



2022

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30707/TLCSD6.1.1649037808.661764>

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Recommended Citation

Hall-Mills, S. (2022). Effects of Experiential Learning on Students' Use of Facilitative Language Techniques during Shared Book Reading with Young Children. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders*, 6(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30707/TLCSD6.1.1649037808.661764>

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Effects of Experiential Learning on Students' Use of Facilitative Language Techniques during Shared Book Reading with Young Children

Abstract

The purpose of this pilot study was to measure the effects of experiential learning on graduate students' use of facilitative language techniques (FLT) to support language development in young children from a high poverty population. Seven CSD graduate students who participated in a language seminar received direct instruction in and experiential learning with 11 FLT. The students implemented the learned techniques during an 8-week experience in the community while providing shared book reading activities for children at a local family shelter. Results indicated that the students made significant gains in the number and type of FLT used during book reading activities. The findings suggest that experiential learning yielded clinically significant changes in the graduate students' use of FLT during shared book reading with young children. Implications are provided for further research.

It is important for speech-language pathology (SLP) students to learn how to facilitate language development in young children within authentic contexts. Among the SLP roles and responsibilities that programs must prepare students for are duties related to prevention and identification of written language problems (ASHA, 2002). In their prevention efforts, SLP students must learn how to foster language acquisition and emergent literacy in young children. Students also need to learn how to identify children who are at risk for reading and writing difficulties so that their risks can be addressed and mitigated. One way to do this is to provide students with opportunities to implement rich language and emergent literacy experiences with children who are at risk.

This pilot study investigated the training of student clinicians to use facilitative language techniques (FLT) as they engaged with children in a community-based program at a local shelter for families experiencing homelessness. The Story Time program was designed to provide shared reading opportunities for young children two evenings weekly for eight weeks at a community center. Story Time was supervised by a speech-language pathology (SLP) faculty member and facilitated by SLP students, all of whom served as volunteers at the shelter. The location of Story Time was selected with consideration of a range of risk factors for children's global language development, health and school success that are associated with poverty and homelessness for this vulnerable population.

Risks Associated with Poverty

A rudimentary definition of poverty explains that it is a condition in which one's financial resources do not cover the costs associated with basic necessities for life such as food and shelter. The U.S. Government defines the federal poverty threshold by total family income. For example, the 2017 poverty threshold for a family of four people was \$24,600 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Parent income level is only one measure of poverty, and poverty can have a broader impact than difficulties obtaining the essentials for life. Limited access to opportunities and resources are other variables of poverty that impact child development and school outcomes.

There are data that indicate an association exists between poverty and increased risk of speech and language disorders in young children. National health data reveal that a larger proportion of children who live in poverty have speech and language disorders than those who do not live in poverty, especially for those with severe cases involving comorbidity (Blumberg et al., 2015; Raghaven et al., 2018). Furthermore, the risk of some communication disorders is significantly greater for children whose families do not own a home (Wren et al., 2016). In addition to greater risk for communication disorders, poverty also places young children at greater risk for reading and learning disabilities (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016).

To explore reasons for the added risks associated with poverty, researchers have examined the differences in home literacy environments for children from families of varying levels of socioeconomic status (SES). Many studies have documented observable and substantial gaps in the language and literacy experiences of children from families with low SES compared to those in the middle and high ranges of SES. These findings collectively address disparities in the quality and quantity of language directed to children in the home. Hart and Risley (1995) famously

documented the gaps in cumulative language experience of children from families with a range of SES, findings which have been substantiated in subsequent research (Rowe, 2008). Other researchers have documented limitations in the range and depth of verbal input of children from low SES families compared to children from higher income families; differences that are associated with delayed language skills (Hoff, 2013; Pruitt & Oetting, 2009; Smith et al., 2000). Finally, at school entry, many children in poverty have the added challenge of having had fewer emergent literacy experiences than their peers (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016).

Risks Associated with Homelessness

The term *homeless* is defined as an individual or family that is either lacking a fixed, regular, adequate nighttime residence, having a public nighttime residence not designed for regular sleeping accommodations, living in a supervised publicly or privately-operated shelter for temporary living arrangements, living in hotels or motels with others after losing housing due to not paying rent, lacking resources to obtain permanent housing, or unaccompanied youth who have experienced frequent moves or a long period of independent living without housing (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 1987). More than half of all children who are homeless and residing in shelters are five years old and younger (National Center for Homeless Education [NCHE], 2013).

Long-term homelessness can have negative consequences on children's development and academic achievement through the school years. As a group, children who are homeless or whose families are highly mobile have lower reading and math achievement and slower achievement growth rates and greater risk of grade retention than their lower-risk peers, including peers in poverty who are not homeless (Cutuli et al, 2013; Fantuzzo & Perlman, 2007; Rubin et al., 1996). Furthermore, the language models available to children in homelessness may restrict their language development. For example, O'Neil-Pirozzi (2003) analyzed the speech and language performance of 25 mothers and their children of preschool age living in homeless shelters. The mothers' language performance showed deficits were common in oral expression and writing (language productivity and quality), and most of the mothers and their children exhibited overall language delays in listening comprehension, verbal expression, reading, and/or writing.

Fortunately, the effects of poverty and homelessness on literacy can be mitigated through improved home literacy environments, increased access to high quality early childhood programs, and early intervention during the first two years of elementary school (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016). Recent projects such as the Thirty Million Words Project demonstrate the effectiveness of parent-directed interventions to offset SES-related limitations in language input (Leffel & Suskind, 2013), and early language and literacy interventions can help correct the course for children at risk for reading disabilities (Catts et al., 2015). There also is hope stemming from the field of neuroscience about how rich early language experiences support child development. Romeo (2019) described neuroimaging evidence of relationships between SES and brain development and suggested that clinicians can help mitigate the impact of poverty on language development through direct intervention and parent coaching during critical periods of their children's development.

Importance of Experiential Learning

Jarvis (1987) initially outlined the framework components of adult experiential learning theory, which have been incorporated in models of clinical supervision in SLP training programs (Walden & Gordon-Pershey, 2013). The experiential learning framework is common in higher education because it is known to enhance student outcomes and learning. Experiential learning is defined as “a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). In the graduate SLP program at the host institution, students have the opportunity to integrate and apply course content through a variety of experiential learning activities. Some of the activities occur during class sessions (e.g., case studies, role-playing) while others may occur via simulated learning online (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). Outside of class time, in vitro practicum experiences enable students to implement learned approaches with clients, thereby extending the experiential learning to an authentic clinical setting.

Prior research supports the use of experiential learning with SLP students. Experiential learning opportunities have resulted in a range of significant outcomes for SLP students, including increased cultural competence (Vale & Arnold, 2019) and aphasia service delivery (Hoepner & Sather, 2020). There has been one prior investigation examining SLP students’ response to an experiential learning opportunity with young children in the community. Kelley et al. (2019) engaged a cohort of undergraduate SLP students in a learning experience about the purpose and use of vocabulary instruction during shared book reading with preschool children. Students completed video learning modules about implementing robust vocabulary instruction within shared book reading activities, then participated in a practicum experience with children enrolled in a preschool. The results indicated that there were significant improvements in the students’ knowledge and skills for explicit vocabulary instruction during shared book reading.

Shared Book Reading to Enrich Children’s Language and Literacy Development

Shared book reading (also known as “interactive shared book reading”) is a literacy-based interaction between an adult and a child in which they view and read a book together while the adult uses one or more structured techniques to actively engage the child in the book. Shared book reading has many benefits for children, including increased motivation for reading, exposure to new words in rich and meaningful contexts, and support for school readiness, oral vocabulary, listening comprehension, and print awareness (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008; Rvachew et al., 2017).

Shared Book Reading for Children from Low-Income Families

Although shared reading has many benefits, it is not common practice within many low-income families (Heath, 1982; Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). The lack of shared reading experiences could result from a shortage of books and other reading materials, infrequent visits to the library, and the level of parental education (Heath, 1982, Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). Shared reading experiences are most effective when those experiences include an interactive technique called dialogic reading (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). Dialogic reading occurs when the adult and child engage in conversation about the book or text that is being read. The dialogic reading experience encourages the child to participate during reading while creating an avenue for the adult to provide and support to enhance linguistic and literacy development, including narrative skills (Hargrave &

Sénéchal, 2000; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). Thus, the Story Time program provides shared reading opportunities for children experiencing homelessness.

Language Facilitation Techniques

Children whose parents use facilitative language techniques (FLT) during book reading in the years prior to school entry demonstrate greater school readiness than peers who lack those experiences (Trivette et al., 2010). Using FLT and extratextual talk during shared reading helps to enrich children's language learning and reading development (DesJardin et al., 2014). Prior research has explored the role of various types of FLT in fostering oral language development ranging from the pre-linguistic stage of development (via low-level FLT) to the early word phrase level (via high-level FLT). DesJardin et al. defined seven lower- and four higher-level FLT implemented in a shared book reading intervention with young children with hearing loss. Lower-level FLT are helpful for children who are developing comprehension at the word level (e.g., linguistic mapping, comments, imitation, labeling, directives, close-ended questions), whereas higher-level FLT foster comprehension at the phrase and discourse level (e.g., parallel talk, open-ended questions, expansion, recast). Parents' use of high level FLT (e.g., recasts, open-ended questions) was positively associated with children's oral language skills. The present study incorporated the FLT outlined by DesJardin and colleagues (2014), which are defined in Table 1.

Purpose of the Present Study

One challenge for SLP students is learning how to implement a variety of techniques for facilitating language during interactive shared book reading activities with children. Students are introduced to a variety of FLT during classroom-based instruction. However, this instruction needs to be paired with hands-on practice for experiential learning to occur. The purpose of this pilot study was to measure the effects of experiential learning on graduate students' use of FLT during shared book reading to support language development in children from a vulnerable population. The findings will be applied to the development of training modules for future undergraduate and graduate students to continue learning about and implementing FLT in book reading activities with children in the community, including a continuance of the Story Time program.

Prior research has shown how parents and teachers of early childhood and preschool programs can be trained to implement a variety of FLT during book reading activities with children (Rezzonico et al., 2015). However, to date, there have not been any published reports of the use of experiential learning to improve graduate SLP students' use of FLT during shared book reading with children in a shelter setting. The absence of research on effective instructional models to support students' efforts in using quality FLT in a community setting motivated the present study. This study incorporated current knowledge regarding the importance of experiential learning in students' clinical development and was guided by the following research questions:

1. Does direct instruction in FLT paired with experiential learning affect graduate students' use of FLT during an 8-week shared book reading program provided in a local family shelter?
2. What are the qualitative experiences of students engaged in experiential learning through the Story Time program based on formative assessment results?

Table 1

Facilitative Language Techniques (FLT): Descriptions and Examples adapted from DesJardin et al., 2014

FLT	Description	Example
<i>Higher Level</i>		
Parallel Talk	Parent talks aloud about what the child is directly looking at or referencing.	Child is looking directly at a picture of a frog and parent says, "The frog is jumping off the log."
Open-ended question	Parent provides a phrase/question in which the child can answer using more than one word.	While looking at a picture, parent says, "What is happening in this picture?"
Expansion	Parent repeats child's verbalization providing a more grammatical and complete language model without modifying the child's word order or intended meaning.	Child says, "baby cry" and the caregiver says, "The baby is crying."
Recast	Parent restates the child's verbalization into a question format.	Child says, "baby cry" and the caregiver says, "Is the baby crying?"
<i>Lower Level</i>		
Linguistic mapping	Putting into words or interpreting the child's vocalization that is not recognizable as a word.	Child vocalizes as she is looking at the storybook and parent says, "doggie."
Comments	Statement or phrase that signals that a message has been received or an utterance to keep conversation going.	Mother says, "yeah!" or "thank you."
Imitation	Repeating verbatim the child's preceding vocalization without adding any new words.	Child says, "baby" and mother says, "Yes, baby."
Label	Stating the name for a picture in the storybook.	Father says, "There is a doggie."
Directive	Tells or directs child to do something.	Parent says, "Look at this picture."
Closed-ended question	Stating a question in which the child can only answer with a one-word response.	Father asks child, "Do you like this book?"

Method

Participants. Seven female graduate students (5 Caucasian, 2 Latina) enrolled in one SLP graduate program participated in the present study. Students were enrolled in an elective seminar focused on language and literacy practices for vulnerable populations; all students were in their third semester of the program (all participants' age = 23 years). Service learning was a required

component of the seminar. Students consented to participate in research per the requirements of the university's institutional review board for human subjects research.

Setting. Children and families without permanent housing may reside in a publicly or privately-operated residential facility such as a shelter. A shelter is a facility designated to provide temporary living arrangements and support services to individuals and families. The Story Time Program took place in a local residential facility for homeless families with children. The facility provides an emergency shelter and temporary housing, case management, and support services for families and women moving out of homelessness and into stable housing. The facility provides food and shelter for up to 140 people at one time. Over seven years, more than 1,200 residents, including 500 children, have successfully transitioned to housing of their own. Over the past few years, the facility has seen a growing number of children and families checking into the shelter. During the 8-week program, shelter staff took data on the number of children engaged in the Story Time program with the graduate students. A total of 250 children attended one or more book reading sessions (59.6% female; 40.4% male; age range 0-6 years). In their report, shelter staff noted that throughout the semester during the Story Time program, children showed an increased interest and desire to read, even when the graduate student volunteers were not present.

The Story Time Model. The Story Time program included two-hour long evening sessions offered weekly by community volunteers to children who were residing in a shelter for families experiencing homelessness. The volunteers were university students enrolled in the graduate SLP program and supervised by a faculty member who specializes in child language and literacy development within vulnerable populations. Each week, children who were in residence were invited to participate in shared book reading activities with the volunteers. Children's participation was voluntary and the book reading activities were provided at no cost to the shelter or the families. The Story Time program provided an opportunity for students to practice implementing FLT's during literacy activities within an active learning paradigm. Students were responsible for organizing and leading the book reading activities each week. They also participated in semi-weekly seminar meetings to review prior sessions and engage in collaborative planning for subsequent story time activities.

Story Time began with a large-group shared book reading activity with vocabulary review at the conclusion of the story. For the remainder of the hour, students worked in small groups or one-on-one with children during additional book reading activities. The large group stories were pre-planned by the SLP students, whereas the children selected the stories to review in small groups or individually with a graduate student. All of the books used during story time activities were donated via local book drives facilitated by the faculty member and the university's chapter of the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association (NSSLHA). The books were given each week to the children who attended Story Time.

Procedure. The study was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, graduate students received a volunteer orientation to the shelter facility and participated in the first Story Time session with children in residence. At that time, the students had not received direct instruction on FLT's and shared reading. Initial observations of the graduate students' use of FLT's took place during the first Story Time session as a baseline measure of their use of higher and lower order FLT's. After the first Story Time session, students then received direct instruction in FLT's during

a seminar class. Experiential learning took place in the second phase, in which the students engaged in twice weekly Story Time sessions with children at the shelter and attended a biweekly seminar to discuss evidence-based practices in language and literacy intervention. In the third phase, another wave of observations was conducted at the conclusion of the 8-week program as a post-test measure of students' use of higher and lower order FLTs.

During the observations, the students interacted directly with the children during shared book reading. The primary investigator and a doctoral student independently scored each graduate student's use of high and low level FLTs during a 5-minute segment using a checklist. The checklist contained definitions and examples of each type of FLT, similar to Table 1. All seven graduate students were observed within a 40-minute book reading session. Students received one point for each occurrence of a specific FLT during the 5-minute observation block. The scores were then compared between raters for reliability. The same procedure was followed during post measures. Inter-rater agreement for the pre and post measures was 100%. Additionally, a formative assessment was used to document the students' perspectives on the Story Time program. Students submitted a written reflection at the conclusion of the semester, which was reviewed for thematic content to create a description of their experience as a group. Students were asked the following questions, and provided a paragraph response to each question:

1. What were some important insights you gained in the past two months and why is this important?
2. What types of facilitative language techniques have you been able to use with the children?
3. What could you do differently in the future?

Design and Analysis. This pilot study was a mixed methods study involving a single group ($n = 7$) pretest/posttest design to measure outcomes with FLTs during shared book reading activities with children, and qualitative analysis of participant reflections on the experiential learning experience. To address the first research question, pre and post scores on FLTs were compared via paired samples t tests. To address the second research question, qualitative analysis was conducted to extract themes of participants' qualitative experiences as measured by their formative assessment reflections. The data from the reflection papers were summarized using inductive methods for qualitative description and thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). The author reviewed each participant's reflection paper to identify salient themes and took note of the variety of responses and similarities and differences between responses of various participants. A doctoral student conducted a second round of reviews and verified the themes extracted from the reflection papers.

Results

The first research aim was to determine whether experiential learning resulted in greater use of FLTs by graduate students during shared book reading with young children staying in a local family shelter. Table 2 includes descriptive statistics of the cohort's mean use of FLTs by high- and low-level types and the total number of FLTs. Figure 1 shows the pre and post scores by individual student. To detect changes in the graduate students' use of facilitative language techniques, a paired samples t -test was conducted to compare their use of 10 FLTs during story time at week 1 (pre-test) and at week 8 (post-test) of the story time program. There was a significant difference in the scores for pre-test total FLTs used ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 0.69$) and post-test total FLTs

used ($M = 8.43$, $SD = 0.53$); $t(6) = -11.50$, $p < .001$. The graduate students used a greater number of FLTs at post-test than they did at pre-test. Furthermore, two additional t-tests revealed that students' use of both higher and lower level FLTs (respectively) increased significantly from pretest to post test: $t(6) = -7.78$, $p < .001$; $t(6) = -3.36$, $p < .01$. Each of the students made significant gains in their use of FLTs. Notably, the greatest level of improvement was observed for the student who began with the lowest number of FLTs at pre-test (e.g., Student 6).

Table 2

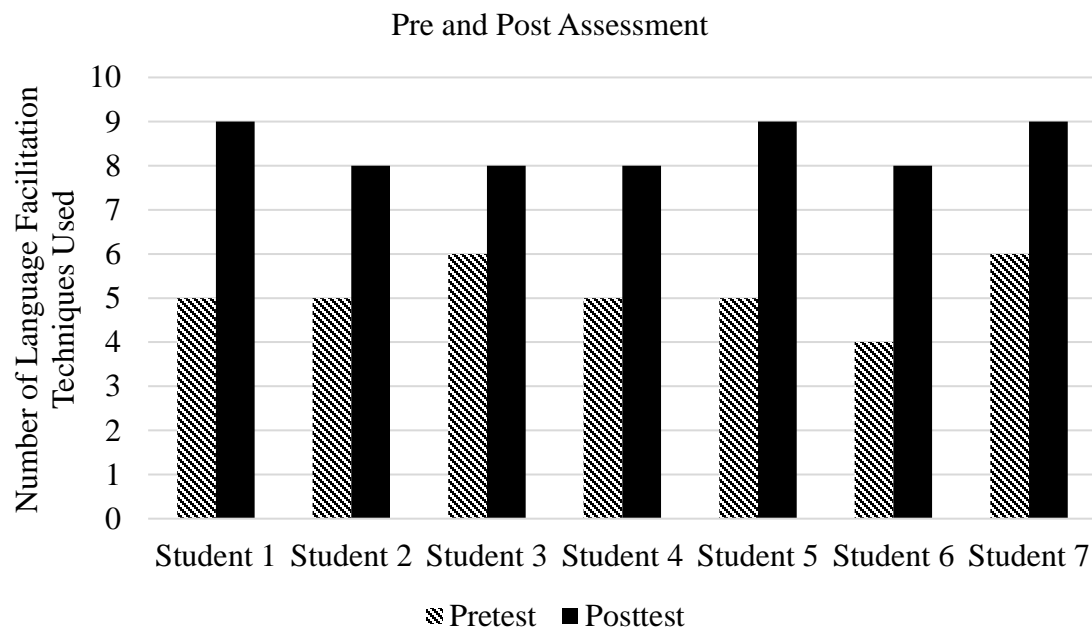
Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation) for Use of Facilitative Language Techniques.

Time	Total FLTs	High Level FLTs	Low Level FLTs
Pre	5.14 (0.69)	1.71 (0.49)	4.00 (0.58)
Post	8.43 (0.53)	3.29 (0.49)	5.14 (0.69)

Note. Sample size = 7.

Figure 1

Pre and Post Student Use of Facilitative Language Techniques



The second research aim was to describe the graduate students' qualitative experiences via formative assessment. The qualitative analysis of the students' reflective logs revealed several themes, which are reported in Table 3. First, all of the students acknowledged that engaging children in shared book reading activities in a communal living facility had its challenges as well as rewards. Challenges included implementing positive behavior support, maintaining emotional

and behavioral regulation in a large group of children, and being flexible to meet the needs of different children each week. Students commented about the challenges of the transient nature of the population, that they would see some children only once, and other children repeatedly across weeks or months as their families exited and re-entered the facility. Rewards reported by the students included learning how to engage children at various stages of language development in shared book reading and seeing progress in children's interest, motivation, and engagement in reading. Second, each student commented about one or more specific instances in which they saw the value in providing robust language models for children and in sharing those techniques with family members. One student called attention to the importance of making the most of her time with the children during story time, as many of them had limited access to specialized services. Another student stated the importance of learning to advocate for children at risk for language and literacy problems and filling an identified need in the community. Third, five of the students reflected how the Story Time experience would affect them in their future careers. They discussed how the seminar helped them learn evidence-based techniques for facilitating language, and how the implementation of FLT's really worked in shared book reading experiences with young children. All of the participants reported use of the four targeted higher level FLT's: Recasting, parallel talk, expansions, and open-ended questions.

Discussion

This pilot study is the first to measure the use of FLT's by graduate SLP students during an experiential learning opportunity while providing shared book reading to children in a family shelter. SLP students received direct instruction in FLT's through a seminar class. The seminar also included experiential learning via video case examples. The students engaged in an 8-week preventive enrichment Story Time program in a local family shelter to provide shared book reading activities to the children there. The findings have important implications for students, faculty and SLP programs.

The main objective for the graduate students was to learn how to implement targeted FLT's in a community setting. Increases in the quantity of total FLT's used by the students during shared book reading were expected, but the most encouraging finding was the improvement in the quality of FLT's used based on the increases in higher-level FLT's. These changes occurred via an authentic, community-based book reading program with young children over a relatively short period of time. The students' conscious use of higher level FLT's was supported by their reflection summaries. Additionally, the students' personal reflection logs revealed the experience was a challenging yet positive opportunity for them to learn how to implement a range of FLT's in a community setting. In the absence of prior publications on this topic, the present study fills a gap in the current knowledge in this area of teaching and learning.

Implications

These findings lend several suggestions for the future of Story Time and similar programs. First, the combination of direct instruction in FLT's and experiential learning opportunities to implement FLT's during shared book reading activities with children was effective in students' learning and real-world experience. The pilot data in the present study reflect the value of the students' experiential learning with a variety of FLT's during the Story Time program. While there are a

variety of courses within which direct instruction on FLTs can be embedded, the addition of real-world opportunities to implement FLTs during flexible book reading activities with young children can better prepare students to engage in such activities in other settings in the future.

Table 3

Qualitative Formative Assessment Results from Participant Reflections

Reflection Stem	Response Themes
Important Insights	<p>Challenges Identified</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing positive behavior support, mediating disagreements among children • Maintaining emotional and behavioral regulation in a large group of children • Being flexible to meet the needs of different children each week • Making the most of our time with the children <p>Rewards Identified</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to engage children at various stages of language development in shared book reading • Seeing progress in children's interest, motivation, and engagement in reading • Seeing the value in providing robust language models for children • Noticing the value in sharing FLTs with family members • Learning how to advocate for children at risk for language and literacy problems and filling an identified need in the community • Learning to engage children in story-based activities at the shelter gave me real life exposure to situations that might occur when I am working in the schools/community. <p>Other Insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because each child is unique, we should refrain from making assumptions based solely on the child's family background. • It's important to remember that any situation can bring forth an opportunity to communicate and an opportunity to teach. It is important that we are making the best of our time with these children and really taking advantage of the opportunities they give us to communicate with them.
Higher Level FLTs Used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking open-ended questions • Expanding on utterances • Parallel talk • Recasting
Future Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule additional time with parents to focus on their use of FLTs with their children • Improve the environmental arrangement to support positive behavior • Gather additional book donations to provide to the children • Train shelter staff on the importance of FLTs in theirs and the parents' interactions with children • Be more familiar with the reading material before each story time and generate good questions ahead of time for the story to prompt better engagement in the story geared toward each age level

Second, the Story Time program can be implemented by other SLP programs, whose faculty may use the data from the present study to create a similar group of experiences for their students. By facilitating shared book reading activities in other community shelters, SLP students and faculty can help establish a culture of literacy and support families' efforts to provide children with early language and literacy experiences. The following suggestions are provided for programs seeking to implement a similar experiential learning program for students.

The Story Time program was founded on two important layers of community collaboration: one with the volunteer coordinator at the local shelter, the other with donors in the broader community who were willing to provide books and supplies for the weekly story activities. Faculty in other programs can utilize similar local collaborations to establish story programs in their communities. Once the community collaborations are established, then faculty can identify the mechanism for students to receive direct instruction in FLT and form a cohort of students to facilitate Story Time activities.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative assessment of student progress with implementing the FLT is suggested. The behavioral observations of students' use of specific FLT provides useful data at a snapshot in time. However, it is the reflection logs that have the capacity to reveal deeper learning from the experience of delivering FLT via shared book reading activities with children in the community. Furthermore, weekly observation tallies of students' use of higher level FLT would enable faculty to identify lower frequency, high level FLT, such as recasting, and then provide additional instruction in team, course, or seminar meetings to see whether additional direct instruction on a particular FLT results in higher frequency in subsequent Story Time sessions.

A final recommendation for the continuance or new implementation of the Story Time program is to add a direct training component for parents. Prior research has shown that even a short-term period of parent-directed training in facilitating language with their children is effective in offsetting SES-related limitations in language input (Leffel & Suskind, 2013; O'Neil-Pirozzi, 2009; Trivette et al., 2010). While the family population at a shelter can be transient by nature, community agencies that offer transition housing programs for families may provide a window of opportunity to implement weekly parent training sessions with the same families over a period of a few weeks or even months. It is recommended that such programs be explored for further opportunities to support children in the community and provide authentic community-based experiences for SLP students.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations worth acknowledging in the present study. First, the sample was a small, convenient sample of a cohort of graduate SLP students engaged in an elective seminar course with accompanying community practicum. The size and make up of this cohort are common within training programs where specialized teams or training grant groups are established. However, due to the small cohort, it is unknown the extent to which the findings would apply to other SLP graduate students. Future studies could explore the impact of experiential learning in shared book reading experiences for larger groups of students.

Second, the relative contributions of direct instruction in FLTs via the seminar versus experiential learning through the Story Time program cannot be determined from the present data. Prior research has shown that classroom instruction alone is not enough to produce change in clinical behavior, and the design of graduate SLP programs mirrors this concept with the focus on practicum experiences in addition to academic knowledge. Still, follow-up studies should include a measurement plan that would allow an examination of the unique contributions of direct instruction and experiential learning opportunities to student outcomes.

Third, there was inconsistent parent involvement in the book reading activities. Parent training should be incorporated in future activities at the shelter and incorporated in follow-up studies. Prior research has shown that it is feasible and beneficial to incorporate parents in family homeless shelters into language-based group intervention (O'Neil-Pirozzi, 2009). The students in the current cohort mainly engaged in parent interaction by creating and sharing an online tool with ideas and resources for parents to facilitate language in their young children. Future directions include adding a module on parent engagement and working more directly with parents of children at the shelter to increase the amount of guided participation and support in reading activities they engage in with their children to facilitate greater expressive language and school readiness for preschool children (Britto et al., 2006).

Acknowledgements

The training experience reported here was supported by a personnel preparation grant funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (H325K130304-17). Views expressed herein are those of the author, not the agency.

Disclosures

Financial relationship: The author received summer salary from the university via the training grant to supervise the SLP students. There are no non-financial relationships to disclose.

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