



Rurality and Reading Readiness: The Mediating Role of Parent Engagement

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Parent Engagement in Early Literacy

- Reading skills are critical to academic success (Adams, 1990) and effects of poor reading are compounded over time (Stanovich, 1986).
- Early family engagement in language and literacy is important for children's reading development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sheridan et al., 2011) and has longitudinal effects on reading outcomes (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005).

Parent Engagement in Early Literacy

- Parent engagement takes many forms, and as defined here concerns parental practices and provisions that support early language and literacy skills for preschoolers.
- This may include reading books together, telling stories, singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes, and going to libraries.

Rurality and Parent Engagement

- Conditions under which parent engagement influences child outcomes over time need further study.
- Specifically, little is known about the effects of living in rural communities on parents' engagement in language and literacy activities with their young children and their children's reading readiness at school entry.

Rurality and Parent Engagement

- Parent academic engagement in rural settings produces the same benefits for children as it does in urban and suburban settings (Keith et al., 1996).
- However conditions in rural areas may differentially influence parent engagement and its impact on school readiness.

Purpose of Study

This study examined the effect of setting on parents' engagement and children's early literacy, and whether parent engagement mediates effects of setting on child outcomes.

1. Does setting predict (a) parents' literacy engagement and (b) children's early literacy?
2. Does parent literacy engagement mediate the relationship between setting and children's early literacy?

ECLS-B Database

This study was a secondary analysis of the ECLS-B national database

- A study sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education.
- Followed a nationally representative sample of children born in the United States in 2001.
- Examined the systemic interactions of the child, family, childcare, health care, educational system, and community on children's overall health, social-emotional development, and intellectual capacity that influence children's school readiness



Participants and Procedures

- Participants
 - $N = 6,550$ children entering kindergarten in 2006 or 2007
- Procedure
 - Structured parent interview
 - Direct child assessment

| Unweighted Descriptive Statistics for the Study Sample | |
|--|----------------------|
| Study Variable | Percentage/Mean (SD) |
| Child | |
| Male | 51.1% |
| Race/Ethnicity | |
| White | 40.5% |
| Black | 16.0% |
| Hispanic | 20.6% |
| Asian | 11.5% |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 3.1% |
| More than 1 race | 8.4% |
| kindergarten assessment age in months | 68.2 (4.3) |
| Parent | |
| Primary respondent is biological mother | 95.4% |
| Family | |
| Highest parent education level | |
| Less than a high school degree | 9.8% |
| High school degree or equivalent | 22.0% |
| Vocational or technical program degree | 5.3% |
| Some college | 26.5% |
| Bachelor's degree | 17.4% |
| Advanced schooling beyond Bachelor's | 18.9% |
| At or above 100% poverty threshold | 75.4% |
| 2 or more adults in the home | 86.9% |
| Primary language in home is English | 79.2% |

Study Variables and Measures

Geographic Setting

- Household zip combined with American Community Survey to create locations defined by National Center for Education Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau
- For this study, we collapsed setting into four groups:
 - *city* ($n = 1,950$)
 - *suburban* ($n = 2,550$)
 - *town* ($n = 850$)
 - *rural* ($n = 1,100$)

Study Variables and Measures

Parental Preschool Literacy Engagement

- Home literacy materials (number of books in the home)
- Children's exposure to the library (take child to public library, borrow books from library, borrow other materials, take child to story hour)
- Parental language and literacy behaviors (read books, tell stories, sing songs)

Study Variables and Measures

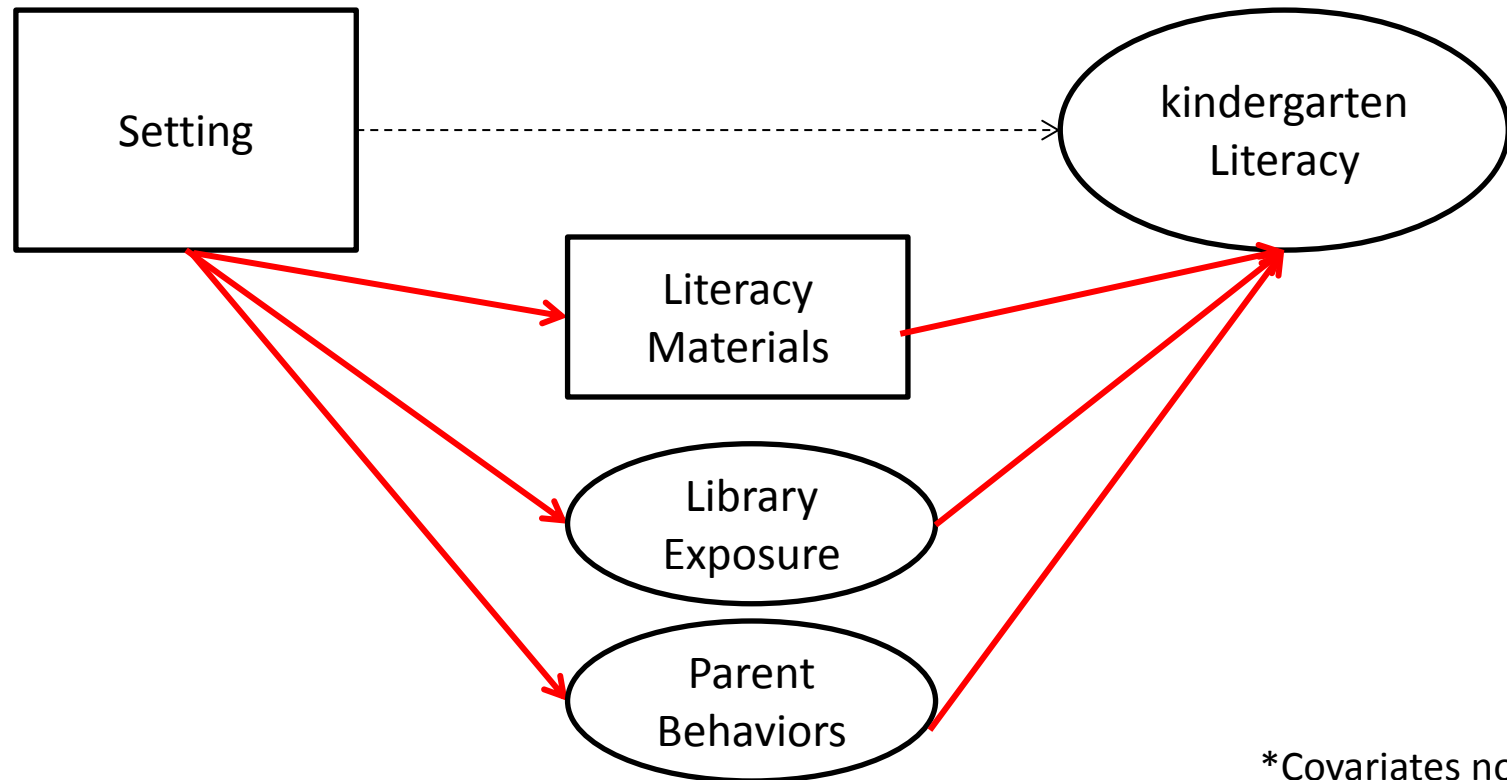
Children's kindergarten Literacy

- Broad measure of early child language and literacy skills using newly developed items and existing items from well established measures
 - PreLas 2000
 - PPVT-III
 - Pre-CTOPPP



Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) in *Mplus* Version 6.1



*Covariates not pictured

Results

What is the relationship between setting and children's kindergarten literacy?

- Suburban children had higher reading scores when entering kindergarten than rural children
- No differences in kindergarten reading scores between rural children and city and town children

Results

What is the relationship between setting and parents' preschool literacy engagement?

- Setting predicted library exposure
 - City and suburban children were exposed to the library more than rural children
 - No differences in library exposure between rural and town children
- Setting did not predict literacy materials nor parent language and literacy behaviors

Results

Does parent literacy engagement during preschool mediate the relationship between setting and children's kindergarten literacy?

- Library exposure mediated the relationship between setting and children's kindergarten literacy
 - City and suburban children were exposed to the library more than rural children, and library exposure positively predicted children's kindergarten literacy

Discussion

- This study provides a unique look into the influence of rurality on early parent engagement in children's kindergarten language and literacy development.
- This study included a large nationally representative rural sample.

Discussion

- Findings indicate living in a rural community influences parents' access to resources (i.e., libraries), which in turn affects children's literacy, but it does not influence home literacy environments and parent language and literacy behaviors.
- However, differences across settings raises interesting questions.

Discussion

Differences in kindergarten literacy still exist between suburban and rural children even after accounting for differences in parent literacy engagement

- Suggests presence of additional mediating variables for which suburban children are advantaged

Discussion

No overall differences in kindergarten literacy between city and rural children despite city children's greater exposure to the library

- Suggests presence of additional mediating variables for which rural children are advantaged
- Conditions in rural settings need to be better understood to determine what factors promote strong literacy skills.

Limitations

- Inferences limited to children born in the U.S. in 2001 when they were in preschool and kindergarten
- Select number of parent engagement variables
- Use of self-report rather than observational data

Future Directions

Distinctive features of rural contexts need to be examined to identify important factors that can be manipulated to promote optimal learning outcomes for children in rural communities.

- What factors uniquely influence parent engagement and young children's language and literacy development in rural communities?



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