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Topic: Build skills to promote child development and learning and lead to life and school success.

Goldstein, H. (2011). Knowing what to teach provides a roadmap for early literacy intervention. *Journal of Early Intervention, 33*, 268-280.

Context

This paper presents a review of the research on early literacy instruction and describes the key changes that have occurred in early literacy approaches over the past 25 years.

Historical Overview

The challenges of reading failure in children were addressed as early as 1955 with Rudolph Flesch's book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Since then several approaches have been used to try and ameliorate the delays in reading of children at risk for disabilities. Some early approaches involved memorization of sight words, while other approaches like Whole Language maintained that children learned to read by natural exposure to rich oral and written language. Several reports in the 1990's and early 2000's had a profound impact on identifying what we needed to teach for reading success. The National Reading Panel (NRP) identified 5 key components to reading skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Since the NRP report, researchers have focused their attention on the efficacy of teaching strategies in these five areas of literacy.

What to Teach

Researchers have identified two broad classes of early literacy skills that are the foundation for reading: code-based and meaning-focused skills. Code-based skills are identified as alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness (PA). Meaning-focused skills comprise oral language skills, including vocabulary, grammar, and children's knowledge of the world. The meaning-focused skills are critical for fluency in reading and reading comprehension. Young children progress developmentally by first playing with words within playful routines, songs, and rhymes. Then children's vocabulary

becomes more sophisticated and the focus is on understanding the alphabet and corresponding sounds. Their oral language progresses as they learn story narratives and comprehension strategies, and begin to answer questions that require inferences about the story character's actions, feelings, and events. Teaching reading to children who have limited literacy experiences or who have disabilities requires more focused intervention strategies.

Promising Practices in Early Literacy Intervention

Shared book reading. There is support for encouraging adult-child interactions during book reading, as merely reading books to children is not enough. Dialogic reading strategies where the adult asks Wh-questions, asks for descriptions of the pictures in the book, prompts and expands the child's language, and asks the child to complete sentences has been found to be very effective in developing vocabulary, language, and phonological awareness.

Code-focused intervention. The practice of teaching PA and alphabet knowledge has also shown effective in literacy development of young children. Explicit instruction of the letter sounds and blended sounds in small group instruction is recommended.

Response to Intervention (RTI). Researchers have found that using a three-tier model can assist in identifying the precise literacy needs of all individuals and in establishing goals that will move them toward mastery of the identified needs. It provides a framework in which interventions are matched to identified needs and monitored so that fidelity of implementation and progress toward success are frequently and consistently measured.

Early literacy for children with significant disabilities.

Several researchers have been successful in teaching literacy to children with severe disabilities. The strategies that have been most successful involved supplementing early literacy curriculum with consistent, explicit, and comprehensive reading instruction that was implemented over an extended period of time up to 3 years. More research is needed on the impact of augmentative and alternative communication systems for teaching language and literacy skills of children with significant intellectual disabilities.

Discussion

The science of reading has progressed significantly over the past 25 years. Yet, early childhood and early childhood special education teachers continue to face significant challenges in working with children experiencing reading difficulties. Current early childhood curricula are not sufficient to address these learning difficulties. It is recommended that researchers focus on the critical yet complex components of early literacy development, and extend the research on practices that have shown promise in the past few years.

About Research-to-Practice Briefs

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

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