

MyTeachingPartner™ (Pre-K) A Series of NICHD-Funded Studies

This series of studies provides additional evidence that the MyTeachingPartner™ coaching model, with its web-facilitated consultation and feedback, is a feasible and effective method of improving the quality of teacher-child interactions on a large scale. Findings also indicate that preschoolers' language and literacy skills improved when they had teachers who implemented the MTP™ curriculum in the prescribed manner.

MyTeachingPartner™ (MTP) is an innovative program that addresses the challenge of providing an enduring, classroom-focused, and scalable teacher professional development experience. MTP™ is a web-based system of professional development resources that include both video exemplars and web-mediated consultation on specific dimensions of teacher interactions with children. The MTP™ approach aims to improve the quality of teaching in early childhood education classrooms and enhance children's school readiness by providing teachers with year-long, individualized support and feedback about their classroom practices based on a well-validated assessment for describing teacher-child interactions.

A team of researchers from the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) undertook a controlled evaluation trial over a two-year period to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of the MTP™ model for improving instruction in preschool classrooms. The study compared two randomly assigned groups of teachers in state-funded preschools across a single state. The preschools specifically served four-year-olds at risk of school failure.

The two teacher groups varied by type of professional development available to them. Sixty-nine teachers received the MTP™ Language & Literacy curriculum and access to web-based video exemplars of effective teacher-child interactions. The video exemplars included dozens of brief (1-2 minute) video clips with annotations describing teachers' behaviors and interactions.

Sixty-five teachers received access to the same MTP™ Language & Literacy activities and web-based video exemplars. In addition, they received individualized consultation to support their implementation of these language/literacy activities.

All teachers were asked to provide videotapes of their interactions with children during an instructional activity every other week for the entire academic year. Teachers in

the consultancy group were asked to watch their video and respond to prompts about their interactions with children in online journals at least once per week during the two academic years.

Effects of MTP™ on Teacher-Child Interactions

At the end of the first year, researchers compared improvement in specific dimensions of teachers' observed classroom interactions across two conditions. Their purpose was to (a) examine the extent to which participation in either of the professional development variations was associated with changes in the observed quality of teachers' interactions with children over the course of a school year and (b) to determine whether either of these intervention conditions is more effective in a particular set of classrooms.

Teachers' interactions with children were measured based on observations of the videos of their instruction specifically related to developing language-literacy and alternative thinking strategies. The evidence-based CLASS (Classroom

MTP = MyTeachingPartner™

The MyTeachingPartner™ program is a set of professional development resources for teachers culled from years of research on how students learn best. Ranging from online videos to personal support from a trained consultant with videobased feedback, these resources aim to improve the quality of teacher-student interactions from pre-K to grade 12, one teacher at a time.

Assessment Scoring System™) was used to measure teachers' social and instructional interactions with students.

The results, although preliminary, indicated that the teachers who received MTP™ consultation showed greater gains in the quality of their social and instructional interactions with students—especially in high-poverty classrooms—than did teachers who had access only to the web-based resources. The use of more-intensive professional development supports such as consultation may be needed to offset the demands of teaching in high-need classrooms.

The results of this study also indicate that if teachers are exposed to multiple field-based examples of objectively defined high-quality practice and receive regular feedback about the extent to which their classroom interactions and instruction

promote learning in key skill domains, then specific dimensions of instructional quality improve.

Educators' Usage Rates and Self-Reported Satisfaction

Leveraging the value of public investments in early childhood education requires that research and development efforts focus on identifying effective and replicable approaches to teacher training at a large scale that produce positive, and even accelerated, gains in children's academic performance. At the end of the second year of this study, researchers collected data on teacher usage rates and their self-reported satisfaction with the levels of professional development support.

Teachers overall reported using the website for an average of 4 to 5 hours during each academic year. They identified the access to online lessons and activities as the greatest benefits of participating in the MTP™ program, closely followed by the exemplar videos.

Teachers in the consultancy group largely stayed engaged with the website, videotaping regimen, and consultation cycles across two years and reported that their involvement added value to their everyday teaching practices. Despite teachers noting that videotaping their classroom practices every other week was a challenge, most teachers were reliable at capturing this video and thus sharing their instructional interactions with children, even without accountability to a consultant. This finding, in part, debunks the myth that teacher discomfort with observation is an insurmountable barrier to providing video-based consultation and feedback.

The relative success of this videotaping process, in tandem with teacher satisfaction regarding the remote consultation support, is foundational to the scalability of such an approach to in-service teacher development focused on teacher-child interactions. Video observation provides a rich, objective medium for identifying strengths and challenges for teachers during interactions with children in the classroom, focusing on ways in which teachers are helping children learn through individualizing instruction, engaging children actively in activities, facilitating children's problem-solving and higher order thinking skills, and so on.

In sum, given that teacher engagement and satisfaction were consistently high for two years across a wide range of indicators, this study offers evidence that providing ongoing, Web-mediated feedback and support focused on teacher-child interactions is feasible. In contrast to the typical "one-and-done" professional development workshops that are all too common for early childhood education teachers, this enduring, observation-focused approach appears to be responsive

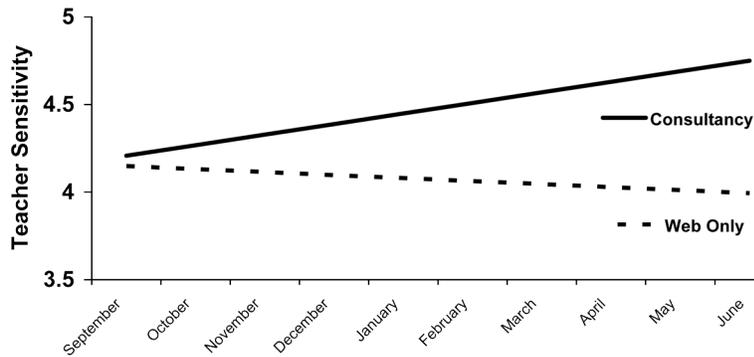


Figure 1. Changes in teacher sensitivity for teachers participating in the MTP™ consultation and web-only study conditions.

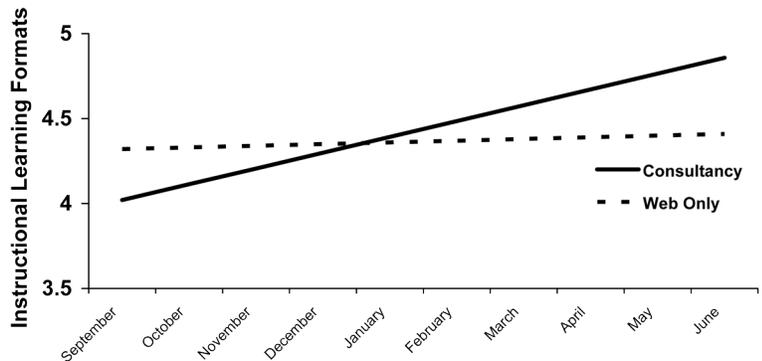


Figure 2. Changes in instructional learning formats for teachers participating in the MTP™ consultation and web-only study conditions.

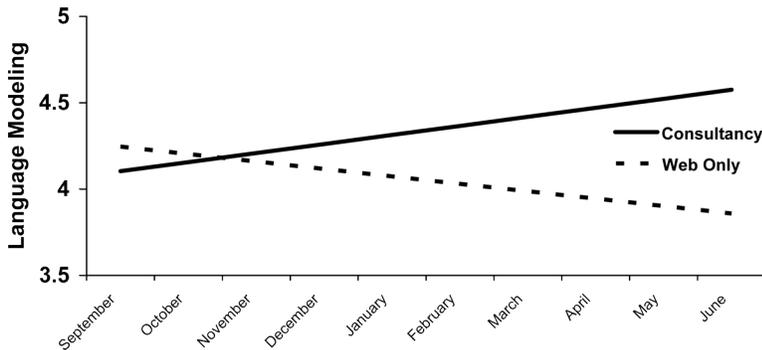


Figure 3. Changes in language modeling for teachers participating in the MTP™ consultation and web-only study conditions.

CLASS™...

- provides programs, schools and districts with reliable, valid data on teacher effectiveness.
- creates a common language about effective teaching practices across subject areas and grade levels.
- helps teachers better understand how their interactions in the classroom affect student learning.
- documents improvements in the effectiveness of teachers' interactions with students.

to the classroom needs of pre-K teachers, is directly aligned with the types of teacher-child interactions that have been empirically linked to child outcomes, and has the capacity to reach many teachers without the expenses associated with live contact.

Implementation Fidelity of Literacy & Language Activities

The MTP™ Language & Literacy Curriculum encompasses a set of explicit instructional activities focusing on areas of language and literacy that are consistently linked to later achievements in word recognition and reading comprehension and were likely to be underdeveloped among children at risk of school failure.

Teachers were asked to implement at least six of the language and literacy activities each week and to submit videotape of themselves implementing the activities once each month.

The researchers then examined the extent to which teachers who implemented this curriculum more often and with higher quality had students who made greater gains in literacy and language across the preschool year.

Teachers reported using the curriculum fairly often, and they were observed to generally follow curricular lesson plans. The quality of delivery, defined as the use of empirically based strategies for teaching literacy and language, however, was much lower. Children in classrooms in which activities were observed to last longer and in which teachers exhibited higher quality of delivery of literacy lessons made significantly greater gains in early literacy skills across the preschool year. Also, teachers' use of higher quality language interactions was associated with gains for children who did not speak English at home.

Impacts on Language & Literacy Development

Researchers examined the impacts of the MTP web-based resources on the language and literacy development of 1,165 children during pre-kindergarten. Children whose teachers were randomly assigned to receive access to both the MTP™ video exemplars and consultation made greater gains in receptive language skills during pre-kindergarten compared to children whose teachers were randomly assigned to receive access to the MTP™ video exemplars only. Further, among MTP™ consultancy teachers, more hours of participating in the

consultation process was positively associated with children's receptive language development, and more hours implementing the language/literacy activities was positively associated with children's language and literacy development.

Together these results suggest that consultation may be associated with children's vocabulary development due to an increase in high-quality, language-rich teacher interactions with children—interactions that have shown links to children's academic development. More importantly, these findings indicate that a critical ingredient for realizing the promise of professional development programs for improving teaching and learning is both increasing implementation fidelity and engaging and motivating teachers to make use of available professional development opportunities in the ways they are intended.

About the Studies

This series of studies was funded by grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Interagency Consortium on School Readiness. Complete published descriptions of these studies may be found as follows:

Hamre, B. K., Justice, L. M., Pianta, R. C., Kilday, C., Sweeney, B., Downer, J. T., & Leach, A. (2010). Implementation fidelity of MyTeachingPartner literacy and language activities: Associations with preschoolers' language and literacy growth. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25*, 329-347.

Pianta, R. C., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., Hamre, B. K., Justice, L. (2008). Effects of web-mediated professional development resources on teacher-child interactions in pre-kindergarten classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*, 431-451.

Downer, J. T., Kraft-Sayre, M. E., & Pianta, R. C. (2009). Ongoing, web-mediated professional development focused on teacher-child interactions: Early childhood educators' usage rates and self-reported satisfaction. *Early Education and Development, 20*, 321-345.

Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., Hamre, B. K., Justice, L. M., & Pianta, R. C. (2010). Consultation for teachers and children's language and literacy development during pre-kindergarten. *Applied Developmental Science, 14*, 179-196.

Kinzie, M. B., Whitaker, S. D., Neesen, K., Kelley, M., Matera, M., & Pianta, R. C. (2006). Innovative web-based professional development for teachers of at-risk preschool children. *Educational Technology & Society, 9*(4), 194-204.

Whitaker, S. D., Kinzie, M. B., Kraft-Sayre, M. E., Mashburn, A., & Pianta, R. C. (2007). Use and evaluation of Web-based professional development services across participant levels of support. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 34*(6), 1573-1707.

MyTeaching Partner™

More information about MyTeacherPartner™ can be found at <http://myteachingpartner.net>.

CASTL

The University of Virginia Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning works to improve educational outcomes through the empirical study of teaching, teacher quality, and classroom experience from preschool through high school, with particular emphasis on the challenges posed by poverty, social or cultural isolation, or lack of community resources. For more information, see <http://curry.virginia.edu/castl>