



Parents as Teachers®

REPORT

Results of the Innovative Approaches to Literacy Project

April 2015



Acknowledgments

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Background

Parents as Teachers is one of the nation's largest evidence-based visiting parenting education models. For more than 30 years, Parents as Teachers affiliates across the United States have implemented the Parents as Teachers evidence-based home visiting model with hundreds of thousands of families of children prenatally through kindergarten entry, significantly impacting outcomes in the model's four goal areas: increasing parent knowledge of early childhood development and improving parenting practices; providing early detection of developmental delays and health issues; preventing child abuse and neglect; and increasing children's school readiness and school success. Supporting parents in the promotion of their child's language and literacy development has long been a hallmark of Parents as Teachers.

In 2012, the national office of Parents as Teachers received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) Program to promote and strengthen early literacy skills for children living within the attendance boundaries of high-poverty local educational agencies and schools. The purpose of the IAL grant to Parents as Teachers was to evaluate the impact on home literacy activities and children's oral language development of Parents as Teachers when augmented with the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library book distribution program that provides monthly books to children from birth to age 5.

Participating families, the majority of whom had two or more risk characteristics, were offered bi-weekly literacy-focused personal visits and monthly literacy related group connections. Children received an Imagination Library book monthly, and the Parents as Teachers affiliates distributed additional books to families on visits and at group connections. Parent educators also connected parents with community libraries and other literacy resources.

Results indicated that the literacy-enriched Parents as Teachers personal visits combined with Imagination Library improved the overall literacy environment in the home and increased the oral language skills of participating four year-old children. Of particular note is that oral language development of participating at-risk 4 year olds was on a par with national norms after participating in the project.

Methods

The evaluation of the Parents as Teachers IAL project was conducted at two levels. The first level was the *overall evaluation*. Information was collected from all participating families and their parent educators on frequency and content of literacy-related activities conducted at home and experienced by participants as part of the project. The Home Literacy Checklist (HLC) and the Literacy-related Personal Visit Records (Lit PVR) were used to collect this information.

The second level was the *focal evaluation*. A smaller group of children in five focal states (Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina) who were going to be between ages 48 and 59 months at the end of the project was identified and recruited. In addition to home literacy experiences, focal children were assessed using the norm-referenced Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement-III (WJ-III) Extended Oral Language subtests (Test 3: Story Recall, Test 4: Understanding Directions, Test 14: Picture Vocabulary, and Test 15: Oral Comprehension; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001, 2007) at project enrollment, and again at the end of the project, when they were 4 years of age.

Participants

The project began with 59 Parents as Teachers affiliates serving families living in the catchment area of 59 high poverty school districts in 9 states. One affiliate decided to drop from the IAL project because they could not keep up with project requirements. The children served by this affiliate continued to receive Imagination Library books, but were no longer involved in the evaluation. When the project began, a total of 1,326 families (1,557 children) consented to participate in the Parents as Teachers IAL project and to be evaluated. At the end of the project, there were 1031 children remaining in the evaluation.

Table 1: Child's Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Focal	Non focal
<i>State</i>		
Georgia	9.5%	5.7%
Michigan	3.4%	5.3%
North Carolina	12.9%	14.7%
Pennsylvania	46.2%	35.3%
South Carolina	28%	16.9%
Colorado	0%	7.8%
Illinois	0%	9.4%
New York	0%	3.2%
Virginia	0%	1.5%
<i>Age at enrollment</i>		
Younger than 12 months	0%	39.6%
12-23 months	0%	36%
24-35 months	48.1%	20.3%
36-48 months	51.9%	4%

Participants

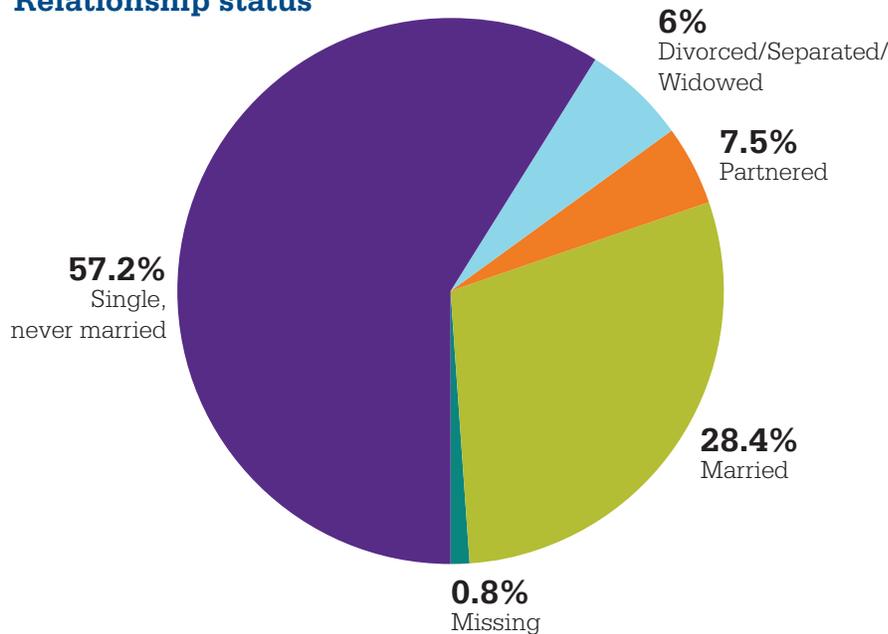
Throughout the project, 446 non-focal children and 80 focal children dropped out (almost always because they exited the Parents as Teachers program), resulting in an attrition rate of 34% for non-focal and 30% for focal children. The focus of the IAL project was on high-risk families. Sixty-five percents of families had annual household income below \$20,000, 81% of families received Medicaid, and 70% of parents/guardians were unemployed. Additional demographic characteristics for the program participants are outlined in Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 1 and 2.

Table 2: Child’s Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Focal	Non focal
<i>Child’s race</i>		
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0%	0.40%
Asian	0%	0.90%
Black	51.9%	38.1%
White	32.2%	39.5%
Other	5.7%	11.3%
Multi-racial	10.2%	9.8%
<i>Child’s ethnicity</i>		
Latino/Hispanic	17%	27.3%

Figure 1: Parent/Guardian’s Demographic Characteristics

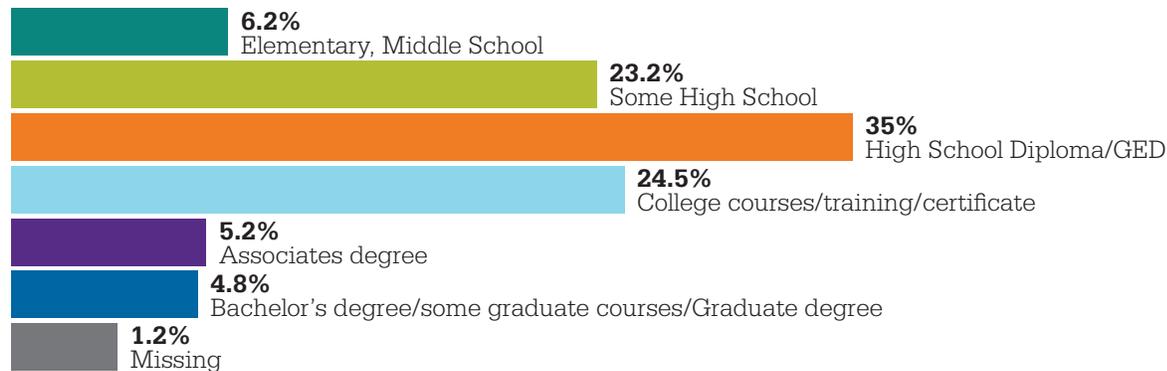
Relationship status



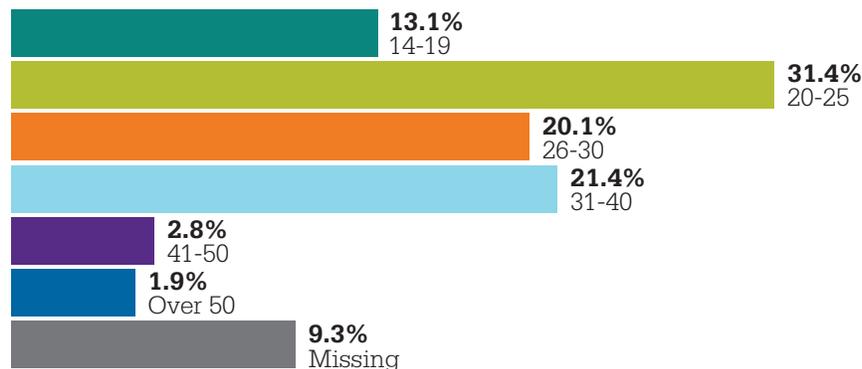
Participants

Figure 2: Parent/Guardian's Demographic Characteristics (cont.)

Education status



Age



Outputs

Personal visits

Parent educators reported completing 24,856 personal visits over approximately 15 months with participating IAL families. Literacy was an intentional focus on virtually every visit. On 49% of the visits, parent educators spent between 21 and 60 minutes on literacy-related activities, and on more than 70% of the visits the parent educator conducted multiple literacy-related activities and shared literacy-related resources with the family.

Books Distributed

More than 35,000 books were distributed through the IAL project, both through Imagination Library and additional books provided to the participating Parents as Teachers affiliates that were distributed to participating families on personal visits and at group connections.

Improved Home Literacy Environment

Increased number of children's books

At the end of the project, over half of children owned a small personal library of between 26 to 75 books. There was a 35% increase in the percentage of families with 26 or more books in the home (54% at the beginning of the project and 89% at the end of the project).

Increased connections to libraries and literacy resources

Of families remaining in the project, the percentage of families reporting that they own a library card steadily increased over the length of the project. At the end of the IAL project, there was a 19% increase in the number of families that reported owning a library card (an increase from 55% at the beginning of the project to 74% at the end of the project).

Increased home literacy behaviors.

Throughout the IAL project, children showed increases in the frequency of their literacy behaviors, such as looking at books alone. There was a 29% increase in the number of children looking or pretending to read books once or more a day. Parents also increased the frequency with which they used literacy behaviors with their child (i.e., reading books to their child), as well as positive literacy engagement approaches, such as asking their child questions about the book they are reading together. There was a 22% increase in the number of families reading together once or more a day. The majority of parents and children read the Imagination Library books together once a week or more frequently and the majority of children looked at the Imagination Library books by him/herself once a week or more frequently.

The focus on children's literacy appears to have made parents more likely to read, as over half of parents reported that they always read books, magazines, or newspapers. Many parents read the literacy handouts or practiced the adult-child literacy activities given to them by their parent educator.

The improvements in the home literacy environment and parents' literacy-enriching behavior were expected to impact children's oral language development.

Increased oral language

Children were assessed by trained child assessors at the beginning of the project to obtain baseline WJ-III scores, and again at the end of the project to examine progress over time. Children's standard scores were compared to the standard scores of a nationally representative sample. At both pre- and post-test, children participating in the IAL project had comparable scores to the national mean ($\mu = 100$, $SD = 15$).

The focal evaluation children showed significant increases in their oral language skills at age four. The percentage of the 174 children assessed who increased their score on at least one of the four measures of oral language was 94%.

While the increases in oral language skills for the focal evaluation group were not significantly different from those of the normed sample, the focal evaluation sample had higher overall levels of risk (low income, low educational attainment of the mother, single parent families, minority) than the group on whom the scores were normed. It is likely, therefore, that the changes in the home literacy environment that were the result of Parents as Teachers home visits and Imagination Library participation contributed to keeping these children's oral language skills developmentally on the same level as the nationally normed (and less at risk overall) sample at age 4.

Additionally, growth in oral language skills for the lowest performing children was examined. At pretest, a number of children's standard scores on each subtest of the WJ-III (Story Recall, Understanding Directions, Picture Vocabulary and Oral Comprehension) were more than 1 standard deviation below the mean (a score of less than 85). At post-test, scores had improved to an average score (85 or above) on each subtest for more than 50% of the children (see Table 3).

Table 3: Number of Children Scoring more than 1 Standard Deviation (SD) Below the Mean at Pre-test Improving to an Average Score at Post-test

	Pre-test # of children scoring more than 1 SD below the mean	Post-test # of children who increased from 1 SD below the mean to average score	Percentage of children who improved
Story recall	99	53	54%
Understanding directions	40	26	65%
Picture vocabulary	23	12	52%
Oral comprehension	74	56	76%

A major goal of the IAL grant was to increase parent-child literacy activities among parents with children aged birth through 4. The results showed increases in the number of children's books in the home, the number of parents who owned library cards, and increases in home literacy behaviors including children pretending to read and families reading together.

The other major goal of the IAL grant was to increase the oral language skills of four-year-old children. The results showed that the oral language skills did improve. In addition, the number of Parents as Teachers children, most of whom would be considered at-risk, scoring more than 1 Standard Deviation below the national mean on the oral language subtests decreased from the beginning to the end of the project.