READ RIGHT FROM THE START:
GEORGIA PRE-K PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
YEAR 2 EVALUATION
(2010-2011)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Report submitted to:
The Rollins Center for Language & Learning
The Atlanta Speech School

Report submitted by:
Nicole Patton Terry, Ph.D. & Gary Bingham, Ph.D.
Research and Evaluation Team
College of Education, Georgia State University

Reported on: July 30, 2011
Executive Summary

The Rollins Center for Language & Learning at The Atlanta Speech School has been a leader in providing support to schools, teachers, children and families to foster language and literacy achievement for all children, especially children who are at-risk for or are currently experiencing difficulty in school. Beginning in 2009, Rollins partnered with the Hanson Initiative for Language & Literacy at Massachusetts General Hospital, the United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, and Bright from the Start to implement Read Right from the Start: Georgia Pre-K Professional Development Project—an initiative focused on strengthening and enriching the language and literacy development of young children by providing professional development, coaching, and mentoring to pre-K teachers and teacher assistants in Georgia pre-K classrooms (hereafter referred to as Read Right). In order to evaluate the teacher, classroom, and child outcomes from the project, a group of research faculty at Georgia State University conducted an independent evaluation. This report summarizes findings from Year 2 of the project.

Children and teachers from 20 Georgia pre-K classrooms throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area participated in Year 2 of the evaluation. Teachers were observed providing instruction in their classrooms at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year and participated in focus groups to share their impressions of the program at the end of the year. Children completed several language and literacy tasks at the beginning and end of the school year. Classrooms were located in public elementary schools and private childcare sites and included:

- DeKalb County: Childcare Network 50, LaPetite Academy
- Fulton County: Lake Forest Elementary School (Fulton County Schools), Conley Hill Elementary School (Fulton County Schools), L. O. Kimberly Elementary School (Atlanta Public Schools)
- Gwinnett County: Sunshine Houses 76 and 77
- Rockdale County: J.H. House Elementary School, Peeks Chapel Elementary School, Hightower Elementary School

Consent was obtained for 40 lead and assistant teachers and parent permission was obtained for 294 children to participate in the evaluation protocol in Fall 2010. Of these children (mean age = 54.7 months, SD = 3.5 months), 46.6% were boys, 46.9% were African American (40.8% were Hispanic/Latino), and 38.4% were English Language Learners (ELL) whose primary home language was Spanish (as reported by teachers based on parent responses on enrollment forms and/or student’s primary language use in the classroom). Individual student’s socio-economic status was not available. Surveys were completed by 165 of the children’s primary caregivers and indicated that 34.8% of the respondents had attended at least some college, vocational/technical school, or obtained an associate’s degree (19.2% had obtained at least a college degree).

Analyses for the second year of the project focused on five separate outcomes. First, like the Year 1 evaluation, we measured student performance on various language and literacy tasks and observed teacher’s classroom quality and instructional practices. The purpose of these analyses was to examine student and teacher progress over the academic year. Second, because one goal of Read Right was to improve teachers’ knowledge about pedagogical practices that support...
young children’s language and literacy achievement, we examined teachers’ performance on a teacher knowledge survey. Third, because some teachers participated in the project for two years, we examined not only changes in their instructional practices but also their students’ performance on key language and literacy indicators. Finally, in order to gather some estimation of the long-term effects of children’s participation in pre-K classrooms with teachers who had participated in Read Right, we followed some children from Year 1 of the project into kindergarten and measured their language and literacy achievement at the beginning and end of the school year.

Student and Teacher Outcomes during Year 2

Overall, the results are very similar to those reported for Year 1. Both children and teachers exhibited significant growth in the targeted outcome areas. Progress was most evident for children who entered pre-K with poor oral language achievement and children whose primary home language was not English. Moreover, achievement gaps were still present among the children, with children in these two at-risk groups still performing below their typically-achieving peers at the end of pre-K. Finally, compared to Year 1, students made quite impressive gains in phonological awareness skills.

Specifically, at the end of the pre-K year for typically achieving children whose primary language was English:

• 88% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of oral receptive vocabulary (as compared to 88% at the beginning of the year);
• 92% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of oral expressive vocabulary (as compared to 90% at the beginning of the year);
• 95% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of print and alphabet knowledge (as compared to 85% at the beginning of the year);
• 75% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of phonological awareness (as compared to 66% at the beginning of the year);
• 87% were able to name at least 12 uppercase letters correctly (as compared to 62% at the beginning of the year);
• 92% were able to write their names with many correct letters (as compared to 60% at the beginning of the year).

Significant progress was observed for children who began pre-K with very low oral language skills. As noted in the Year 1 Evaluation Report, these findings are particularly important because the professional development program focused on helping teachers to improve children’s oral language knowledge and use. Among children in this group:

• 38% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of oral receptive vocabulary (as compared to 0% at the beginning of the year);
• 52% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of oral expressive vocabulary (as compared to 50% at the beginning of the year);
• 70% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of print and alphabet knowledge (as compared to 41% at the beginning of the year);
• 43% performed at or above average on norm-referenced measures of phonological awareness (as compared to 32% at the beginning of the year);
63% were able to name at least 12 uppercase letters correctly (as compared to 23% at the beginning of the year);

72% were able to write their names with many correct letters (as compared to 26% at the beginning of the year).

Finally, children who were ELL also exhibited growth in the targeted outcome areas over the school year, although their means were lower than the children who were not ELL. This result is similar to those reported in the literature for ELL who receive language and literacy instruction in English-only classrooms.

Teachers also showed growth over the school year. Specifically, classroom observation indicated that teachers:

- significantly improved their oral language interactions with children and increased opportunities for emergent reading and writing activities;
- significantly improved the quality of the instructional support they provided children;
- significantly increased their intentional focus on literacy skills;
- significantly improved their ability to implement interactive repeated story book reading activities during large group activities and strategies to “lift the language” during center time activities;
- improved the frequency and quality of their interactions with children around letters, print knowledge, and phonological awareness.

Teacher Knowledge

Teachers’ performance on a Teacher Knowledge Survey given at the beginning (Fall 2009) and end (Spring 2011) of Read Right improved significantly, from 58% to 68.4%. Although not at mastery levels (e.g., 80%), these findings suggest that teachers acquired knowledge about children’s early literacy and language development, how language works in relation to the acquisition of literacy skills, and best practices for language and literacy instruction.

The Effect of Two Years of Read Right on Instructional Practice

Staffing changes at the participating sites resulted in some teachers participating in Read Right for two full years (2009-2011) and some only participating for one year (2010-2011). Analyses comparing these two groups of teachers’ scores on classroom observational tools revealed a complex and nuanced picture of the effects of professional development on classroom practice in pre-K. Specifically:

- Teachers who received two years of Read Right significantly improved their scores on the Book Reading subscale of the ELLCO in the first year of the project and significantly improved their practice on the Language and Writing subscales of the ELLCO during the second year of the project.

- Although teachers who received two years of Read Right improved the quality of their Management and Emotional Support, as evidenced by their CLASS scores, during the first year of the project, a significant change in the quality of their Instructional Support and Literacy Focus (areas targeted by Read Right) occurred during the second year of the project.
• Teachers who received two years of Read Right evidenced considerable improvement in their repeated interactive book reads and these improvements were maintained over the second year of the project.

• According to the fidelity tool, teachers who received two years of Read Right significantly outperformed teachers receiving only one year of Read Right in the quality of their Interactive Repeated Book Reads, marginally outperformed them on Language quality during center time, and performed the same as teachers receiving one year of training on PAC Time implementation.

Language and Literacy Achievement in Kindergarten

Finally, we examined the language and literacy achievement of some children who were enrolled in Read Right classrooms in pre-K during their kindergarten year. Analyses revealed that:

• children exhibited steady growth in vocabulary knowledge from the beginning of pre-K to the end of kindergarten;
• children demonstrated age-appropriate vocabulary, letter recognition, word reading, and spelling achievement at the beginning and end of kindergarten;
• although children demonstrated phonological awareness skills that were slightly below average at the beginning of kindergarten, they began kindergarten with stronger phonological awareness skills than peers in their classrooms. Children in both groups attained age-appropriate achievement by the end of kindergarten.

Summary

Findings from the Year 1 and Year 2 evaluation of Read Right suggest that teachers significantly improved their language and literacy knowledge and practices over the course of two years. Results from teacher observations over two years reveal that teachers were able to change the quality of some practices rather quickly (i.e., repeated book reads), while others took more time to develop (i.e., quality of conversations and language interactions, literacy focus). Encouragingly, this change appeared to transfer to children’s development, as measured by standardized literacy and language assessments, and was more evident during the second year of Read Right than the first year. These findings suggest that although teachers take time to improve some of their literacy and language practices, the effects of this change are evident in children’s growth and development of literacy and language skills. Although considerable time and effort is expended to change teachers’ knowledge and practices, it appears that these changes promote meaningful growth and development in children’s language and literacy skills.

Finally, as noted in the Year 1 report, the evaluation team acknowledges that the results and their interpretation are limited by the experimental design. A quasi-experimental design with a comparison group of children and teachers is necessary to examine the causal relationships between the Read Right intervention and outcomes for teachers, classrooms, and students. In addition, it is important to continue to monitor children’s progress through the primary grades, not only to better understand the benefits of the gains they exhibited during their pre-K year but also to support them (and their teachers) as they begin formal literacy instruction so that the gains are not lost. This kind of support would seem particularly important for children who, like
many of those in the ELL and low oral language groups in this report, made significant progress during pre-K but still enter kindergarten lacking proficiency in critical early literacy skills.