all their children by reading the book and doing the activities together as a family. One family stated: “Our whole family could be involved so that especially made the story come alive.” One child even taught his little brother the song contained within the unit. A mother specifically mentioned that use of the units was “easy to incorporate into our day and week.” Another family was pleased that the unit was open-ended instead of narrowing itself to specific developmental age. All families who used these literacy units found them organized and easy to use. In particular, families enjoyed “clearly laid out” instructions, a book, and related activities all together in one packet.

While parents found the strategies embedded in these units to be very beneficial, at first some parents found the instructions in the units to be intimidating. However, one mom stated that once she got started, “I saw how easy it was and the processes were all natural and

extensions of dialogic reading.” Other challenges that parents encountered included their child not being interested in the book or their child not understanding how to participate in an activity. One family was able to adapt the unit by adding visual components to the song to capture their child’s interest. In addition this family used additional strategies that helped engage their child while reading such as interacting with the pictures in the book (blowing on the leaves, petting the dog, etc.).

Future Use. Three copies of each literacy unit were developed for a total of nine compiled literacy units. Three units will be given to the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind (USBD) program and six units will be given to the Sound Beginnings program to be used in the future for children who are DHH and their families.

Personal Take-Away

As part of the dissemination of these literacy units, I had the opportunity to watch a mother and her child use a unit during a tele-intervention session. It was amazing to see the child engaged in the book and participating in the activities to learn body part vocabulary. I was able to coach the child’s Mom through the process, giving her ideas of questions and listening and spoken language strategies to use. I was able to see the effect that engaging in a shared reading experience had on this child’s language and vocabulary. By the end of the activity, the child understood all the body part vocabulary receptively and used some words expressively.

I enjoyed receiving feedback from the families who used my units (see Appendix A for direct quotes from families). The majority of the feedback was positive, but I also received insight into how I could make these units more successful in the future. For example, it may be beneficial to simplify the instructions in these units, include activities that target different language levels, or describe how the activities could be adapted. In the future, it may also be

beneficial to include a recorded example of dialogic reading strategies being used. Simpler and fewer instructions or targeting fewer strategies at a time would keep parents from getting overwhelmed or intimidated by each unit (see Appendix B for more information on how these units will be improved). Two particular comments from parents made me proud of the materials I created when they said: “Thank you for taking the time to do this. The tools are high quality and very thorough” and “Thank you for supplying a fun activity for my son and I to enjoy and making reading fun!” Overall, I feel that these units were a beneficial way to expose parents to dialogic reading strategies to promote language and literacy through shared reading experiences.

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Appendix A

Specific Quotes from Families for Literacy Unit Use

Quotes Concerning Organization and Use
“This unit was easy to use with my child. The instructions were thorough and easy to follow.”
“This unit was easy to use and follow because the instructions were clearly laid out.”
“It was “open-ended”. It didn’t narrow itself to a specific developmental age.”
“It was nice to have a packet with a book and related activities to go with it all together.”
“Thank you for taking the time to do this. The tools are high quality and very thorough.”
Quotes Describing Units as a Family Activity
“[This unit] gave us all something fun to do as a family that was easy to incorporate into our day and week.”
“[My child] loved rolling the dice and doing the actions. Our whole family could be involved so that especially made the story come alive.”
Quotes Explaining Parent’s and Children’s Favorite Activities
“[My son] loved both the book and song because it was easy for him to tell and show me on his own.”
“[My son] loved the Hokey Pokey. I caught him many times trying to teach the song to his brother.”
“The choice of book was great. I liked how much action there was...and I liked the variety of vocabulary words to describe the actions.”
“[The action cards] were a great way to have a very energetic, active, engaging vocabulary building game. Thank you for providing the take-home action cards, we will continue this game!”
Quotes Evaluating the Dialogic Reading Process
“I pointed at each pictures and he told me what it said even on the first time through the book.”
“[My son] loved saying ‘Oops!’ all week and reading the book to me many times.”
“Thank you for supplying a fun activity for my son and I to enjoy and making reading fun!”
“We have never read this book together and it was a great tool to get [my child] talking about actions and body parts. There are all key words for helping our deaf 2-year-old get to know (and talk about) his world.

“[My child] liked seeing the animals do it in the story and then to see Mom or Dad acting it out themselves.”

“I loved reading the story and pointing to our body parts and doing the actions together. Instead of saying “can you do it?” I replaced that phrase with “Yay! You can do it!” and we cheered for [my child] to do it.”

Challenges and Suggestions from Families

“It was pretty easy to use, though the instructions were a little intimidating. It is really useful to have so many dialogic reading and LSL strategies compiled in one place, but when we were just starting, it was hard to remember all them all.”

“When I first got this unit I didn’t have a smart phone to download the app so I would suggest maybe having at least a CD of animal sounds to use as an alternative.”

“The instructions were a bit lengthy. I would try to condense the number of points on a page, simpler words, and fewer overall handouts. I think I was a bit daunted at first because it looked like a lot of work to use the book. Once I got started, I saw how easy it was and the processes were all natural and extensions of Dialogic reading.”

Appendix B

Plans for Future Improvement

Three things will be done to improve these units for future use:

1. A recorded example of each unit being used by a teacher or another parent will be included on DVD. Parents will be encouraged to watch the video before beginning use of the unit to make the process clearer and less overwhelming at first.
2. Parents who have easy access to the units will be given two or three specific strategies to work on at a time. For example, while reading *When the Leaf Blew In* by Steve Metzger, parents can be encouraged to read the words before showing the pictures, expand on the vocabulary in the story, and define unknown words while reading. These strategies can be highlighted on the laminated instruction sheet in the unit. When parents feel comfortable with these strategies they can return to Sound Beginnings Preschool or Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind and new strategies can be highlighted.
3. A CD will be included for the “Animal Sounds” activity in the animal vocabulary unit. This will accommodate parents who do not have access to a mobile device to download the animal sounds app.

Dialogic Reading Instructions:
“When the Leaf Blew In”
By Steve Metzger

The goal of dialogic book reading is to create an engaging book reading experience that helps your child develop language and literacy skills. Several dialogic reading techniques are presented below. Use them as you read this book to your child. Some of these techniques may need to be adjusted according to your child's age or language abilities.

- The first time you read the book, read the words on each page before showing your child the pictures (auditory first).
- Use sabotage to encourage language. For example, on the first page (the cow) you can say, “Look! The dog sneezed.” Your child may reply with something like, “No! The cow sneezed!”
- Expand on the vocabulary with your child. Talk about what the animals look like and what sounds they make.
- As your child becomes more familiar with the book, see if he or she can remember what animals are on each page. Give auditory clues to prompt your child. For example, “On this page there is a pink animal in the mud!”
- Talk about the pictures with your child. Ask open-ended questions that encourage language such as “What do you see on this page?” or “How do you think the dog feels?”
- Explain unknown words to your child. For example, “swooped,” “dove,” “reared,” and “leaped.” Exposure to this higher level vocabulary can be beneficial.
- Connect the book to your child's personal experiences. For example, “We saw a cow yesterday when we were driving in the car!”
- At the end of the book ask your child what he or she thinks is going to happen next.
- Be excited and animated as you read the book to keep your child engaged.

