



Promoting Equality in Early Childhood Education: Implications for Trainers of School Psychologists

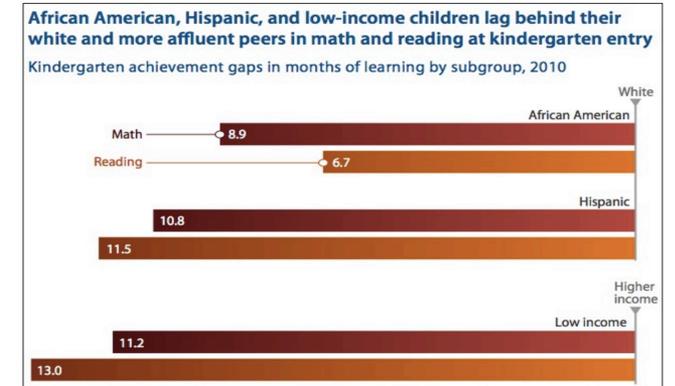


Marci Walton, B.S. and Tamara Hodges, Ph.D.
Baylor University

Introduction

While access and attendance to a public preschool education is relatively equally dispersed throughout the United States, access to a high-quality preschool education is highly variable (Bassok & Galdo, 2016). Specifically, preschool quality fluctuates as a function of the community's economic and racial demographics as schools with high levels of poverty and greater proportions of minority students consistently score lower on measures of process quality (Bassok & Galdo, 2016). Therefore, even though White, Black, and Hispanic students attend preschool at around the same rates, upon entering kindergarten, Black, Hispanic, and children from a low-income family are between six and 13 months behind their White and more affluent peers in math and reading (Friedman-Kraus, Barnett, & Nores, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Since participation in a high-quality early childhood education program reduces achievement gaps at kindergarten entry and predicts long-term benefits for a child's school trajectories (Friedman-Kraus et al., 2016), this project attempts to promote social justice in the sector of early childhood education by utilizing school psychology training programs as a means to improve learning outcomes for all students.

Research has shown that student outcomes are better predicted by a classroom's process qualities (teacher-student interactions and instructional practices) over its structural features (teacher education, number of children in class, and child/adult ratio) (Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016). Due to these findings, this project provides resources and examples for how to improve a preschool classroom's reading and math instruction as well as increase positive social interactions between teachers and students. Lastly, a checklist is provided for educators of school psychologists to expand their program's coverage of these topics with the hope that practicing school psychologists will utilize their knowledge and advocate for better teaching practices within their school district's preschool programs.



Preschool Reading Interventions

The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) found **phonological awareness** and **alphabet knowledge** among early readers to be moderate to strong predictors of later conventional literacy.

Phonological awareness instructional progression:

- Words make up sentences
- Breaking apart compound words
- Syllables
- Onset and rimes
- Phonemic awareness

Alphabet knowledge instructional progression:

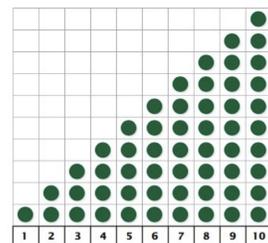
- Letter names
- Letter sounds

Teaching phonological awareness strategies in combination with alphabet knowledge had a larger impact on children's literacy development than teaching either one of these alone.

Preschool Math Interventions

Early math concepts should be taught using a developmental progression that includes:

- **Subitizing**
 - Basic Hiding Game
 - Reinforce using classroom objects
- **Meaningful object counting** (cardinality principle)
 - Start with three or less items
 - Hidden Stars Game
- **Counting-based comparisons of collections larger than three**
 - Tokens or tickets from winning games
- **Number-after knowledge**
 - Start with giving students a running start
- **Mental comparisons of close or neighboring numbers**
 - Reinforced with cardinality chart
- **Number-after equals one more**
 - Reinforced with cardinality chart



Preschool Emotional Support

Emotional support in preschool classrooms, specifically **quality teacher-student interactions**, has shown "unique and positive associations with learning gains" (Pianta et al., 2016, p. 123). Using the CLASS observation measure, classrooms with exceptional emotional support score highly on measures of:

- **Positive climate**
 - Positive communications and warm, supportive relationships between teachers and students
- **Teacher sensitivity**
 - Teacher is consistently aware of students who need extra support
- **Regard for student perspectives**
 - Teacher provides students with autonomy and organizes instruction around shared interests
- **Behavior management**
 - Rules and expectations for behavior are clear and consistently enforced
 - Teacher effectively redirects misbehavior by focusing on positives

At-risk children benefit the most from high-quality teacher-student interactions in preschool classrooms.

School Psychology Graduate Programs

Using NASP's Position Statement, *Early Childhood Services: Promoting Positive Outcomes for Young Children* (2015) and empirical research, a checklist was generated that includes four domains that school psychology programs must address within their curriculum to support effective early childhood education and intervention:

- **Constructs of social-emotional learning**
- **Consultation and collaboration**
- **Assessment and evaluation**
- **Effective interventions and instructional strategies**
 - Early literacy and math skills
 - Social and emotional interventions
 - Classroom management

****See attached checklist to review specific components of each criteria.**