Relation of Explicit Narrative Instruction and Vocabulary to Narrative Language Skills in Preschool

Alana Tunstel  
Spelman College  
Lindsay Forston, Anita McGinty  
University of Virginia

Introduction

- Comprehension and expressive vocabulary underlie the ability to retell stories and describe events (narrative ability) (Dunst, Simkus, & Hamby, 2012)
- Narrative ability is an important predictor of later school success (Griffin, Hemphill, Camp, & Wolf, 2004).
- Explicit literacy instruction has shown differential effects for children with higher or lower language and attentional skills (McGinty, Justice, Piasta, Kaderavek, & Fan, 2011).
- Explicit instruction in specific language and literacy domains (e.g., print and phonological awareness) has produced promising results for preschool outcomes (Justice, McGinty, Cabell, Kilday, Knighton, & Huffman, 2010)
- We are interested in the relationships between early expressive vocabulary, explicit narrative instructional practices, and early narrative skills.

Research Questions

- RQ1. What is the relationship between incoming child vocabulary, explicit narrative instruction, and children’s’ narrative skills at the end of preschool?
- RQ2. To what extent does the relationship between explicit narrative instruction and vocabulary to narrative language skills vary as a function of incoming vocabulary?

Method

- Participants
  - 145 4-year-olds (M=4.42, SD=0.30) attending preschool in rural Appalachia  
  - Gender: 52.2% Girl

- Measures
  - Maternal Education
    - Some high school
    - High school diploma
    - Some college or Associate’s degree
    - Bachelor’s degree or higher
  - Race/Ethnicity
    - White
    - Non-White
  - Incoming vocabulary
  - Early Narrative Skills
    - Sum of 12 items from the Narrative Assessment Protocol (NAP; Pence, Justice, & Gosse, 2007)

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicting Growth in Narrative Skills over the Preschool Year from Vocabulary and Explicit Literacy Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Report</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maternal Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incoming narrative skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incoming expressive vocab</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative instruction</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Interaction not significant for either outcome

Method continued

- Explicit Narrative Instruction
  - Teacher report. Sum of 3 items regarding frequency of classroom activities involving writing and retelling stories (measured on a 5-point scale) from the Teacher Questionnaire
  - Observed practices. Sum of teacher explicit instruction around narrative targets (e.g., character, setting, story) during shared reading using a standardized observation protocol (Explicit Literacy Instructional Techniques [ELIT]; McGinty, Gosse, Pettit, Pentimonti, & Justice, 2011).

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CELF-Expressive Vocabulary Subset</td>
<td>19.34</td>
<td>6.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAP</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Questionnaire (Reported Practices)</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELIT (Observed Practices)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.22</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Procedure

- Teachers completed Teacher Questionnaire Fall and Spring of preschool
- CELF administered to preschoolers Fall of preschool
- NAP administered to preschoolers Fall and Spring of preschool
- ELIT measured from a book reading observation in Spring

Analytic Approach

- Analyses excluded children with missing data (list-wise deletion, valid N=91) and controlled for differences in age, gender, race/ethnicity, maternal education, and incoming narrative skills
- Linear regression using centered variables

Results continued

- RQ1. What is the relationship between incoming child vocabulary, explicit narrative instruction, and children’s growth in narrative skills over preschool?
  - Results show that vocabulary had no significant relationship to children’s growth in narrative skills over preschool.
  - Neither observed, nor self-reported explicit narrative practices showed a trend

- RQ2. To what extent does the relationship between explicit narrative instruction and narrative skills vary as a function of incoming vocabulary?
  - There was no significant interaction between vocabulary and explicit narrative instructional practices.

Conclusions

- Incoming narrative was the strongest predictor of narrative growth
- It was surprising that vocabulary had no relation to narrative growth and speaks to the distinctness of various language skills
- The observed explicit instruction had a stronger relationship to narrative growth than teacher’s self-report of narrative instruction.

Limitations

- Small, homogenous sample
- Reliability of teacher report measure (discrepancy between teacher report and observed practices)
- Nature of ELIT coding

Future directions

- Examine additional dimensions of language and language instruction in relation to narrative skills
- Examine different domains within narrative skills
- Evaluate narrative skills using other instruments

Selected References


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