



Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders OAFCCD

The Role of Speech and Language Pathologists in Assessment and Programming for Children at Risk for Reading Failure

Rosine Salazer, Kim Gain and Kim Koyanagi, in collaboration with Professor Genese Warr-Leeper, have recently completed a study of phonological awareness skills and programming outcomes for at risk Kindergarten children in the Thames Valley District School Board. Results of this study indicate that phonological awareness training programs that involve the participation of Speech-Language Pathologists are the most effective in improving the phonological awareness skills of children.

Phonological awareness is the direct understanding of a word's sound structure. It is critical for effective sounding out of printed words and the recognition of sound-letter connections necessary for learning to spell. Phonological awareness is a multi-level skill that reflects knowledge of how words can be broken into smaller units in differing ways. Training tasks may require children to segment words into syllables, (syllable-level tasks), identify or produce rhyming words (rhyme level tasks), identify individual sounds in words, blend sounds to make words, or segment words into their individual sounds (phonemic-level tasks).

The students involved in the study attended the 46 Partnership for Excellence Schools which had previously been identified as having students with the lowest literacy rates and the highest level of environmental disadvantages. The study involved testing of student's phonological skills in the fall, before extra programming was provided, and again in the spring, at the end of the program.

The project involved 1562 students between the ages of 4 years and 8 months and 5 years and 10 months. The children were tested on a variety of phonological awareness skills including:

- rhyming recognition
- word awareness
- sound blending
- beginning sound identification
- ending sound identification
- middle sound identification
- rhyming production
- syllable awareness
- sound awareness
- sound segmentation
- sound deletion

Five different phonological awareness training programs were used in the project including:

Program	Staff and Materials
Class Lessons	Teacher, Speech - Language Pathologist (SLP), Literacy Teacher, Educational Assistant (EA)

Individual Lessons	Teacher, SLP, Literacy Teacher, EA, Volunteer
Small Group Lessons	Teacher, SLP, Literacy Teacher, EA, Volunteer
Class Programs	Teachers using Jolly Phonics or Animated Literacy
Indirect Support	SLP as a resource to Teacher, Literacy Teacher + Teacher, SLP providing home program, SLP offering suggestions directly to parent in a coffee group

Results:

The scores for each child, each school, and each program, before and after the program were recorded. Using the scores three skill level classifications were identified. The categories were children who *do not have the skills*, children who *have emerging skills* and children who *have the skills*. The scores of children in all of the skill groups improved by the end of the program.

Category	Pre-Training	Post-Training
Do not have skills	23 %	7 %
Emerging skills	60 %	38%
Have skills	16 %	55 %

The largest gains in overall scores were found for training programs led by an SLP and class lessons led by teacher and supported by an educational assistant. Smaller gains in overall scores were found with individual lessons led by a volunteer and classroom lessons led by the classroom teacher alone.

Conclusion

Phonological Awareness Training Programs can improve the skills kindergarten children at risk for reading failure and the results suggest that the development of literacy skills is well served through a team approach. The results also show that the services of a Speech-Language Pathologist were important and increased the success of the training programs.

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