

A New Spin on Literacy: An Analysis of a Culturally- and Linguistically-Responsive Language and Literacy Intervention in Neighborhood Laundromats in Philadelphia

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Background

Literacy learning for young children is not bound in time and space.

- In informal, day-to-day places, children may begin to discover the many purposes for literacy long before they develop the technical skills associated with its development.
- Over 80% of young children’s time is likely to be spent in these informal settings compared to the 20% of time in more institutional-like learning contexts such as childcare or preschool¹.
- Studies have documented a striking rise in income inequality, opportunity gaps in young children’s access to print, and in spaces for learning through participation and interaction^{2,3,4}.
- Coley et al (2021)⁵ found that higher-income families spent over 60% more time on enriching materials and opportunities for their children than their lower-income peers.
- This gap in resources and time is expected to continue to widen between high- and low-income families⁶.



Research Questions

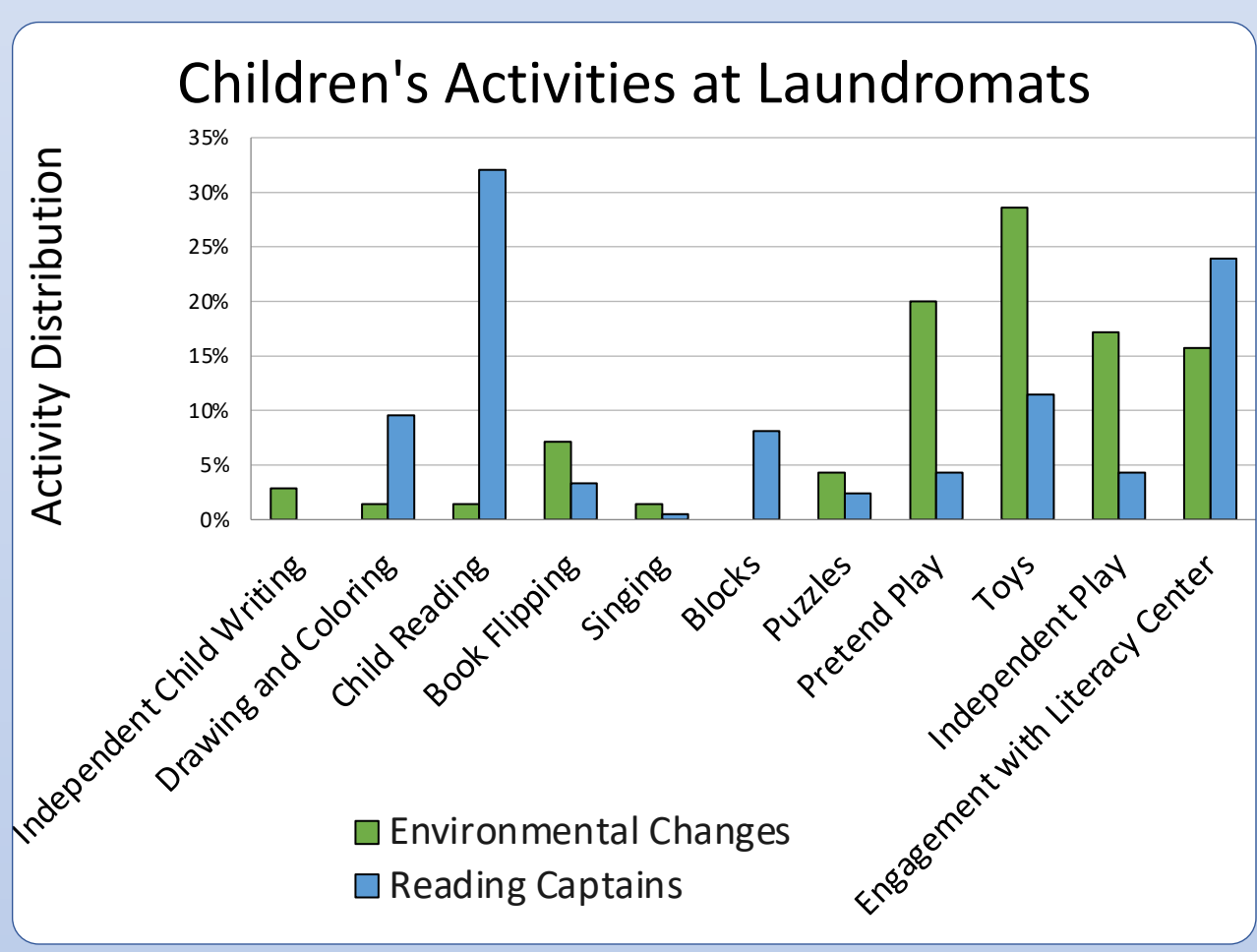
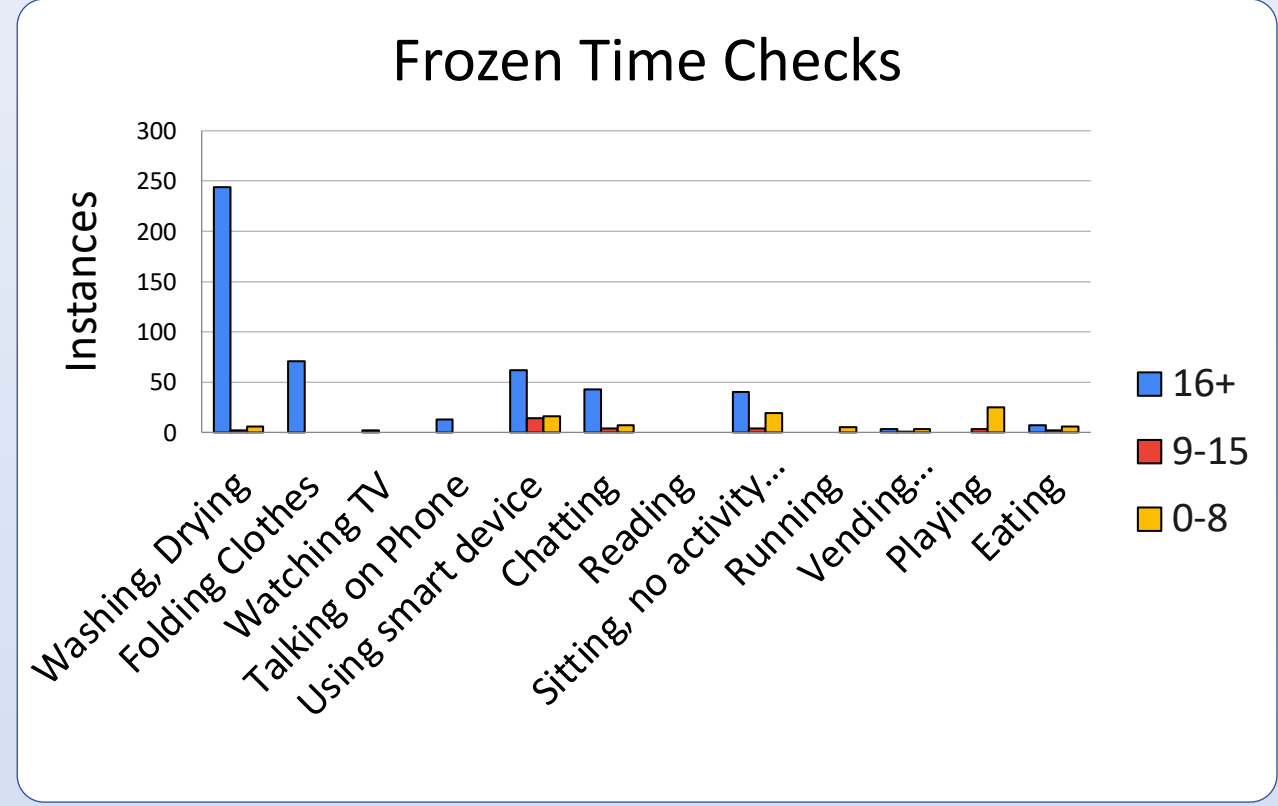
- In what ways do these play settings in laundromats influence literacy-related activity as measured by instances of behavior and time-use in the spontaneous play of preschoolers compared to those without such play settings?
- To what extent does the addition of a trusted messenger in guiding play in these settings influence children’s time use and literacy-related activity?



Results

Results of the evaluation indicated the following key findings:

- Design changes alone seemed to have only a modest effect on children’s language and literacy activities
- The addition of Reading Captains appeared to have a profound effect on promoting literacy activity in these laundromats. Stark increases were reported for the amount of time spent engaging children in labelling, open-ended questioning, and conversational turn-taking
- Reading time to children rose dramatically as a result of Reading Captain involvement.** On average, 4 books were read per session
- Reading Captains conveyed important information to parents about talking and reading with their child
- Reading Captains engaged in culturally- and linguistically sensitive language and literacy interactions which appeared to enhance their ability to communicate with children and families

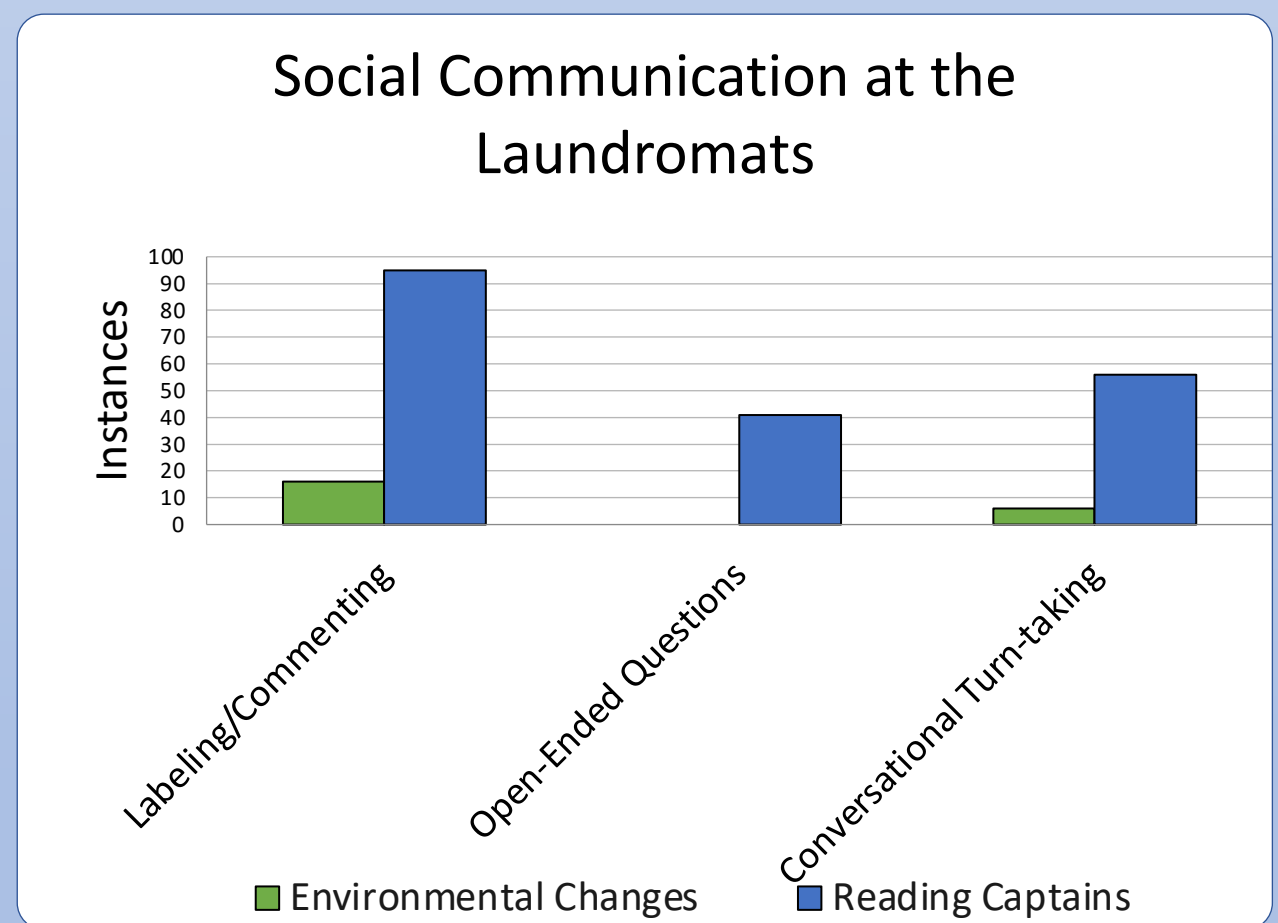


This study, which builds on previous research, examines **the effects of creating hybrid spaces on increasing language and literacy opportunities**, as well as the contributions of local volunteers from the neighborhood (*Reading Captains*) in creating culturally and linguistically sensitive spaces, which may enhance children’s language and literacy opportunities in these playful learning settings.



Conclusions

- Everyday spaces can serve as environments for language and literacy
- Engaging local citizens in a community to become trusted messengers may enhance children’s opportunities to learn
- As one Reading Captain put it, “It’s going to take the whole village to get our kids where they need to be...and we’re committed to doing everything we can to help them”.



Methods

- This research took place over an 8-month period using 3 laundromats as treatment sites and one as a control site.
- 3 laundromats received a 2-phase intervention for 8 weeks each, along with 1 control site.

Phase #1: Create language and literacy spaces
Phase #2: Initiate Reading Captains, local volunteers from neighborhood who similar in ethnic and social status

- Baseline of activities in the 4 laundromats were established prior to treatments. Trained Research Assistants conducted ‘frozen time checks’ using momentary time-sampling to document activity of children and families at the current moment every 10-minutes for a 2-hour period.
- Research assistants conducted rapid ethnographic assessments including observations; interviews; and collected surveys from families and patrons.
- This evaluation examined 32 hours of activity for each laundromat for a total of 96 hours of observation.

Analysis

Guided by a cultural and linguistic adaptation intervention framework, we developed a qualitative coding structure for the field notes and transcripts collected by research assistants. Examples of codes included:

- Reading Captain use of dialect/second language alongside SAE
- Reading Captain use of cultural and/or language adaptation (language of books, translations)
- Reading Captain use of shared group membership or other cultural scaffolding
- Reading Captain building community among children

References

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