

JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION

RETHINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION



VOLUME FOUR, ISSUE TWO

FALL 2019

SEAN RUDAY, EDITOR

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION
SEAN RUDAY, *JLI* FOUNDER AND EDITOR
LONGWOOD UNIVERSITY

I am proud to share with you another issue of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation*. The two manuscripts in this issue align perfectly with this journal's goal of blending theory and practice. These works are varied in their topics and methodologies, but are similar in that they provide important and thoughtful contributions to the field of literacy research and do so by combining high-quality research with insights that have important applications to the classroom.

The first manuscript in this issue, "The Impact of Cultural Mediation and Ethnicity on Literacy Development: Implications for Educators" by Dr. Lisa Crayton, is an innovative study that "applies a sociocultural perspective to examine the home to school transitions in literacy achievement of three low-income children from Guatemala." In this manuscript, the author identifies three significant purposes: "1) to share an insider's point of view of the home literacy experiences of a non-dominant culture family; 2) to address the sociocultural influences that shape the reading attitudes and motivation of low-income, Hispanic children; and 3) to offer ways schools and teachers of reading can adapt to meet the needs and experiences of immigrant, bilingual children." Crayton's work achieves all three of these goals, providing readers with a detailed discussion of the participants' literacy experiences and sharing important implications of this significant work.

Next, you'll find another outstanding manuscript, "Tiered Literacy Intervention Using Targeted, Modular Guided Reading Intervention: Early Results of the RISE Project in Urban Chattanooga Elementary Schools" by John S. Cunningham and Debbie Rosenow. This piece provides a detailed discussion of preliminary results from "a promising literacy intervention currently in use in seven elementary and three middle schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee." Cunningham and Rosenow's work skillfully merges a discussion of rigorous research with insightful recommendations for practitioners. This piece features strong discussions of the interventions featured in the study and the methodologies used. After describing this information in detail, the work provides thoughtful commentary on what the study's results can mean for educators. The combination of these components results in an outstanding example of the merging of theory and practice.

I am proud to share these excellent pieces that align with *JLI*'s goal of providing educators with resources that merge theory and practice. I hope you will consider adding your voice to this conversation by submitting your work for consideration for publication in a future issue of the *Journal of Literacy Innovation*. For more information on the journal, please visit www.journalofliteracyinnovation.weebly.com.

See you in April 2020 for *JLI*'s next issue!

Sean

Sean Runday, Ph.D.

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THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL MEDIATION AND ETHNICITY ON LITERACY DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

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Abstract

This research discusses the findings of a two-year study examining the home literacy environment of a low-income family of five from Guatemala. Through participant observation and informal conversations with the family during home visits, two factors appeared to influence the literacy development of the family's three young children: cultural mediation and ethnicity. Investigating the home literacy environment of an immigrant family provides an insider's perspective of the life experiences of children from non-mainstream homes. Understanding their home reading and writing experiences is valuable for reading teachers facing increasingly diverse students from multicultural backgrounds. This exploration reveals a different path to literacy—a path mired in struggle and hope.

The Impact of Cultural Mediation and Ethnicity on Literacy Development: Implications for Educators

Summary

This study applies a sociocultural perspective to examine the home-to-school transitions in literacy achievement of three low-income children from Guatemala. Through participant observation and informal conversations with the family during home visits, two factors appeared to influence the literacy development of the family's young children: cultural mediation and ethnicity. Investigating the home literacy environment of an immigrant family provides an insider's perspective of the life experiences of children from non-mainstream homes. Understanding their home reading and writing experiences, and their transition to school literacy, is valuable for reading teachers facing increasingly diverse students from multicultural backgrounds.

Introduction

Immigrant families face many issues when they transition from one culture to another. Learning to read, write, speak, and understand a new language is one of the factors immigrant families must grapple with as they enter a new social and cultural world. This study examines the home

literacy environment of a low-income family of five from Guatemala. The three children—ages three, seven, and ten—face daily challenges as they navigate between two worlds—the culture of their Spanish-speaking home and the Anglo world of their community and school in South Florida. First, theoretical background on sociocultural influences of the home, community, and school are discussed in relation to immigrant, Spanish-speaking families. Second, the methodology used to examine the family's home literacy environment is described. Third, the context of the study is described with details of the parents, children, their home, and lifestyle. Fourth, in the findings section, two distinct areas of influence are described in relation to the home literacy environment of the family—cultural mediation and ethnicity. Finally, educational implications for teachers are discussed. The purposes of this study are threefold: 1) to share an insider's point of view of the home literacy experiences of a non-dominant culture family; 2) to address the sociocultural influences that shape the reading attitudes and motivation of low-income, Hispanic children; and 3) to offer ways schools and teachers of reading can adapt to meet the needs and experiences of immigrant, bilingual children.

Theoretical Perspective

Sociocultural theorists view literacy acquisition as occurring in the midst of specified social environments and cultural landscapes. The quality and quantity of social interactions, as well as the construction of the literacy atmosphere in home, community, and school contexts, are critical factors influencing the reading and writing behavior and attitudes of young children. A sociocultural perspective defines literacy in cultural terms and views children as becoming literate within the cultures of their homes, communities, and schools (Duncan, 2018). From this view, knowledge is constructed by the interaction of the individual with the sociocultural environment; higher mental functions such as reading and writing are social and cultural in nature, and members of the culture can assist and mediate others while learning (Robinson, 2015; Wertsch, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). This "situated knowledge" constructed in particular situations refers to the idea that language and literacy forms can only be understood in terms of context and function (Ewing, 2018; Gee, 2001). The following theoretical background offers a review of literature concerning the social and cultural aspects of literacy development in three sections: 1) the influence of the home on bilingual literacy development; 2) the influence of the community on bilingual literacy development; and 3) the influence of school on bilingual literacy development. Specific emphasis is placed on low-income, immigrant, and Hispanic children's literacy experiences in the home, community, and school.

The Influence of the Home on Bilingual Literacy Development

Perhaps the most important social environment for literacy development is the home. The home is the single most significant reading environment for children (Ryan, 2000). Interest in literacy activities is influenced by the home literacy environment which may also be bound up with socio-economic factors, such as parental education levels (Carroll et al., 2019). Cultural and social factors have been shown to influence the home literacies of Spanish-speaking immigrant families making language and literacy transitions in the home. For example, Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez and Shannon (1994) found that in everyday exchanges and social situations, even in the

personal space of their homes, four Spanish-speaking Mexicano families living in California were required to negotiate their new culture and language with the Anglo world. Similarly, social and cultural factors in the home contributed to Delgado-Gaitan's (1987) findings of the functions and meanings of literacy for Mexican immigrant families. Despite the fact that the parents had little prior schooling and did not perceive themselves as readers, Delgado-Gaitan found that each of the four families she studied used a range of text types in both English and Spanish in a variety of ways that went beyond school-related reading. Even among demographically similar families, a diverse set of constraints and variables are at play which significantly impact children's reading motivation (Rueda et al., 2001). For example, Senechal and LeFevre (2014) discovered that parents alter the amount and nature of the literacy experiences they provide on the basis of the abilities of their child. Similarly, Janes and Kermani (1997) found that family literacy events among low-income Latino recent-immigrant families did not occur and were not scaffolded in the same manner as in middle-class, mainstream families, but were likely to happen in a variety of time frames and locations, routinized in culturally specific ways. The family is also influenced by the community where the family lives.

The Influence of the Community on Bilingual Literacy Development

The communities where children live can also influence their literacy development to varying degrees (Ewing, 2018). For example, Neumann and Celano (2001) studied the access to print in four neighborhoods and found striking differences between neighborhoods of differing income in access to print: middle-income children have a large variety of private and public resources from which to choose, whereas low-income children are limited mainly to public institutions. Another study which examined children's literacy from the sociocultural context of the community was conducted with culturally and linguistically diverse children in the U.S.-Mexico border area of Texas. Quintero (1993) found several aspects of Hispanic culture and community life that point to the existence of diverse cultural norms. For example, according to Quintero, parental authority is an important value in Hispanic culture, and cooperation of group members, whether in the family or community, are a significant part of children's social experiences. Community contexts also influence the messages embedded in social interactions. For example, Delpit (1995) examined literacy in Native Alaskan villages and found parent/child relations were different in these communities than in mainstream, Anglo communities. Specifically, Native Alaskan parents do not make their children go to school or do homework: "In the parents' view, children were not to be coerced with authority, but were to be treated with the respect that provided them with rationales, stated or unstated, to guide them to make decisions based on their own good sense" (Delpit, 1995, p. 101). Communities with diverse socioeconomic, language, and cultural backgrounds appear to influence the quality of children's literacy experiences in the home and at school.

The Influence of the School on Bilingual Literacy Development

Another key sociocultural context that influences children's literacy development is the school (Carroll, 2017). Robinson (2015) considers the most important partners with schools are the families and parents of the students who go to them: "The culture of schools is also deeply

affected by the more general climate in which they work” (p. 205). McGee and Richgels (2003) discovered that children from low-income families who are likely to attend schools with low reading performance are less likely to have acquired certain literacy knowledge prior to the initiation of beginning reading instruction in kindergarten. Researchers have studied children's literacy in school and found cultural categories or socioeconomic status did not define the children: "it was in the interplay of institutional structure and sociocultural circumstances that 'differences' from the assumed norm most often emerged as 'problems': the 'problems,' for example, of children speaking varied languages, having an employed single parent, and not entering school with institutionally expected expertise in print conventions" (Dyson, 1997, p. 122). To counteract the inherent discrepancies in children's home backgrounds and school expectations, Duncan (2018) suggests that educators must appreciate home culture as a key factor in school success by considering the social context of learning to read and by utilizing instructional approaches that culturally diverse learners can relate to.

To conclude, this theoretical background was intended to illustrate the various ways home, community, and school contexts influence children's literacy development. Researchers have examined a wide range of home, community, and school environments with children from diverse socioeconomic, language, and cultural backgrounds. Examining the home literacy environment of a low-income family from Guatemala will provide another perspective of the influences of the home environment on bilingual literacy development.

Method

The research questions guiding this study are: 1) What roles do literacy activities play in the culture of the home environment? ; 2) What are the functions and uses of reading and writing in the daily life routines of the family members? ; and 3) What types of print information and reading materials are available in the home? These questions were examined as I spent two years observing and interacting with the family during weekly home visits (Graue and Walsh, 1998). During my home visits, I held several roles in the family dynamics (Givens, 1999). I provided child care, tutored the children in English, helped with homework, and served as an English language interpreter for the parents. Through participant observation, collection of fieldnotes and artifacts, and interviews and informal conversations, a portrait of the home literacy environment emerged (Clay, 1995; Geertz, 1973; Glesne, 2001; Spradley, 1980). I analyzed the events in the home through coding, memos, patterns, and vignettes. I shared my observations and stories with the family (Barnett & Frede, 2001; Erickson, 1986). They trusted me and were open about their home environment and experiences (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). I was invited to the children's birthday celebrations, holiday get-togethers, and dinners. I was given traditional Guatemalan food made by the family to take home. As the patterns of their home literacy environment and lifestyle emerged, I was able to notice factors that were influencing the literacy development of the children.

Context

The sociocultural context of this study is described in the following section in four parts: 1) the parents; 2) the children; 3) their home; and 4) lifestyle. This background is intended to give the

reader detailed descriptive knowledge of the participants and their home environment that sets the stage for literacy learning.

Jose Diaz (all names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants) moved to South Florida in 1995 with his wife Catarina and young daughter Anna. He moved to this particular community because there is a large immigrant Guatemalan community where they would be near relatives and have contacts to find employment. He works as a landscaper—planting trees, maintaining gardens, and doing yard maintenance at wealthy, suburban subdivisions. "I love my job," he tells me. He is the crew leader and supervises ten other Guatemalan immigrants in the landscaping business. He works six days a week from 7 am until 4 pm. His wife, Catarina, gets ready to go to work when Jose comes home. At 5:30 she leaves to clean offices until 10 pm. During the day, she stays home with their three-year-old son Junior. She also takes care of her sister's two young children, does housework, gardening, shopping, and cooking. Anna Diaz is the only child in the family who was born in Guatemala. She came to South Florida eight years ago when she was two and has never been back to her home country. Anna's role in the household is to watch after her two younger brothers, Miguel, age seven, and Junior, while their mother is at work each evening. She is responsible for child care, cleaning, cooking, laundry, and shopping while her mother is at work. Miguel, as the oldest boy in the family, has privileges his sister and brother do not. He gets preferential treatment in terms of toys and freedom. "Miguel never has to do anything," Anna tells me. "He always gets presents and can do whatever he wants." Miguel spends his time when he's not at school watching cartoons on television, playing Yu-Gi-Oh and Pokemon card games and video games with neighbors, and climbing trees in the yard. Anna and Miguel ride the school bus that stops at the corner by their house each morning. They both receive free lunch at school based on their family's income. They leave at 7:30 am and return home at 2:30 pm. They do not participate in after-school activities. As the baby of the family, Junior is showered with attention and affection. Jose printed a decal on the back window of the family truck proclaiming "We love you Junior!" He plays with toy cars in the yard, goes on bike rides with Jose sitting on a bike seat, and practices riding his bicycle with training wheels in the driveway.

Jose bought the two-bedroom, one-bathroom mobile home where they have been living for the past five years for eight thousand dollars cash. He could not finance a home because he has no credit history and no bank account. All transactions are cash only for the family. When Jose and Catarina get paid from their jobs, they go to a check-cashing business to cash their paychecks. The family has no insurance on their home. The parents sleep in one bedroom, the boys sleep in the other, and Jose has made a bedroom on the porch for Anna. With some plywood and curtains, Anna has some privacy from her little brothers. The porch was destroyed during Hurricane Irma and all of Anna's possessions were ruined by flooding water. The family received emergency assistance from FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) to fix their porch roof.

There are four televisions in the home--one in the living room, one in each bedroom, and one on the porch. Also in the living room is an entertainment center with a combination VCR, DVD, and music cassette player. Stacks of children's videos, DVD's, and Spanish music cassettes line the shelves of the entertainment center. Photos of the children at different ages and symbols of

Jesus Christ adorn the walls of the living room. There are no books in the living room. In the boys' room, there is only enough space for two twin beds, a closet, and a dresser where the television sits. Toys and clothes cover the floor. The only rooms in the house with reading material or print are in the kitchen, where the refrigerator door is covered with school announcements and the school lunch menu, and the porch, where a cardboard box is filled with old toys, coloring books, crayons, and school worksheets. Junior chooses a toy from this box and takes it outside to play with. When he gets bored with it, he drops it on the ground and goes to the box to retrieve another. Anna and Miguel discard their school worksheets in this box as well.

When the parents are not working and the children are not in school, the family life centers around several entities. Jose and his sons spend time daily maintaining, washing, and fixing the family's two vehicles—a minivan and a pick-up truck. All the family participates in mending and watering the large garden of flowers and vegetables in the front of the house. Also, the family spends considerable amounts of free time visiting their numerous Guatemalan relatives who live nearby as well as hosting the relatives at their home during barbeques, informal meals, and celebrations. Jose did play soccer with a team of Guatemalan immigrants before an injury made it difficult for him to run. Television is also a daily fixture in the family lifestyle. The children watch between four and five hours of programming a day. The parents watch Spanish programming at night after work.

By discussing details about the parents, children, home, and lifestyle of the Diaz family, their social and cultural world is presented. This background is intended to give the reader an insider's view into their lifestyle. To what extent reading and literacy experiences were observed in the household is discussed next in the findings section.

Findings

Two factors emerged that influenced the home literacy environment of the Diaz family. The first, cultural mediation, created tension in the home between parents and children. The second, ethnicity, was evident as Anna and Miguel embraced and emulated the popular, cultural entities they watched on television programs and commercials, thereby embracing the ethnic transmissions of culture in their environment.

Cultural Mediation

Jose and Catarina do not speak English in the home or at work. Their lack of English speaking and reading abilities causes stress and confusion in daily interactions with the English-speaking world. For example, Jose cannot read the tax forms, bills, and other pertinent information that arrives in the mail. He asks me to read them to him and explain their meaning. The only mail he does try to read are coupons, advertising, and catalogs for car parts, Home Depot, K-Mart, and Walmart. When Jose's sixteen-year-old niece came from Guatemala to live with the family, Jose was able to get her employment as a dishwasher at a Mexican restaurant. The restaurant took advantage of the fact that neither Jose or his niece knew English well enough to know she was not being paid fairly for the work she was doing. Catarina interacts primarily with her Guatemalan relatives. "She wants to keep her Guatemalan culture," Anna tells me. She does not

speak English to her children and only says words such as “hi,” “hello,” “how are you,” and “thank you” to me.

Anna and Miguel, on the other hand, are fluent in both English and Spanish. They speak English among each other and watch only English-speaking television. When their parents speak Spanish to them, they answer in English. Junior navigates between his Spanish-speaking parents and English-speaking siblings. "He doesn't talk very good," Jose tells me. The family is concerned that Junior is confused between the two languages. The only words I hear Junior say are in English, such as car, Spiderman, ball, candy. When I ask Anna and Miguel about Guatemala and their relatives, they do not want to talk about it. They say they will never go there. "I don't want to go there, I like it here," Anna tells me. Both she and her brother have many friends in the neighborhood and at school who are not from Spanish-speaking families. Their interactions are with African-American and white neighbors and schoolmates, as well as cousins, neighbors and schoolmates of Hispanic families. During all of the social interactions I observed, the children spoke English. They appeared to have embraced popular American culture not only in language use, but also in their clothing styles, music preferences, food tastes, and hobbies.

Ethnicity

The extent to which Catarina holds on to her ethnic Guatemalan roots by not learning English, interacting only with relatives, and making traditional meals for her family is in direct contrast to the extent to which her children have assimilated to American culture. Anna shows me the lyrics to a popular rap song she has copied from an African-American friend at school. "I'm trying to memorize this rap," she tells me as she sings the rhyme over and over with her African-American neighbor Vanessa. They dance and sing the lyrics asking me to explain some of the words in the song like M.C., strut, and filet mignon. Anna follows all the popular teen series on the cable television networks Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and the Disney Channel. She watches the series targeted for pre-teen girls on a daily basis and asks me each time I visit if I've seen the latest shows. Anna loves to eat at fast food restaurants and wears jeans and T-shirts with sayings printed on them such as "Angel" or "Pretty in Pink." Anna enjoys cooking and I observed her reading the directions and recipes for her EZ-Bake oven that she received as a birthday present. For a few months, she was keeping a diary where she wrote about her friends and family. Miguel stole the diary and, as a result, she never felt like writing in it anymore.

Miguel has also embraced the figures and hobbies of American popular culture. He spends his free time playing the card games of Pokemon and Yu-Gi-Oh. He reads the cards, collects them, and trades them with his friends. He also follows television series and discusses them continuously. His shows of choice are Power Rangers, Spiderman, and Japanese animation cartoons. Most of his clothing proclaims his enthusiasm for cartoon characters, action figures, and super heroes. All of my interactions with Miguel center around his interests in these facets of television. Even three-year-old Junior has his favorite super hero, Spiderman. Most of Junior's clothing and his bedding are covered with Spiderman images. Whenever I come to visit, he says "Spiderman" to me and then does karate chops in the air. Jose is concerned about the excess television viewing of his children. "They watch too much t.v." he tells me. Reading books did not appear to be an aspect of life that interested the children. I often observed Anna trying to

motivate her little brother Miguel to practice his reading. He would systematically whine and refuse to do so.

To summarize, the home literacy environment of the Diaz family was influenced by two key factors—cultural mediation and ethnicity. The parents in the home held on to their Guatemalan culture by keeping their language and cultural traditions alive. The children, on the other hand, spoke English and embraced popular American children's culture. Reading books or writing for communicative purposes did not appear to be a priority in the home. In the next section, I discuss educational implications for teachers who teach students like Anna and Miguel.

Educational Implications

Children from non-mainstream homes with language, economic, and cultural factors influencing their school success need schools and teachers who respect their diverse backgrounds. Schools need to reflect the literacy learning that occurs in diverse homes to provide opportunities for children to build upon their existing background of knowledge (Carroll, 2017; Campbell, 1998). Similarly, Janes and Kermani (2001) demonstrate ways in which school's responses to nontraditional forms of literacy can be accurately identified and program implementation effectively modified to better serve non-mainstream children in school. Comber (2000) contends that schools and teachers need to make themselves "ready" for different children, not only in terms of individual differences, but also in the kinds of differences in children's linguistic, social, economic, and cultural capital. Schools that value certain forms of knowledge over others create a cultural elitism that hinders alternative constructions of literacy: "Some cultures, and consequently the children representing those groups, do not believe in the autonomous, self-contained individual. The behavior, knowledge, and beliefs associated with individualism will not be valued or exhibited by all children. When institutions, such as schools, favor individualism over multiple views of human beings, a cultural elitism emerges for those younger human beings who are part of the group that values autonomy," (Cannella, 1997, p. 39). It is important that the words which become the starting point for learning to read and write come from the student's ideas, not from the teacher's reading book (Freire, 1970). By creating literacy experiences in schools that build upon student life experiences, teachers can make schools more open and inviting for children from diverse language, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Constraints such as lack of travel budget and time create barriers for teachers to complete home visits in order to investigate the roles literacy activities play in the culture of the home environment. Teachers therefore need to keep open lines of communication to build relationships with parents that will positively influence children's literacy development. Communication lines can be strengthened through daily notes home, social media updates and posts, and invitations to community-based social gatherings such as book clubs, festivals, award ceremonies, incentive programs, and other reading-related celebrations. Teachers can focus on specific ways children can embrace their cultural capital through reading about inspiring people, writing family memoirs, and researching diverse cultures.

Conclusion

The literacy experiences of bilingual, immigrant families are influenced by various sociocultural contexts. Home, community, and school environments impact the reading and writing experiences of children growing up in Hispanic, low-income homes. To what extent the home literacy environment of the Diaz family is typical of other Guatemalan immigrant families remains to be examined. By investigating the roles literacy activities play in the culture of the home environment, what the functions and uses of reading and writing are in the daily life routines of the family members, and what types of print information and reading materials are available in the home, a portrait of a family's literacy environment emerged. The factors influencing the literacy development of the Diaz children were bilingualism, cultural mediation, and ethnicity. By sharing an insider's point of view of the home literacy experiences of a non-mainstream culture family, teachers can more fully understand and appreciate where diverse students are coming from when they hop off the school bus each morning. When teachers know who their students are in terms of their home environments, interests, hobbies, and routines, they can adapt the curriculum accordingly with nontraditional literacy experiences that respect the diverse language, economic, and cultural backgrounds of children from multicultural worlds.

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TIERED LITERACY INTERVENTION USING TARGETED, MODULAR GUIDED READING INTERVENTION: EARLY RESULTS OF THE RISE PROJECT IN URBAN CHATTANOOGA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Urban education reform tends to operate as a pendulum, swinging from intervention to intervention with little consistency or permanent impact (Cuban, 1990). Contemporary efforts, incentivized by temporary capital injections of temporary grant funding under Race to the Top intervention schema (McGuinn, 2011), seek to find short-term interventions that can provide lasting results. These interventions often focus on early grades literacy, where students first show learning gaps that persist and deepen over time (Justice, Chow, Capellini, Flanigan, & Colton, 2003). School officials in Hamilton County, Tennessee were faced with an unsuccessful round of iZone intervention (Zimmer, Henry, & Kho, 2016) and with students remaining in interventions meant to be temporary year after year. As a part of a wholesale reform, the district placed all feeder schools for the former iZone into a zone structured for enhanced coordination and support. The zone leadership implemented a literacy intervention in the seven elementary schools built around guided reading stations which has shown promising early successes. While there are myriad reasons to remain cautious and to track students to show whether intervention improves state test scores or keeps students from subsequent interventions, the early successes warrant scaling the intervention to other district schools and further study.

Tiered Literacy Intervention Using Targeted, Modular Guided Reading Intervention: Early Results of the RISE Project in Urban Chattanooga Elementary Schools

A focus on literacy in school improvement efforts at all levels has plenty of face validity; if students read and understood passages with more skill, their understanding of numeracy, science, or social studies concepts would necessarily improve (Lonigan, Purpura, Wilson, Walker, & Clancy-Menchetti, 2013). It would be reasonable to think that test scores in not only literacy, but all other subjects, would consequently improve as well. This paper seeks to briefly validate these

notions, particularly in elementary education, and then explore a promising literacy intervention currently in use in seven elementary and three middle schools in Chattanooga, Tennessee. After briefly reviewing the cogent literature, the program methodology is reviewed, and preliminary results shared. More research, including whether gains are held after students cycle out of the intervention, is warranted.

Literature Review

Opportunity Zone

The Innovation Zone (iZone), Charter-Managed Organization (CMO), and Achievement School District (ASD) reform efforts in Tennessee under Race to the Top (RTTT) (McGuinn, 2011) showed little growth across the state regardless of which intervention was employed (Zimmer et al., 2016). In the Hamilton County Department of Education (HCDE), five schools were given iZone designation and operated from 2012-2015 using School Improvement Grant (SIG) support and heightened autonomy in hiring and firing in an effort to move from the bottom five percent of schools in the state. After three years, all five former iZone schools remained underperforming and were at risk of state takeover (Anderson, 2016). Due to complicating factors such as slow growth in ASDs and irregularities in online testing, the state was hesitant to mandate a new ASD be formed (Mangrum, 2018). Hamilton County was already in a state of flux from a combination of tragedy and scandal which led to a new superintendent and school board turnover (Greeson, 2017). The new superintendent requested a partnership with the state rather than a takeover and formed an “Opportunity Zone” from all 12 schools within the feeder patterns of the five former iZone schools. The zone was formed for increased support, coordination, and ease of cooperation with the state (Mangrum, 2018). The five alert schools exist in a partnership network receiving additional funding and support from the state while remaining nested within this larger zone.

A core strategy of the Opportunity Zone leadership is additional layers of support for the high number of inexperienced and underprepared teachers in the zone, an issue that is typical of urban schools (Jacob, 2007). These new teachers tend to last an average of three years (Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007), and systems of support are the most effective way to improve new teacher quality and retention (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Olmedo, 1997). In addition to implementing new teacher coaches and mentors, interventions are being aligned across the zone to address both student mobility (Uekawa, Borman, & Lee, 2007) and teachers unprepared to design and implement complex interventions on their own (Horn & Little, 2010; Pressley, Graham, & Harris, 2006).

Literacy Intervention

Children who begin their school careers as successful readers are more likely to experience academic success, graduate from high school and college, and find employment (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Livermon, & Dolan, 1989; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Conversely, long

term measures are bleaker for students who enter school with deficits in literacy, and these deficits quickly develop into dysfluency (Al Otaiba & Fuchs, 2002). Juel (1988) found that children who were unsuccessful readers in first grade remained poor readers in fourth grade. As with most gaps, the gap between poor readers and their more accomplished peers widens over time (Stanovich, Nathan, & Vala-Rossi, 1986). Remediating reading difficulties becomes increasingly difficult after third grade (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; Kennedy, 1986; Lyon & Moats, 1997), and reading difficulties in elementary school often persist into adulthood (Juel, 1988; Maughan, Gray, & Rutter, 1985).

In 2002, the National Research Council (NRC) found that one in five children have difficulty learning to read in school (Snow et al., 1998). The NRC report goes on to say that reading problems are more likely to occur among children who are poor, are minorities, attend urban schools, or arrive at school not speaking English (Snow et al., 1998). Students entering school lagging behind in basic-skills and experience reading need explicit, intensive, and systematic instruction on core prereading and reading skills along with continued support beyond initial instruction (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007).

Guided Reading

Guided reading is a teaching approach used with all readers, struggling or independent, that has three fundamental purposes: to meet the varying instructional needs of all the students in the classroom, enabling them to greatly expand their reading powers (Fountas, Pinnell, & Le Verrier, 2001; Richardson, 2016); to teach students to read increasingly difficult texts with understanding and fluency; and to construct meaning while using problem-solving strategies to figure out unfamiliar words that deal with complex sentence structures, and understand concepts or ideas not previously encountered. (Richardson, 2016; Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005). The implementation of guided reading can yield powerful growth for students due to its intentional design based on student needs. Teachers must understand how to administer and analyze assessments, identifying specific needs in decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Skilled teachers use the results to determine specific skills and strategies needed to specialize and strengthen student abilities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

Guided reading materials should provide a challenge that is “just right” for students. However, when working with a classroom of twenty to thirty students, it is impossible to select texts that will “fit them all” (Fountas et al., 2001). For some, the text will be so far above their ability that they cannot possibly learn anything positive about reading as they struggle simply to “get through it.” For others, the text will be so easy it won’t offer the appropriately stimulating reading challenge necessary for learning. Selecting and introducing texts for a particular group of students who share similar developmental needs at a point in time creates a context that supports learning (Fountas et al., 2001; Pinnell & Fountas, 2010). The goal of guided reading is to develop a self-extending system of reading that enables the reader to discover more about the process of reading while they are practicing reading. As children develop these understandings, they self-monitor, search for cues, discover new things about the text, check one source of

information against another, confirm their reading, self-correct, and solve new words using multiple sources of information. Throughout this process, the central elements of accuracy, speed, and fluency increase and over time these systems become increasingly automatic. Therefore, the role of the teacher is essential to “guide” the reading, as well as selecting appropriate texts. Teachers must know how to prompt and guide students as they work to build this self-extending system of reading; the critical element, however, is the skillful teaching that helps young readers learn the effective strategies they need to become independent (Iaquinta, 2006). Guided reading teachers across Hamilton County currently work to see every student in guided reading several times throughout the week with at-risk readers being seen daily. These guided reading lessons generally last 20 minutes as students work on reading comprehension, brief word study skills, and writing.

The training and competency required to implement guided reading is a high bar for urban schools with inexperienced and underprepared teaching staffs (Miller, Murnane, & Willett, 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). These schools tend to have the highest need for intervention, further placing demands on an inexperienced staff (Jacob, 2007; Levin & Quinn, 2003). The Reading Intervention for Student Express (R.I.S.E.) literacy intervention breaks the complex guided reading intervention into its component parts, allowing a guided reading specialist to train interventionists to deliver only a single component, increasing the effectiveness for those who may not have deep, extensive knowledge in reading instruction. When overseen by a trained and experienced guided reading specialist, this allows for a complex and nuanced intervention delivered by those with relatively little experience or training.

Gamification and PBIS

R.I.S.E. uses a token economy of stickers and progress charts within the R.I.S.E. room, and large banners students can sign when they “level up” to the next reading level. The gamified elements of the R.I.S.E. program would clearly work best in a school climate in which a comprehensive Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) system was in place (Sugai & Horner, 2006). PBIS uses data to distinguish tiers of need for behavioral support in a student body similar to the Response to Intervention (RTI) model for academic needs (Doolittle, 2006). PBIS uses positive reward systems, typically token economies in the elementary ages, to encourage positive behaviors in especially those tiers less dependent on intensive intervention (Sugai & Horner, 2006). When used within an established PBIS system, the gamified elements of R.I.S.E. work naturally alongside the positive reward system and tiered intervention model. Gamification is not a core element of the R.I.S.E. intervention design, but in a school with an effective PBIS system, R.I.S.E. has elements that naturally lend to reinforcement through reward. Since the Opportunity Zone schools leveraged these elements through sticker charts and banners, this variable should not be overlooked.

Purpose of Current Intervention

There is support in the education reform research for designing literacy intervention and using this as a core strategy around which to scaffold other layers of intervention (Pressley et al., 2006). However, providing targeted interventions in literacy can be one of the most challenging components of instruction for teachers, administrators, and schools. For the past three years, Hamilton County elementary schools have worked to support struggling readers through the implementation of various programs during Response to Intervention (RTI²). RTI² is designed to provide intense, differentiated instruction to accelerate student progress, enabling students to decode and comprehend at grade level (Greenwood et al., 2011). Ideally, students should not consistently need RTI², but show accelerated progress due to focused instruction and efforts (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2010). However, this is not always the case (Berkeley, Bender, Gregg Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). In a recent study released by the United States Department of Education, Balu et al. (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of RTI². The researchers found that misidentification of students for RTI², a mismatch between reading intervention and instructional needs of students, and poor alignment between core instruction and reading intervention, were the primary reasons the intervention often fails. Across Hamilton County, 75% of students assigned to RTI² in elementary school participate for two or more years, supporting the findings from the study.

In the spring of 2016, a new model used in Fairfax County, Virginia, for three years and yielding impressive results was introduced to Hamilton County Schools leadership. During the 2017-2018 school year, 22 elementary schools and three middle schools in Hamilton County committed to adopting the model. The R.I.S.E. model provides intentional, focused, and differentiated instruction in reading, writing, and word study. The structure uses a modified version of the framework for guided reading found in *Next Steps Forward in Guided Reading* (Richardson, 2016).

Schools implementing R.I.S.E. structured the intervention using a guided reading specialist and two interventionists. Each guided reading specialist implementing the model is a certified teacher, and in most cases, is a former elementary classroom teacher who taught guided reading with great success. Interventionists are also certified but have a wide range of former teaching experiences. The following sections focus on implementation and data from the Opportunity Zone schools who had a literacy director providing professional development to school personnel, planning and overseeing the fidelity of implementation, and using preliminary data to fine tune processes and ensure alignment to the model.

Methods

Sample

Data from state test scores, *Next Steps in Guided Reading Assessment* (Richardson, 2016), Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking, easyCBM testing (a test developed and sold by Curriculum

Based Measurement Solutions (Alonzo, Tindal, Ulmer, & Glasgow, 2006)), Word Knowledge Inventories (Hayes et al., 2011), and writing samples were used to identify students struggling to reach grade level proficiency within the seven elementary and three middle schools in the Opportunity Zone. Guided Reading specialists, interventionists, teachers, administrators, coaches, and the Opportunity Zone Literacy Coordinator analyzed data and identified developing readers with similar needs at each grade level, except Kindergarten, in each Opportunity Zone elementary school. Students were grouped by intervention needs, with each group containing a minimum of nine students and maximum of fifteen students. Cycles of intervention were mapped out, allowing individual schools to select which grade levels they would target first. Most schools decided to begin with students reading a year below grade level to close gaps and quickly accelerate reading levels to grade level expectation. The intervention was limited to a 40-session cycle. Once students completed the 40 sessions, the specialist, interventionists, administration, and classroom teachers met to share progress, instructional strategies, and resources that yielded the greatest impact in helping students make progress. Additionally, other relevant information needed was shared so that the classroom teacher could continue the forward momentum and a smooth transition would occur for students. During the second cycle, students in second, third, and fourth grades who were reading more than two years below grade level were targeted. In cycle three, students in the third, fourth, and fifth grades were targeted with a strong focus on comprehension.

Procedure

In the R.I.S.E. model, students received targeted instruction that isolated and built upon skills and strategies identified as a deficit, while at the same time supporting the reading process holistically. Students received simultaneous intervention in a separate classroom, decorated and set up as a “R.I.S.E.” room with three stations for rotations. Students worked intensely for 45 minutes each day with the Guided Reading specialists and interventionists, increasing their stamina, skills, and abilities to decode and comprehend flexibly across increasingly difficult and complex texts. Engagement in targeted lessons for comprehension, development of word knowledge, and writing addressed specific areas of need during 15-minute rotations. To maintain a holistic approach to reading, the intervention time required a total of 45-minutes rather than the 20 minutes provided under the previous RTI² structure.

Short texts at the students’ instructional level were used in the first station. Students read as the guided reading specialist provided prompting and support. The primary focus was on applying strategies for literal comprehension and vocabulary development. At the second station, students engaged in three-to-four activities designed to improve phonemic awareness, sight word recognition, and phonics skills necessary for developing and improving decoding and fluency. The third station supported students’ writing as they used comprehension of texts and application of word study to compose a short paragraph about their reading. The format of this model provided the opportunity for interventionists and specialists to work closely and intensely each day with students, monitoring and ensuring the intervention was aligned with instructional needs and increasing student abilities.

Measures

The R.I.S.E. intervention structure had multiple checkpoints to determine if the intervention was working and what adjustments were needed to overcome obstacles students were facing. Upon entry, information from *Edition 2 of the Benchmark Assessment System* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) was used to establish an entry instructional level for students. Throughout the process, the guided reading specialists maintained weekly records obtained through observations to assess progress in decoding, fluency, and comprehension. The interventionists maintained high-frequency word checklists and updated word knowledge inventories every two weeks. The interventionists responsible for the writing rotation monitored student writing journals, looking for the application of phonics skills, high-frequency words, and comprehension. Time for daily collaborative conversations between the guided reading specialists and interventionists was built into the schedule and a key component of the intervention so that areas of success and difficulty encountered by students in each station could be identified and instruction could be adjusted before the next session. Bi-weekly, students were given short passages provided in EasyCBM to progress monitor and further inform instructional decisions. At the end of the 40-session cycle, students were given an exit assessment from *Edition 2 of the Benchmark Assessment System* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010) to measure growth across the intervention.

Data trackers were maintained via Google Sheets and provided documentation for beginning and ending levels, number of sessions the student received, number of instructional reading levels moved, and any other relevant information that might have impacted progress (i.e., attendance, suspension, illness). They were updated every two weeks, indicating where students were in the process. At the end of each quarter, guided reading specialists followed up with classroom teachers on students exited from the intervention in previous cycles to determine whether progress was being maintained by students within the regular classroom setting.

Results

Within the Opportunity Zone, students who received at least 33 sessions of RISE showed a growth of 6.4 months, on average. Typically, students who receive 33 sessions of guided reading in a regular setting would grow one to two months. Student growth by number of sessions attended for the 961 elementary students who received RISE intervention is shown in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 1, students receiving between 56-60 sessions of RISE showed almost one year of growth in what would have been 11 weeks of the focused intervention.

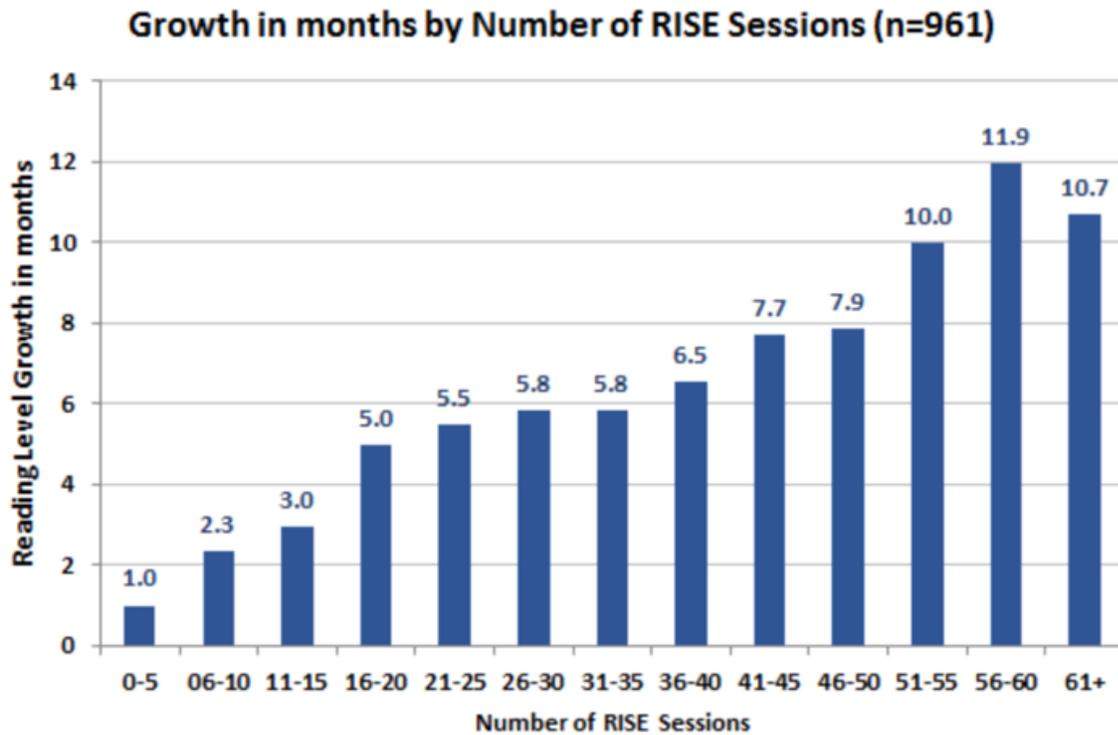


Figure 1

Discussion

Because the intervention was new during the 2017-2018 academic year, there were no state test scores to show whether growth from R.I.S.E. translated into improved scores on year-to-year standardized measures. However, increased motivation to read, improved decoding, fluency, and comprehension, and growth in writing abilities were evident in the results. Students' success bred confidence, and small academic wins with students who struggle to read led to more success, ultimately turning the most reluctant readers into ones who relished the opportunity to read, write, and engage in conversations around texts (de Shazer, Berg, Lipchik, & Nunnally, 1986). Within implementation, there were intervention groups who were not close enough in reading level to receive the formal R.I.S.E. intervention. These groups, particularly at one Opportunity Zone elementary school, were still pulled into the R.I.S.E. room for traditional guided reading with the guided reading specialists and interventionists. After 40 sessions, these groups showed the average growth rather than the much higher average six months growth within the R.I.S.E. intervention groups. Since these students received focused intervention from the same instructor as R.I.S.E. students and were able to take part in the gamified elements such as sticker charts and signing a "level-up" banner, it would seem that rotating among stations and working with peers within similar instructional ranges are uniquely impactful factors in the R.I.S.E. growth. The breaking down of a complex set of layered intervention into component parts and allowing specialists and interventionists to focus on one area of intervention is another factor likely

explaining the difference in scores. Further study could isolate these factors, particularly in a district without organized zones in the urban school feeders where a principal could choose to implement the intervention and results could be compared with peer schools using more traditional intervention techniques.

Limitations

As this was a targeted intervention, there was not an opportunity for a double-blind or even blinded study. In future years, blind samples should be used for validation. The intervention could prove much more difficult in districts without the specialized support staff developed by Hamilton County, such as the Elementary Literacy Coordinator who oversaw and supported this initial implementation effort. There were many lessons learned and some schools required intense support from district staff, which would prove impossible without the layers of support and funding the Opportunity Zone currently receives. This intervention will be repeated next year, providing the ability to track year-over-year growth and any correlation to improved test scores. A second year of fully implemented R.I.S.E. will provide the opportunity to track whether students who have received one full rotation of 40 R.I.S.E. lessons typically requires further intervention or are able to succeed when only receiving classroom instruction once their deficiency has been remediated.

Implications for Teachers

Three specific practices dominated the link to outcomes of student progress from the implementation of R.I.S.E. intervention in Hamilton County Schools. Providing intensive support in an area of deficit for a brief amount of time increased overall reading ability.

- *Identifying specific gaps in word knowledge, spelling, and vocabulary and then engaging students in intentional practice can accelerate fluency, accuracy, and close gaps.* Providing targeted support during the Word Study rotation that reinforces the spelling and pronunciation of irregular vowel patterns, explores breaking multisyllabic words into parts, and builds automaticity with specific rimes increased fluency and accuracy in readers. Additionally, investigating the meaning of Greek and Latin roots and how the meaning changed with the addition of suffixes, prefixes, and endings accelerated vocabulary acquisition and comprehension.
- *Listening to individual students read and prompting for strategies that can be used when encountering difficulty can lead to independence.* Teaching students comprehension strategies to utilize while reading increased abilities in self-monitoring for meaning and understanding how to process the passage while reading. Many students who entered R.I.S.E. were excellent word callers but struggled to articulate what they had read. Through very explicit support, they began to independently internalize comprehension strategies, problem solve at the point of difficulty, and recognize when meaning was breaking down during reading.

- *Setting goals with students and engaging in writing each day builds fluency in writing and constructing ideas.* The structured, supported, short nature of the writing allowed students to practice skills needed to effectively communicate thoughts and ideas. Students were provided with one or two personal writing goals collaboratively developed between the interventionist and student from writing samples to increase skills and proficiency. Once the students began to demonstrate independence with the skill, new goals were established and layered into the process.

While there were multiple instructional moves and collaborations between the R.I.S.E. team and teachers that played critical roles in accelerating student progress, these three were prominent in practice and showed the most significant impact on students.

Calls for Further Study

As promising as the preliminary data from the Opportunity Zone implementation is, this data was collected as a part of the intervention itself and not for research purposes. A research study with rigorous safeguards and a double-blind sample and intervention would isolate many of the potentials for results to be colored by the implementors and facilitators (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2011). Studies which take place year-over-year could also integrate state-level standardized testing data to show whether reading score growth correlates with improved standardized test scores. With the irregularities in the 2017-2018 state testing in Tennessee, even such a rigorously implemented and overseen study would likely not have valid state test data for the purposes of research, supporting the researchers' decision to publish internal measures rather than wait for state test scores to return. Longer, intentional study could also track whether students regress and need cycles of intervention repeatedly over their academic career. Such longitudinal studies could also show whether the intervention impacts lessen over time when students undergo several cycles of intervention across their academic career. Particularly with versions of R.I.S.E. being used in middle schools and a high school freshman academy in the Opportunity Zone, students could burn out on the intervention and much of the draw of such a novel intervention could potentially wear off.

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