

Center for Health Literacy Promotion Research Summary

Parents as Teachers Health Literacy Demonstration Project

Maternal Health Literacy: The cognitive and social skills that determine the motivation and ability of mothers to gain access to, understand, and use information in ways that promote and maintain their health and that of their children. (Renkert and Nutbeam 2001)

Project Description

This two-year project aimed to integrate maternal health literacy promotion into [Parents As Teachers](#) curriculum and practice. Eight parent educators affiliated with three school districts in Butler County, Missouri were trained in reflective practices to promote maternal health literacy and empower parents as managers of personal and family health and healthcare during home visits. The participating PAT programs served families characterized by low literacy and low income.

Parent educators collected data on 103 parents' health- and healthcare-related practices and behaviors and surrounding family conditions using the [Life Skills Progression Instrument](#) (LSP). PAT has recommended use of the LSP to its 2000 sites and has mandated retraining of all PAT parent educators in reflective practice.

Principal Investigator: Karen Guskin, PhD, PAT-National
Training and TA: Sandra Smith, PhD, Linda Wollesen, MA RN
Statistical Analysis: Lauren Carroll, MS, MPH, Nicole Thomson, PhD
Funder: Missouri Foundation for Health/Health Literacy Missouri
Funding Dates: 2010-2012

Key Findings

MATERNAL HEALTH LITERACY & PARENT EDUCATION

- At project start, parents had been receiving usual PAT services for 15 months on average. Nevertheless, mothers achieved significant improvements in maternal health literacy demonstrated by increased scores on both the LSP Healthcare Literacy and Self-care Literacy scales ($p < .01$). Progress continued throughout the study period.
- Estimated reading level at baseline predicted entry level health literacy scores, but did not predict who progressed or how much.
- Healthcare Literacy (use of health information and services) & Self-care Literacy (management of personal and child health at home) scores were influenced by nearly all LSP items, suggesting that maternal health literacy is determined by complex interactions of multiple factors in the family-home environment. Notably, health literacy scores were *not* associated with education, estimated reading level, or depression.
- Mothers who had a stronger relationship with the home visitor were more likely to improve their health literacy scores.
- The results of this project demonstrate it is feasible and effective to integrate a health focus and reflective empowerment practices for promoting health literacy into the Parents As Teachers' school readiness approach.
- Results confirm earlier findings that existing home based maternal-child health promotion programs can be an effective channel for promoting maternal health literacy.
- The LSP can be used as a meaningful measure of maternal health literacy and to tailor intervention to particular families.

Parent Educators on Lessons Learned

"Parents have their own answers. We just need to ask questions to get them thinking."

"I talk less; parents think more. This [reflective questioning] works!"

MATERNAL HEALTH LITERACY & PARENT EDUCATION

“At first I was terrified. I felt comfortable after about 10 visits.”

Presentations

Integrating Health Literacy and Reflective Practice into Parent Education
Parents as Teachers Annual Conference November 7, 2011 St Louis, MO
Sandra Smith, PhD

Promoting Maternal Health Literacy as an Asset Sandra Smith, PhD
US Department of Social & Health Services
Coalition for a Healthier Community Grantee’s Webinar May 15, 2012

Promoting Maternal Health Literacy Sandra Smith, PhD
Global Public Health Conference
Worldwide Universities Network, Health Literacy Network
May 20, 2012 Southampton, England

**Promoting Parental Health Literacy Through Parents as Teachers
Home Visiting Program: Preliminary Parent and Child Outcomes**
Nicole Thomson, PhD
Society for Research in Child Development April, 2013 Seattle, WA.

**Promoting Parental Health Literacy Through Parents as Teachers
Home Visiting Program: Preliminary Parent and Child Outcomes**
Sandra Smith, PhD
Health Literacy Annual Research Conference Oct, 2013, Washington, DC

Publications

Carroll L, Smith, SA & Thomson N (in press 2014) Parents as Teachers Health Literacy Demonstration Project: Integrating an empowerment model of health literacy promotion into home-based parent education. *Health Promotion Practice*.

For more information Sandra Smith sandras@uw.edu

Updated 6.5.14