

New Study Reveals Between The Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative Significantly Improves At-Risk Pre

Wednesday, 18 February 2009

Mississippi preschoolers at risk for reading failure make significant gains in reading skills after using an educational curriculum based on the award-winning PBS series, *Between the Lions*. Through the *Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Initiative, Mississippi Public Broadcasting has provided lessons, books and DVDs of episodes to more than 1,500 economically disadvantaged children across the state.

Key Findings

"Our research clearly indicates that the *Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Initiative curriculum positively impacts vocabulary development, teacher behavior and literacy environments," said Deborah L. Linebarger, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication and Lead Investigator in the study. "We found substantial evidence in the *Between the Lions: Mississippi Literacy Initiative* study that children who may be at-risk for reading failure due to economic disadvantages are acquiring necessary early literacy skills."

Participants in the research study were 319 children in preschools and child care centers living in economically disadvantaged communities in Mississippi. The study was conducted during 2007-2008.

"Among the more significant findings is the fact that on some literacy measures, children who were below the national average at pre-tests, improved to levels above the national average in post-tests," said Marie Antoon, MPB executive director.

Children who participated in the Treatment Group learning with *Between the Lions* were better able to identify Lower Case Letters (81.9 percent in the Treatment Group vs. 61.3 percent in the Control Group) and Letter Sounds (75.2 percent in the Treatment Group vs. 50.5 percent in the Control Group).

In addition, children in the Treatment Group obtained higher scores on the Get Ready to Read! Screener -- a national measure used to build and identify early literacy skills -- than the national Head Start average (9 - 12 points vs. 8.52 points).

"The most impressive thing about this study is it confirms that the *Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Initiative is transforming daycare centers into child learning centers," said Dr. Susan Zelman, Vice President of Education for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). "The study indicates that teachers using the curriculum learn new classroom management strategies and how to carry out activities that build language and other early reading skills. As a

result, the children make enormous gains in key areas of literacy."

Funding for this research was provided by CPB in partnership with PBS as part of the Ready to Learn grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

"This initiative reflects public service media's core mission of addressing the needs of the unserved and underserved audiences," said Pat Harrison, president and CEO of CPB. "We congratulate Mississippi Public Broadcasting for its outstanding efforts and results in reaching children, caregivers and educators where they live, work, learn and play."

The Barksdale Reading Institute supports early childhood education nationally and literacy initiatives in Mississippi.

"It is wonderful that Mississippi's children are benefiting from the curriculum," said Jim Barksdale, founder of the Barksdale Reading Institute and former chief executive officer of Netscape Communications Corp. "We applaud the Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative because it clearly improves early literacy skills that children will need to be ready for kindergarten."

In 2007, MPB began a partnership with Mississippi Rotary District 6820 to provide the Between the Lions preschool literacy curriculum in child care centers adopted by Rotary Clubs in the district. Rotary District 6820 Literacy Chairman Jack Forbus explained that one of Rotary's major international causes is literacy.

"It was hard for us to justify sending our support and volunteers outside of America when so many of the children right here are drastically behind in their literacy skills," said Forbus. "We see each day how this initiative is helping young children learn to read. This project will have a positive impact on many future generations."

Between The Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative

"PBS is proud to play a role in empowering all children for success in school and life," said Paula Kerger, President and CEO, PBS. "Since 2000, Between the Lions has proved itself an effective resource for educators and parents in advancing literacy."

The Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative was created in 2005 to improve early childhood education and build a strong literacy foundation among preschoolers. Participating child care centers receive a comprehensive set of curriculum materials drawn from Between the Lions, along with professional development and mentoring. The production is a partnership between MPB, WGBH Boston, Sirius Thinking, Ltd., CPB, U.S. Department of Education, and Barksdale Reading Institute.

"When Between the Lions first came into production we envisioned the onscreen learning one day translating into valuable classroom lessons," recalls Brigid Sullivan, Vice President of Children's Programming at WGBH Boston. "It's rewarding to see the continued impact of the series and its accompanying curriculum programs on children that might not otherwise have the chance to gain these reading skills."

Mississippi Public Broadcasting has tracked hundreds of success stories with child care centers that have used the Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative.

"We are proud to be the home of the Between the Lions program and encouraged by the positive impact it is having and its opportunity for growth throughout our state and the nation," said MPB Executive Director Marie Antoon.

To learn more about the Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative and the Mississippi Literacy Study, please visit - www.betweenhelionsliteracy.org

About Between the Lions: Mississippi Literacy Initiative Study

Participants were measured by PALS-PreK: Alphabet Knowledge, Print and Story Concepts, Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI), including Picture Naming IGDI and Initial Sounds Fluency IGDI and the Get Ready to Read! Screener as well as Classroom Literacy Behaviors. The results were examined using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), which represents a statistical technique used to examine mean differences between predefined groups labeled factors. Four subscales--General Classroom Environment, Literacy Environment, Language Literacy, and Curriculum and Literacy Activities--from Early Language and Literacy Observation (ELLCO) were evaluated for significant differences across groups.

About Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative

Program participants include 73 child care centers, with 95 classrooms, 61 child care directors and administrators, 60 teachers and 1,591 children in Mississippi.

Each participating classroom received:

- Set of five teachers' guides, with a total of 30 weekly lessons
- Set of five DVDs, with a 10-15 minute *Between the Lions* video for each lesson, edited specifically for preschools
- Set of 61 related children's books
- Additional classroom resources, such as alphabet strips, poem and song charts, magnetic alphabet letters, word cards, story figures, and other materials.

Between the Lions is produced by WGBH Boston, Sirius Thinking, Ltd., and Mississippi Public Broadcasting. The show is funded in part by a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Ready to Learn through the U.S. Department of Education and by the Barksdale Reading Institute. National corporate funding is provided by Chick-fil-A, Inc.

PBS KIDS, for preschoolers, and PBS KIDS GO!, for early elementary school kids, offer all children--from every walk of life--the opportunity to explore new ideas and new worlds through television, online and outreach programs. With positive character role models and content designed to nurture a child's total well-being, PBS's online and community resources--including PBS KIDS online (pbskids.org), PBS KIDS GO! online (pbskidsgo.org), PBS Parents (pbsparents.org), PBS Teachers (pbsteachers.org), PBS KIDS Raising Readers and literacy events across the country--leverage the full spectrum of media, technology and community to build knowledge, critical thinking, imagination and curiosity. Empowering children for success in school and in life, only PBS KIDS and PBS KIDS GO! have earned the unanimous endorsement of parents, children, industry leaders and teachers. PBS is a nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 356 public television stations, serving more than 115 million people on-air and online each month and reaching 99% of American homes.

The contents of this study were developed under a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Education PR/A#U295A050003. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

FACT SHEET

Between the Lions: Mississippi Literacy Initiative

Note: more info is available at www.asc.upenn.edu/childrenmedia under the "Content Comprehension" button

HIGHLIGHTS FROM ANNENBERG 2007-2008 STUDY

- Post-test, children in the treatment group surpassed the National Head Start with scores that are predictive of later reading success in the second grade.
- A larger majority of children in the Treatment Group were able to identify any Lower Case Letters - 81.9 percent compared with 61.3 percent in the Control Group at the post-test.
- 75.2 percent of children in the Treatment Group compared with 50.5 percent in the Control Group at the post-test were able to identify any Letter Sounds based on the PALS-PreK assessment.
- Pre-test, 64.1 percent of the Treatment Group was unable to complete the PALS-PreK assessment for Lower Case Letters vs. 69.4 percent of the Control Group. Post-test, only 18.1 percent in the Control Group was unable to complete the PALS-PreK Lower Case Letter assessment, vs. 38.7 percent in the Control Group.
- The General Classroom Environment was most positive for teachers in the Treatment Group who received more training and mentoring. Children were also provided with more opportunities for choice and for taking initiative and teachers used more positive management strategies, which in turn, enhanced the overall classroom environment.
- Treatment teachers engaged in more and longer full-group and one-to-one book-reading sessions; modeled writing; provided writing assistance and opportunities for writing; and set aside time for children to look at books alone or with a classmate.
- The study findings indicate that teachers who are new to the Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative are primed and able to make changes to the structural features of their classrooms including general classroom management abilities, specific environmental features that are necessary for literacy support and increased opportunities for literacy activities.
- Conclusions from the study indicate children from low-income and minority backgrounds spend more time watching television and report that the experience is of more value in comparison to children from middle income and majority backgrounds. As such, Between the Lions curriculum can be a powerful tool for these children when learning to read.

STUDY BACKGROUND

- Dr. Deborah L. Linebarger, Director, Children's Media Lab at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania was lead investigator in the Between the Lions: Mississippi Literacy Initiative study conducted in 2007 - 2008. Mississippi State University conducted pre- and post-testing.
- Participants were 319 children in preschools and child care centers (Mean Age=59.93 months, SD=16.87 months) living in low-income areas in the state of Mississippi.
- All children participated in the assessments at their child care centers, 24 in total, which predominantly serve the economically disadvantaged.
- The Between the Lions Preschool Literacy Initiative partners include MPB, WGBH Boston, Sirius Thinking, Ltd., Corporation for Public Broadcasting, U.S. Department of Education, Barksdale Reading Institute and Rotary International.