

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Teaching Early Literacy Skills in a Dual-Language Program

Under the direction of ~

I. Purpose

For this project, I will teach early literacy skills (e.g., initial sound identification, rhyme, decoding of regular words and letter sound associations) to children in a dual-language (Spanish/English) kindergarten through motivating and participatory activities. My research objective in evaluating this literacy program is to assess the value of the instructional interactions and activities conducted in Spanish and English.

I will evaluate the effectiveness of exposing children to early literacy targets during motivating activities. The goal is to create a play setting that purposefully incorporates the target patterns, makes the target patterns salient, provides children with frequent opportunities to notice or practice reading the literacy pattern, and is enjoyable enough to motivate children to participate.

I will also create engaging lessons in Spanish that focus on early literacy skills. I will assess the effectiveness of the Spanish activities in improving literacy skills for both Spanish and English-speaking children. I will also study the effectiveness of the English activities in enhancing the children's literacy skills.

II. Background and Significance

Recent research shows that early literacy skills play a vital role in learning how to read (Goswami, 2000). Important early literacy skills include initial sound awareness, rhyme, invented spellings, sound and syllable blending, and recognizing word patterns.

Traditional Spanish and English early reading books, often referred to as decodeable texts, consist of drill-type activities which lack the necessary motivating elements to encourage child participation. Also, children are often expected to make inferences during these activities and to understand sentences that do not have a clear connection. Because of these weaknesses, children will not be as successful in mastering the literacy skills (Culatta, 2001 and Freeman, 2000).

An effective literacy program combines specific teaching of skills with meaningful, interactive activities (Neuman et al., 2000). In this project I will create motivating activities that highlight target sounds and letter patterns, and that are developmentally appropriate for children. I will also structure activities in Spanish and English that are appropriate for children of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These elements will benefit children in developing literacy skills.

II. Methods and Procedures

A. Participants

Participants for this study come from the Timpanogos Elementary School kindergarten. The morning and afternoon classes will both participate in the study. Approximately forty children will take part in the research. About twenty-five percent of the subjects speak Spanish as their primary language. The children are participating in a dual-language program where they are instructed in both Spanish and English.

B. Materials

I will assess the children's knowledge of initial sound identification, rhyme, word recognition, and sound and syllable blending through tests developed by Dr. Barbara Culatta

(2002) and PALS-K (Invernizzi et al., 2001). The assessments will be conducted in the child's native language. A copy of the assessment battery is attached.

C. Procedures

Instruction will occur four days a week during classroom time. The children will participate in one fifteen minute instruction as a whole group that introduces the literacy target and two twenty minute instructions in small groups. The target literacy patterns will be introduced in English one week and in Spanish the following week. For example, to train initial sound awareness of "p", the children will participate in an activity of pitching puffy pumpkins into a pumpkin patch. The following week will concentrate on "p" sounds in Spanish (e.g., pájaro, pez, porcino, pico). At the end of the two weeks, I will introduce a new target literacy pattern which will also be taught for two weeks. This system will continue through the 2002-2003 school year.

During the instruction, the children will participate in engaging activities while being exposed to target literacy patterns. Activities include dramatic story telling, story reenactment, games, art and food projects, and reading and writing stories about the activities. The target literacy patterns will be embedded into these activities.

Children will be encouraged to participate in the activities by rewarding them with the opportunity to act on or receive turns when they produce the desired target response. I will provide scaffolding to help the children succeed.

The goals of the curriculum are that children will identify rhyme and initial sounds, blend sounds and syllables, associate print and written words, create invented and real spelling, read regularly spelled words, and match sounds with letters. The target patterns will be presented in both English and Spanish. The children will not be expected to read in the nonnative language, but the target literacy skills learned in the nonnative language will generalize to literacy skills in their native language.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

The project will be evaluated using a crossover design and qualitative research methods. In the crossover design, the morning kindergarten class will receive training on one set of target skills (i.e., alliteration and initial syllable identity) while the afternoon kindergarten class will receive training on a different set of target skills (i.e., rhyming and blending). After six weeks of instruction, the children will be post-tested and the targets will be alternated so that the children receive instruction on both targets. In addition, the trained and untrained targets will be compared using a multiple baseline approach and the untrained targets will then be trained.

The qualitative data will be based on children's involvement in the activities, interactions with each other and perception of the activities. This data will be collected through videotape analysis and direct observation during the activities.

IV. Summary

Systematic teaching of literacy skills in an interactive environment will provide a motivating context for children to master early reading targets. Research shows that early literacy skills significantly improve a child's ability to read. This program will provide children with motivating contexts to develop the essential literacy skills in their native language as well as some underlying skills that can generalize to the other language.