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Storybook reading strategies and academic literate cultural capital: Closing the literacy gap before it opens.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2012
Abstract

While New Zealand reading achievement ranks highly in the international arena, the gap between high- and low-ability readers is far greater than that in most other countries. The lower-ability readers hail disproportionately from homes with low income, and their cultural capital often does not match the culture of their schools. They commonly have less academic literate cultural capital (ALCC), which encompasses skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that are related to conventional literacy. Prior to conventional literacy development, ALCC and emergent literacy skills are similar. Storybook reading is a beneficial parent-child activity which has been harnessed by intervention research as a vehicle through which to build on emergent literacy skills. Much print-referencing and dialogic reading-strategy research has been conducted, showing positive effects on children’s emergent reading development and therefore on their ALCC.

The quasi-experimental study, on which this thesis is based, used two DVDs to educate parents from low-income areas about print-referencing and dialogic reading strategies. Thirty parent-child dyads were recruited through kindergartens which were geographically close to a decile one school. Fifteen dyads formed the intervention group, which was given two DVDs over a four week intervention period, and 15 dyads formed the control group. Data was collected before, during, and after the intervention from parents and their young children, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative measures. Parental reading behaviours and beliefs appeared to change as a result of the intervention; parents from the intervention group reported the use of more print-referencing behaviours during storybook reading than their control group counterparts. In particular, intervention parents made significantly more references to letter knowledge (LK). Most parents believed the intervention to have been beneficial to them and their children, and deemed the study material effective. Children from the intervention group reported more reading to occur post-intervention than it did pre-intervention. While the majority of their tested emergent literacy skills increased more than those of the control children after the study, the differences were not significant. The thesis concludes by recommending more research of a similar nature, taking into account several important changes. Additionally, it recommends qualitative research into the cultural capital of New Zealand’s ethnic minorities.
Acknowledgements

My warm thanks go out to the large number of people who were integral to this post-graduate journey. The support and encouragement received from friends and family along the way have been incredible, and are greatly appreciated.

I take my hat off to my main supervisor, Alison Arrow, who has steadfastly guided me through this tremendous project. Thank you for your continuous critique of my writing and ideas, and for your expertise in kindly scaffolding my initial scratching towards this finished product. I am also appreciative of the guidance received from Valerie Margrain and Brian Finch, my secondary supervisors. Valerie, you encouraged me to think outside the box, which led to a thesis quite different from the one I initially imagined. Brian, thanks for coming on board so late in the piece, and for your cultural capital inspiration.

Thank you to the kindergarten association for giving me access to your network of centres, and to the two participating kindergartens who welcomed me into your rooms. I am very grateful to the obliging children and their parents who took time out from their sure-to-be-busy lives to be a part of this study. Without you all, there would be no study. I appreciate the window into your lives that you provided and the time you took to trial this programme.

Finally, heart-felt gratitude goes out to my home and community support. To my mother, Dyana Wells, who has been a rock throughout my study, always encouraging and perfectly realistic. To my young son, Will, for providing a rich contrast and balance to hours in front of the computer, and for so willingly accepting the care of others when Mama was not available. Finally to my partner Ted: while he may not have understood exactly what was being done all this time, he has never stopped supporting me.
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Abbreviations

ALCC        Academic literate cultural capital
ANCOVA      Analysis of covariance
CAP         Concepts about print
CGC         Control group children
CGP         Control group parents
DVD         Digital video/versatile disk
HIPPY       Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters
IEA         International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
IGC         Intervention group children
IGP         Intervention group parents
LK          Letter knowledge
OECD        Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OM          Onset matching
PA          Phonological awareness
PIRLS       Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA        Programme for International Student Assessment
RM          Rime matching
SES         Socio-economic status