

Project: Reducing Early Literacy Differences in Preschool Children From Low-SES Families: The Effects of an Early Metalinguistic Intervention

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Abstract:

This study developed and investigated the effects of an early metalinguistic intervention program called “Joy of Learning Literacy (Jolly)” on the language and reading skills of Chinese children from families with low socioeconomic status (SES) in Hong Kong. A total of 303 third grade kindergarteners completed pretests and posttests on language and reading skills in Chinese and English. Between the two tests, the intervention group received 18 Chinese lessons and 12 English lessons, whereas the control group received no language-related intervention. Controlling for parent education and child gender, age, and pretest performance, ANCOVAs showed that the intervention group (a) performed significantly better in posttests on phonological awareness and morphological awareness in Chinese, and phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and word reading in English, compared with their low-SES counterparts in the control group, and (b) performed significantly better in posttests on phonological awareness and vocabulary knowledge in English, compared with their middle-SES counterparts in the control group. Cluster analysis further revealed three subgroups among low-SES children regarding language skills. Comparisons of these subgroups showed that children with lower language skills prior to participation in the intervention exhibited greater improvement regarding Chinese and English language skills. These findings highlight the potential benefits of an effective early metalinguistic intervention program for addressing the reading achievement gap of kindergarten children from low-SES

and middle-SES families in Hong Kong. These results also increase public awareness of the influence of poverty on child language and literacy development and demonstrate ways for helping low-SES children and their families.

Keywords:

Chinese and English learning; early metalinguistic intervention; kindergarten children; language and reading skills; low-SES families