

The Child-Parent Reading Experience in Pediatric Medical Office Waiting Areas

by
Adam Butler

A Senior Honors Project Presented to the
Honors College
East Carolina University
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for
Graduation with Honors

by
Adam Butler
Greenville, NC
May, 2021

Approved by:

Dr. Terry Atkinson

College of Education, Department of Literacy Studies, English Education, and History Education

Abstract

The practice of shared reading between parent(s) and children (especially those ages 0-5 years old) contributes significantly to children's literacy development and readiness for school learning. Parents and caregivers often report that finding the time for daily shared reading is a challenge. Thus, the waiting times prior to pediatric medical visits offer a unique opportunity for them to engage in shared reading with their children. READ ENC, a local community literacy coalition in Pitt County, NC, partnered with several pediatric offices in the surrounding community to place READ ENC Book Nooks filled with children's picture books in their waiting spaces. This research study focused on whether the presence of these Book Nooks engaged parent(s) and children in shared reading while waiting. Interviews comprised of a pre-determined set of eleven open-ended questions were conducted with five pediatric practice managers. Additionally, seven two-hour long observations were conducted in three separate pediatric office waiting rooms to document the interactions of parent(s) and children while waiting and whether the presence of the Book Nooks resulted in any shared reading. The qualitative data collected from these interviews and observations were analyzed through qualitative data analysis. This process highlighted a common finding that children typically initiated the reading that occurred while waiting, sometimes resulting in attempts to engage their parents in shared reading. Moreover, the data identified engaging with technology (cellphones, television, and arcade games) and well-child forms as significant distractions for both parties, which often took place rather than shared reading. While the presence of books available in waiting areas has the potential to provide families with additional reading time, simply supplying books in waiting areas does not guarantee shared reading as an outcome. Study findings point to the potential of increasing office and pediatric promotion of shared reading while waiting and

limiting technology and well-child in office form completion in order to prioritize increased reading engagement in the waiting space.

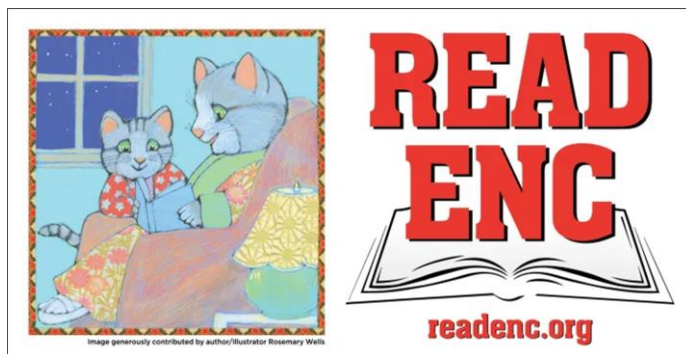
Introduction

Childhood literacy development during the years 0-5 is a key factor contributing to school readiness upon entering kindergarten, which strongly predicts later reading and school success. (Cunningham & Stanovich; Juel, 1988). Parents, guardians, siblings, or other caretakers have the potential to positively enhance their children's literacy learning and language development through shared book reading (SBR), which involves reading books aloud and talking with children about them. Ideally, if 15 minutes a day of SBR begins at birth, by the time children reach kindergarten, they will have experienced approximately 500 hours of reading leading to enhanced brain development and language skills (Read Aloud 15 Minutes, 2021). Parents are often unaware of the importance of these talk and read aloud interactions as they serve in a role as their children's "first and most important language and literacy teachers" (Sloat, Letouneau, Joschko, Schryer, & Colpitts, 2015, p. 41). Despite the widespread evidence supporting daily reading aloud and related language interaction with young children, many parents and child caregivers do not practice daily SBR with their children (Read Aloud 15 Minutes, 2021). Some families, especially those who are economically-disadvantaged (Neuman & Celano, 2001; Neuman & Moland, 2016), identify lack of resources and book availability as reasons for not reading with their children. Thus, many communities have launched initiatives meant to provide book access for all families. Examples of these initiatives include book distribution programs such as Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (Dollywood Foundation, 2021), as well as the installation of community book lending libraries and related book donation drives. Although increased book access provides the tools for shared reading to take place, book

presence still does not alleviate resource constraints, such as having the time to devote to SBR, a factor that parents identify as limiting reading opportunities with their children. Thus, initiatives that may intentionally provide reading time have the potential to foster more family shared reading.

Related Literature

The language and literacy readiness of children entering kindergarten who have spent quality time reading and discussing books with parents or caregivers far outpaces the



readiness of children who have not engaged regularly in SBR and discussion time. This lack of school readiness is most notably documented in economically-disadvantaged children.

Approximately 80% of children living below the poverty threshold fail to read on grade level by the end of third grade – a well-documented benchmark for later school success and high school graduation (Hernandez, 2012; High & Klass, 2014). Increasing the numbers of proficient third grade-level readers is a huge challenge, given that cycles of long-term general and child poverty persist, especially in rural communities (High, Hopmann & LaGasse, 1998). However, lack of kindergarten literacy readiness not only impacts economically-disadvantaged families; but children at all socioeconomic levels if they have not been actively engaged in early language and literacy experiences. Thus, it is evident that increasing parent and caregiver understandings about the importance of reading to young children and talking about books with them is an issue that spans all economic levels (High & Klass, 2014).

There are many reasons why parents and caregivers may lack understandings about how much SBR time benefits their children during the developing years, birth to age five (Jones, Franco, Metcalf & Popp, 2000). This lack of understanding may result from not having had similar experiences when they were younger or never learning about the importance of shared reading and talk about books upon entering parenthood (Zuckerman, 2009). Additionally, many parents identify lack of book access as an obstacle to promoting a regular book-sharing routine with their children starting at a young age (Payne, Whitehurst & Angell, 1994). To increase SBR opportunities with young children and appropriate book access for families, several possibilities have been identified in children's' routine activities within systems in place where access to and support of shared reading might be enhanced. Well-child pediatric visits have been highlighted as a unique venue for encouraging and supporting SBR with children via pediatric interaction, as well as providing a place to engage in SBR during office visits and time spent waiting to see the pediatrician (Mendelsohn et al., 2001). Programs such as Reach Out and Read (Reach Out and Read, 2021) provide additional literacy training for participating pediatricians allowing them to model, explain, and encourage SBR during well-child visits and provide books for families to take home to read. Pediatric medical settings are highly appropriate settings for offering book access and promoting SBR as the practice not only improves the parent-child bond, but it also strengthens a parent or caregiver's bond with their child's pediatrician and their satisfaction of the care and advice they are receiving from their child's health care provider. This strengthened trust between the two parties increases the likelihood of parents being more informed about important health strategies and development issues that come about later in their children's lives (High & Klass, 2014).

While there are many additional factors, influences and outcomes associated with family SBR practices (FerstReaders, 2020), the impact of technology and screen time on children and families is important to consider given its ubiquitous presence in today's world. In particular, smartphone use among adults has increased exponentially in the last 20 years. It was reported in 2017 that 95% of American adults own a cellphone and 77% own a smartphone. Both these numbers have increased exponentially in that only 53% of American adults owned a cellphone in 2000 and only 35% of American adults owned a smartphone in 2011. Easy access to the internet through smartphone devices provides owners with unlimited access to any online information they seek to acquire, which could certainly serve as an asset in language development and shared parent/child interaction. However, research evidence mounts about the negative influence of screen time on the attention and focus of young children and on parent-child interaction (Gurdon, 2019). In addition to learning more about how SBR enhances the growth and development of their children within pediatric settings, enhancing understandings about the negative impact of screen time distraction (Kildare & Middlemiss, 2017) also has the potential to increase parent/caregiver skill sets as they prepare their children to be successful readers and learners in school settings.

Study Context and Focus

READ ENC is a community literacy coalition in Pitt County, North Carolina with an aim of increasing both book access and reading time for parents and children through multiple initiatives meant to increase the number of students who read on grade level by the end of grade three. One such READ ENC literacy initiative involves Pitt County pediatric offices, restaurants, barbershops, and laundromats as community partners who have agreed to place READ ENC Book Nooks in their waiting spaces. This research study focused on the parent/child use of

READ ENC pediatric office Book Nooks that contain regularly organized and updated collections of approximately 100 high-quality children's picture books and beginning chapter books available for SBR as families wait for scheduled appointments. To further enhance SBR, the staff and providers at these pediatric offices are encouraged to promote use of Book Nook with their patients' families. Last, in an effort to build in-home libraries, several of the pediatric offices involved are Reach Out and Read (Reach Out and Read, 2021) participants and enrollment information for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library book distribution program (Dollywood Foundation, 2021), another READ ENC partnership effort, is provided at all Book Nook locations.

The research conducted in this study focused on observations of parent and child interactions with READ ENC Book Nooks during their wait time for their pediatric visits and



interviews with pediatric practice site managers about how effective they were in increasing SBR between parents and children, how well Book Nooks were received, and what limitations were experienced with them. The research sought to document observed evidence of how and if Book Nooks prompted parents and children to engage in SBR when they were provided an accessible opportunity to do so. Ultimately,

this research will assist READ ENC Community Literacy Coalition in improving current implementation of their Book Nook initiative and supporting future implementation meant to increase parent-child shared reading in pediatric waiting spaces.

Methods

Data Sources and Collection

To achieve the goal of understanding the reception, use, and limitations of the Book Nooks in pediatric medical office waiting areas, two data sources were documented and analyzed. Interviews were conducted with site managers at five participating pediatric offices and researcher observations were completed of parents and children interacting with READ ENC Book Nooks in three different pediatric office waiting rooms. Interview and observation protocols were designed and approved by East Carolina University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and no personal data was collected from any of the individuals interviewed or observed. Meetings were scheduled with site managers at each READ ENC pediatric office Book Nook location where the research study process was explained. Consent forms detailing the research study and process were discussed and signed by consenting participants. The consent form is included below:



November 4, 2019

You are being invited to participate in a **research** study titled “Reading While Waiting in Informal Public Learning Spaces” being conducted by Adam Butler, an Honors College Student at East Carolina University in the department of Public Health. The goal is to survey site receptionists at your Book Nook location. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. It is hoped that this information will assist us to better understand their perceptions about the impact of Book Nook presence on parent/caregiver shared reading and also about how the Book Nooks might better serve as a resource to encourage parent/caregiver shared reading. Responses will be kept confidential and no data will be released or used with any identification attached. Participation in the research is **voluntary**. Participants surveyed may choose not to answer any or all questions and may stop at any time. Additionally, Adam Butler will be observing the use of the Book Nook by parents/caretakers and children on several occasions and

taking notes about the shared reading that takes place in these public learning spaces but will not interact with parents or their children at that time. When he comes to observe, he will arrange an observation time suggested by the contact person at your Book Nook location and check in with this person or someone at the front desk before and after observing. There is **no penalty for not taking part** in this research study. Please call Adam Butler at 910-305-4721 for any research related questions or the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

Thank you,

Adam Butler

ECU Honors College Class of 2021
Public Health Major -- Natural Science Minor -- Mathematics Minor
Brody School of Medicine Early Assurance Scholar

Site managers at five different Greenville, NC pediatric offices consented and were interviewed (Greenville Pediatrics, ECU Pediatrics, Children's Health Services, Pirate Pediatrics, and Eastern Pediatrics), and seven two-hour long observations were completed (three at Children's Health Services, three at Pirate Pediatrics and one at Eastern Pediatrics). The interviews took place several weeks after each Book Nook site had been available in practice waiting spaces to give ample time for site managers to observe their use. Researcher observations also took place at peak times that were identified by site managers. The observations involved approximating roughly how old the pediatric patients were who entered waiting spaces, how many adults were with them, and what activities they engaged in during their wait times. A sample interview response and a sample observation are included below:

Sample Interview Questions and Responses from One Practice Location

- 1.) Since the Book Nook was placed here, what have you noticed about the reading that takes place in your waiting area?

A lot of the children look at the books. The younger ones enjoy looking at the pictures, and the parents will go through the books with the young kids. The older kids go to the chapter books, and they will read these by themselves as they wait as opposed to being on their phone or watching TV.

2.) Are children typically reading or looking at books by themselves?

Older children are typically reading by themselves and younger children are typically reading with a parent/caregiver.

3.) Are parents/caregivers typically reading or looking at books together?

Majority of kids are looking at the books by themselves. Most parents seem to be engaged with their phones.

4.) Do you ever hear parents/caregivers talking about the books together?

There is some interaction between parents and kids with the reading. Here again, it is typically the children initiating and participating in the reading by themselves. Lots of parents will encourage their child to go and get a book as soon as they come in.

5.) Do you ever hear children requesting that parents/caregivers to read to them?

There are some requests by children for their parents to read to them. Here again, this is typically the younger kids requesting their parents read with them.

6.) Do parents/caregivers/children take books with them into exam rooms?

Kids will take books with them back to the exam rooms. They really want to be reading the entire time they are here.

7.) Does anyone in your office/business ask if families are getting free books in the mail and encourage them to enroll in Imagination Library using the flyers provided?

The providers try to remind parents of this opportunity, and this location is also a part of Reach Out and Read. The parents are often taking flyers, and they seem to be a good way to reach out.

- 8.) Are you aware of any questions about or interest in Imagination Library enrollment (free books in the mail) based on the flyers displayed in your Book Nook?

The parents will sometimes ask how it works, and they have also expressed that they are already a part of this service.

- 9.) How can this Book Nook location be used more effectively to encourage parents/caregivers to read and talk about books every day with their children?

Turning the TV off and leaving electronic devices outside. Recently, the TV was having difficulties and was not available in the waiting room, and the staff noticed there was far more involvement with the books during that time period.

- 10.) What else (other than books) would parents/caregivers need in order to read and talk about books every day with their children?

Parents need to have more education on the importance of their children reading. The providers are constantly encouraging the parents to engage in this activity. There could be more volunteering in having book clubs on Saturdays or that sort of thing so children have more opportunities to be read to. More education on the importance of reading is key.

- 11.) Anything else you would like to share?

So far, this has been a great program for the office. More advanced reading selections may be beneficial for the older children. There are more older children here than we think. These are the only source of books some of these children have, so allowing them to take them home and encouraging them to finish the books would be key.

Sample Observation From One Practice Location

3-2-2020 8-10AM

- 8:00am → Mother and son around 11-12 years old enter. Mother and son are both on phone their entire waiting period, and they do not interact with the book nook.
- 8:30am → Mother and approximately 15-year-old daughter come in. Mother and daughter are both on their phones their entire wait, and they do not interact with the book nook.
- 8:45am → Mother and two sons come in. The boys are approximately 10 and 12 years old. The mother is filling out paperwork. The 12-year-old has his phone out, and the 10 year old is watching him play a game on it. They never have any interaction with the book nook.
- 9:00am → Mother and baby come in. The mother is filling out paperwork the entire time they are waiting. No interaction with the book nook occurs.
- 9:15am → Mother and female toddler come in. Mother is filling out paperwork while the toddler plays in the play area of the waiting room. No interaction with the book nook is ever made.
- 9:30am → Mother and male toddler come in (approximately 2 years old). The toddler is in the play area when mother finishes paperwork. The toddler then gets a book and asks her to read to him. The mother sits and reads with him for the remainder of their wait.
- 9:45am → Mother and another caregiver and two baby twins come in. The mother fills out paperwork while the other caregiver is on the phone. No interaction with the book nook is ever made.
- 10:00am → Mother and approximately 15-year-old daughter come in. They are on their phone while they wait. They never interact with the Book Nook.

Data Analysis

Transcripts from each interview and observation were analyzed through qualitative data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). The use of reflective memos and open coding led to generative coding to calculate relevant percentages describing the use of the Book Nooks by parents and children. Overall, collecting data in this matter allowed the researcher to identify the ways in which Book Nook interactions appear to be supporting SBR, factors that impede SBR in office settings, and any common interactions that emerged among Book Nook users.

Results

The coding process allowed for common findings to be identified across the research. Findings from both interviews and observations were determined and analyzed to determine commonalities. The following results were documented:

Interview Results	
Finding	% of Site Managers Identifying this Finding
The Book Nooks being present have increased overall interest with and activity involving reading in their waiting space.	100%
School-aged children typically read by themselves and toddlers typically read with a parent/caregiver/sibling.	100%
Site managers of a pediatric office with a television in the waiting room referenced it being a distraction to reading.	100%
Site managers referenced technology (rather being used by parent, child, or both) as an interference to reading	80%

Observation Results	
Observation Outcome	% of Families that Engaged in this Outcome

Observed SBR occurred with a child that was approximately 7 years of age or younger.	100%
Observed visits involved some amount of SBR between parent and child.	21%
Observed visits involved family filling out forms, using technology, or a combination of both.	98%
Observed visits involved parent-child shared reading with no distractions from technology and/or forms,	2%

Discussion

The interviews and researcher observations documented actual Book Nook interactions and the perceptions of practice site managers about how READ ENC Book Nooks were being used and how they had been received by families in the pediatric offices studied. All five site managers interviewed emphasized that the book access provided by the Book Nooks had increased overall reading in the waiting space. All site managers were eager to express that reading had become more of a common occurrence within their waiting rooms, and they highlighted that many children and families expressed excitement about the opportunity to use their wait time to read. Additionally, the site managers affirmed that young children, especially those from toddlers to approximately age 5, often were observed asking parents to read to them and engage in SBR experiences. Site managers collectively mentioned increased child engagement in reading, which resulted in more observed parent excitement about reading to their children. The belief stated by pediatric office site managers was that both READ ENC Book Nooks and their promotion were encouraging families who chose to read while they waited for their appointments. Parent-child observation data yielded the finding that SBR amongst families originated with requests from children who were roughly seven years of age or younger. This observation suggests that ensuring the inclusion of reading selections for older children in Book

Nook locations, as well for infants and toddlers, is important because literacy development and engagement is important throughout childhood. As children proceed through their early grade school experience, literacy engagement impact their skill development and motivation to read and it must be fostered and encouraged as children mature (High & Klass, 2014). Additionally, the observation data highlighted that 21% of family visits resulted in some amount of shared reading between parent and child. Although this percentage may appear somewhat low, these reading experiences may not have occurred without Book Nook presence as all of these reading experiences involved books selected from Book Nook collections. Furthermore, implementation of the Book Nook project was still in early stages when these researcher observations took place. Many parents and children were experiencing them for the first time when they interacted with them during these observed visits. In sum, the presence of Book Nook collections in pediatric waiting areas provided SBR opportunities for those families who chose to read as they had easy access to a wide variety of high-quality children's books. By increasing access to books, more reading was achieved through the Book Nooks as suggested by prior studies (Zuckerman, 2009).

Analysis of interview and observation data also suggested that several factors hindered Book Nook use with families. Every site manager at an office with a television present in the waiting space referenced that the broadcasts (typically children's videos) were a major distraction from SBR. These site managers emphasized that when the television was broadcasting a video, it immediately drew the attention of children of all ages once they entered the waiting space. This distraction often resulted in children who did not even consider, and, in many cases notice, the Book Nooks available to them. Additionally, 80% of site managers noted that some form of technology (smartphones, tablets, video games, etc.) distracted children and/or parents from participating in SBR experiences. The technological distractions engaged families

when they entered the waiting space as they were often the immediate focus of their attention. Technology has increasing presence in the life of today's families, and, although benefit is often an accessible asset, the potential negative impact of limiting parent-child SBR and interaction is well-documented (Gurdon, 2019). Moreover, 98% of observed visits involved some form of technology, well-child forms, or both being a distraction to parent-child SBR. Many families had well-child forms to complete required at pediatric visits, so this completion limited how much attention they could give to their children. Most parents finished these forms before their wait time was complete, but they failed to use the extra time to read and often turned to technology instead of engaging in SBR. For visits that did not involve form completion, parents typically resorted to viewing their smartphone as soon as they arrived in the waiting space. In all, it was found that only 2% of visits observed consisted of parent-child SBR with no distractions from technology or forms throughout the wait time. Thus, this finding highlights the overwhelming influence of technology and completion of well-child forms had on parents when they are waiting for physician visits (Kildare & Middlemiss, 2017). These results indicate that even though increased book access was available via Book Nooks in pediatric waiting rooms, increasing parental understandings about the purpose of the Book Nooks, as well as about the importance of daily SBR interactions and how daily distractions and undermine them, may have the potential to increase reading while waiting.

As noted in the earlier literature review, parents often lack a developed understanding of the importance of reading to their children, as well their role as their children's first and most important language and literacy teachers (Jones, Franco, Metcalf & Popp, 2000; Sloat, Letouneau, Joschko, Schryer, & Colpitts, 2015; Zuckerman, 2009). Only 21% of parents observed read to their children during the wait time of their child's pediatric visit. Even though

books were accessible, many parents still did take advantage of these resources. Thus, education about the importance of childhood literacy development is needed for most parents. Furthermore, limited time has been noted as an issue with parents not reading to their children. The wait times associated with the pediatric medical visits provide time for parents to read to children, but many parents in this study prioritized smartphone use rather than interaction with their child. Helping parents recognize and take advantage of SBR wait time opportunities deserves further attention both within this pediatric office Book Nook initiative and beyond.

Conclusion

The research conducted through this study achieved the goals of identifying how READ ENC Book Nooks are being used, how they are being received, and in what ways their potential is being limited. The interview and observation data prompted conversation and interaction between the READ ENC team and the pediatric offices in an effort to encourage more SBR experiences between parents and children. Overall, this research effort documented how the initial implementation of these Book Nooks worked, and it suggested possible improvements that can be made as the project continues.

In sum, READ ENC Book Nooks provided opportunities for parent-child SBR interaction to occur in pediatric medical office waiting spaces. Increased book access provided families with the opportunities to read in a space that usually might not support SBR unless families brought books with them from home. The availability of the books from READ ENC Book Nooks were appealing to young children as evidenced by children typically initiating SBR with parents or caregivers with requests to read with them. Differences in age of the pediatric patients influenced reading experiences that were observed. Most patients requesting to be read with were younger than approximately five years of age, and the patients who were older read more to themselves.

Although young children appeared to have great interest in reading the books available to them, the reading experience that occurred was ultimately dependent upon how involved the parent(s) were in fulfilling their child's reading request. As Book Nook implementation is still in early stages, and because the COVID-19 pandemic has limited waiting space interaction with them, this pandemic-related pause in READ ENC Book Nook implementation provides an opportunity for pediatric office staff, site managers, and the READ ENC team to plan for their reopening with new commitment to promoting SBR. Based on study findings, the limitations that waiting room technology and well-child forms put on shared reading time should be discussed and considered. For instance, the completion of online forms that could be requested prior to pediatric visits may be requested on a trial basis for future consideration. Also, pediatric office site managers might consider removal of televisions in pediatric waiting areas, if indeed, SBR is a priority within their practice. Overall, many parents need continued education and encouragement to understand how beneficial reading is with their child. If technology influences and well-child form completion can be limited while promotion of Book Nook usage is prioritized, READ ENC Book Nooks have potential to encourage more SBR experiences between parents, caregivers, and children during pediatric medical visit wait times.

Limitations of this research include a small sample size. Thus, findings may not be generalized to other populations or situations. Additionally, the number of observations conducted and documented in this study was limited by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional research is suggested in order to consider how the READ ENC Community Literacy Coalition team and community pediatric health care providers can better promote use of their Book Nooks as tools for increasing SBR in the families of pediatric patients.

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