

American Indian Children, their Home Media and Literacy Environments, and Their Literacy Abilities in Relation to Participation in a *Between the Lions* Literacy Intervention

Deborah L. Linebarger
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
&
Deborah K. Wainwright
Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania

CITATION:

Linebarger, D. L., & Wainwright, D.K. (2007, April). American Indian Children, their Home Media and Literacy Environments, and their literacy abilities in relation to participation in a *Between the Lions* literacy intervention. Paper to be presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Boston, MA.

CONTACT: Deborah L. Linebarger, dlinebarger@asc.upenn.edu

One of the most compelling findings from recent reading research is that children who have an inadequate start in reading rarely catch up. Finding ways to intervene before problems occur is critical. The present study is an evaluation of a project designed to increase the literacy skills of American Indian children attending Head Start programs in the southwestern United States using *Between the Lions* (BTL) and related classroom resources adapted specifically for these communities. Although there were 11 different tribal communities who agreed to implement the intervention, participation in assessment activities varied across these locations (i.e., from the administration of detailed literacy assessments to the collection of questionnaire information from parents and teachers). In this paper, we describe the home literacy

and media environment of 113 children (51% girls) in 4 communities and the English literacy outcomes of 135 children (53% girls) in a different set of 4 communities.

Home literacy and media environment. Children in our sample watched more television, played more video games, and spent less time reading or being read to compared with national averages. Seventy-three percent of the children in this project had bedroom TVs. Having a bedroom TV was related to parents who spent less time in writing and letter/sound teaching activities; and parents and children who spent more time with computers, the internet, and television. Further, children with bedroom TVs whose parents had more education had lower literacy scores whereas children with bedroom TVs whose parents had less education had higher literacy scores.

Literacy outcomes related to intervention. We examined the acquisition of children's English literacy skills across multiple settings (i.e., each setting was either a tribal community Head Start or multiple classrooms within that Head Start). Each of these settings began the intervention approximately 1-2 months apart, while all children participated in repeated assessments across the project period (i.e., for Site A, intervention began at assessment 3). We were interested in evaluating the effects of the amount of intervention occurring at each wave for each setting. To do so, we computed Hierarchical Linear Models (HLM) with the number of intervention lessons at each wave of assessment included in the Level-1 model as a time-varying covariate. A significant difference indicated a linear model where each subsequent intervention

lesson produced an additive effect on the outcome of interest. Children's literacy skills improved in direct relation to the amount of intervention for oral language knowledge, letter names, phonemic awareness and general literacy abilities (e.g., Figure 2).

In this study, we were able to document the home media and literacy environments of American Indian children. Children from less-educated homes benefited from media-related routes to literacy whereas children from more-educated homes benefited from more 'traditional' routes to literacy (e.g., books available, time spent reading, parents who engaged in literacy-related strategies). Participation in the *BTL* intervention was related to improved performance on important early literacy outcomes. These results are consistent with other research involving *BTL* and further substantiate the benefits of using media-related interventions to support children's literacy skills.

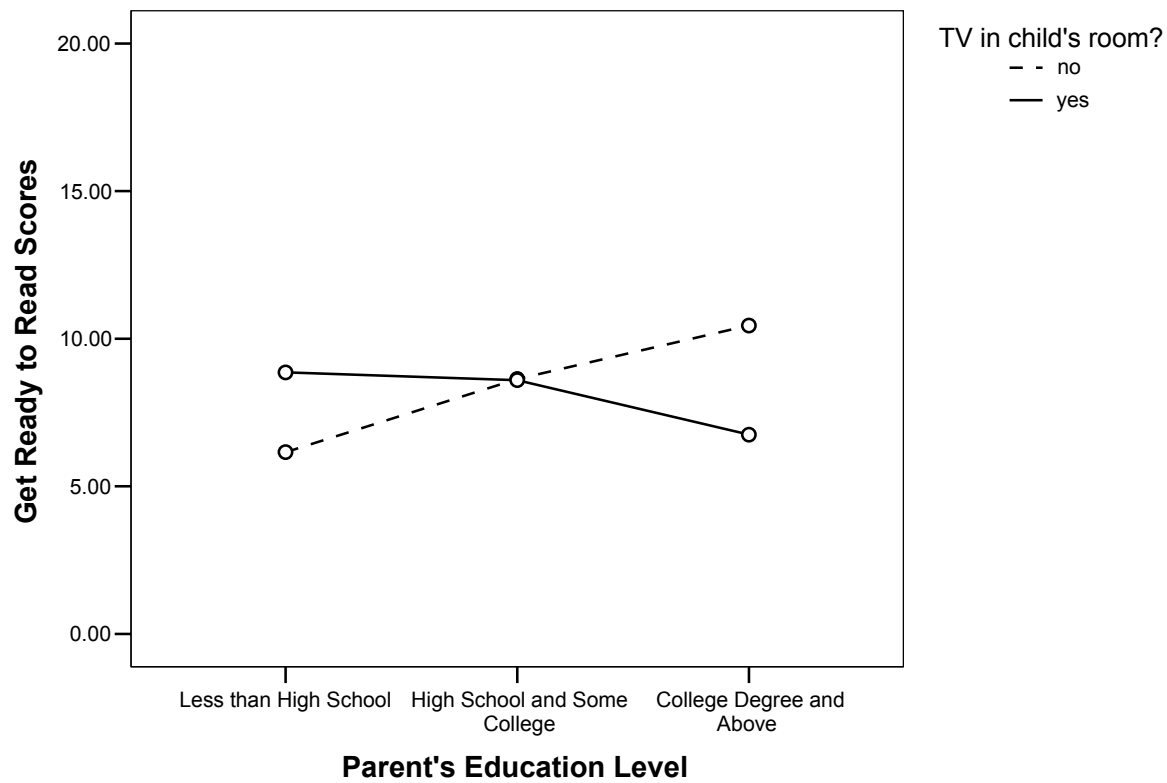


Figure 1. Children's Literacy Skills (as measured by Get Ready to Read! Screener) by Bedroom TV

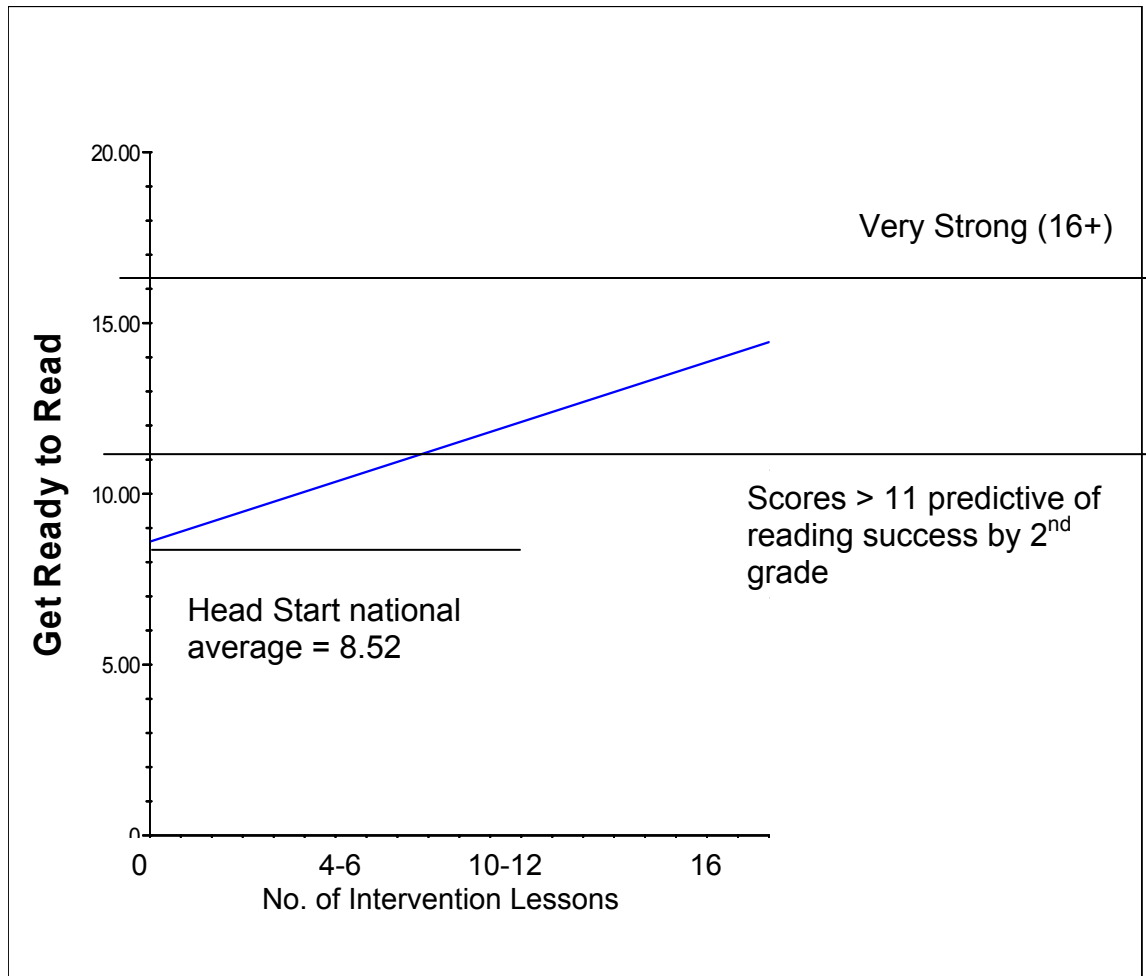


Figure 2. General Literacy Abilities (as measured by the Get Ready to Read! Screener) by Amount of Intervention