

Sharing Results

**Shared Reading Project:
Evaluating Implementation Processes
and Family Outcomes**

by

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Sharing Results
Series

“Sharing Results” is a series of occasional papers that describe the results of work undertaken by the Clerc Center in its three priority areas of literacy, family involvement, and transition from school to postsecondary education and employment. The focus of each of these papers is determined through an extensive public input process with parents, educators, service providers, and researchers throughout the country. The Sharing Results series includes three kinds of papers:

1. descriptions of critical needs in the Clerc Center’s priority areas and the processes used to identify those needs,
2. descriptions of the results of collaborations between the Clerc Center and other schools and programs to develop and implement innovative approaches to some of the persistent challenges of the Clerc Center priority areas, and
3. extensive descriptions of the evaluation of selected innovations. Program evaluations provide information to help program planners determine whether an innovation would be appropriate for their program.

It is hoped that the Sharing Results papers will provide valuable information and ideas to parents, educators, service providers, researchers, and others interested in the education of deaf and hard of hearing children.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SHARED READING PROJECT:

EVALUATING IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

By Linda Delk, Ph.D, and Lisa Weidekamp, B.S.W.
Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University
October 2000

WHAT IS THE SHARED READING PROJECT?

Parents are encouraged to read to their children when they are young to start building a foundation for later reading and academic achievement. Eighty-four percent of deaf and hard of hearing children have hearing parents. These parents want to read books to their children, but are often frustrated in their attempts to do so because they lack effective visually based ways to share books with their deaf child. When this happens, both parents and children miss opportunities to learn and grow together. If hearing parents do not read to their young deaf and hard of hearing children, these children enter school without the early family literacy experiences they need to learn to read well.

The Shared Reading Project is built on the premise that hearing people can learn to read storybooks to deaf and hard of hearing children by observing how deaf adults do it. The Project is an accommodation that gives parents and caregivers visually based communication and booksharing strategies they can use to share books with their young deaf and hard of hearing children. The Shared Reading Project is based on 15 booksharing principles derived from research about how deaf adults read books to young deaf children. Deaf tutors serve as models and coaches to help hearing parents learn the skills needed to share books with their young deaf and hard of hearing children. The ultimate goal of the project is to help deaf and hard of hearing children become better readers in school and improve their academic achievement.

HOW THE SHARED READING PROJECT WORKS

A trained Shared Reading tutor visits the family once a week with a specially designed book bag. Each book bag includes a storybook, a sign language videotape of the story, an activity guide, and a bookmark printed with booksharing tips. The tutor demonstrates to the parents how to read the storybook using American Sign Language and how to apply the 15 booksharing principles. Then the tutor coaches the parents as they sign the book to their young deaf or hard of hearing child. The tutor leaves the book bag with the family so they can read to their deaf or hard of hearing child between tutor visits. Each week for 20 weeks, the tutor brings a new book bag to the family.

HOW THE SHARED READING PROJECT DEVELOPED

The Shared Reading Project was conceived by David R. Schleper, Jane Kelleher Fernandes, and Doreen Higa at the Hawai'i Center for the Deaf and Blind in 1993. Fernandes and Schleper brought the Shared Reading Project to the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University in 1995. The Shared Reading Project addresses two major priority areas of the Clerc

Center: (1) improving the literacy skills of deaf and hard of hearing children and (2) family involvement.

The Clerc Center began making the Shared Reading Project available to other programs serving deaf and hard of hearing children and their families when it supported new expansion sites in 1997-1998. From nearly 30 applicants, five programs were selected to become expansion sites for the Shared Reading Project. These programs included an urban center school for the deaf, a residential school with satellite programs in a rural state, an urban public school program, and two not-for-profit organizations serving families with deaf and hard of hearing children in urban and rural areas.

The role of the expansion sites was to make the Shared Reading Project available to traditionally underserved deaf and hard of hearing children and their families and to assist the Clerc Center in evaluating the Shared Reading Project. Traditionally underserved children, as defined by the Amendments to the Education of the Deaf Act of 1992, include deaf and hard of hearing children who:

- have disabilities,
- are members of diverse ethnocultural groups,
- live in rural areas,
- come from homes in which a language other than English is spoken, or
- are underachieving academically.

EVALUATING THE SHARED READING PROJECT

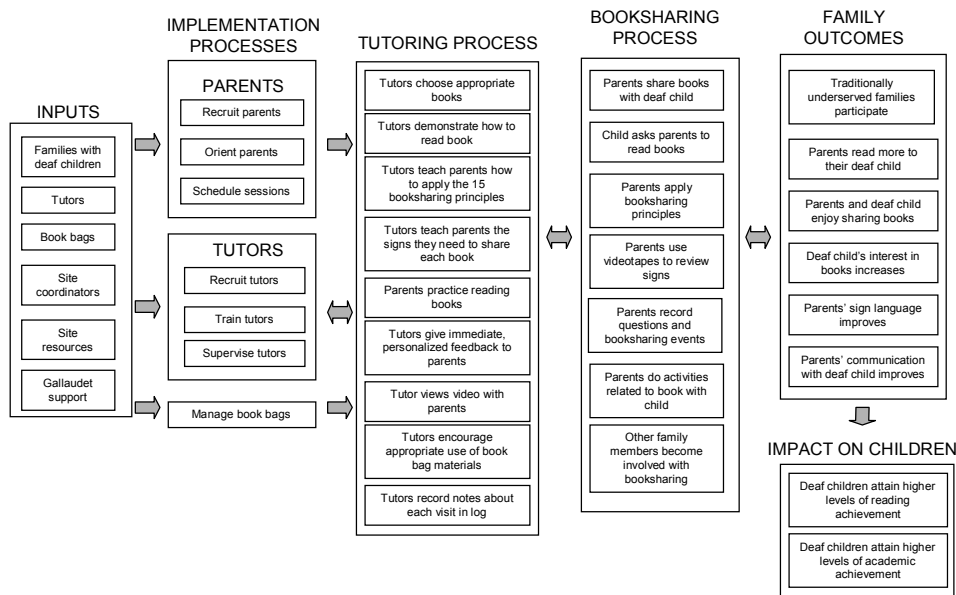
The evaluation focused on the implementation of the Shared Reading Project in diverse settings, the populations being served, and short-term outcomes for families. The implementation portion of the evaluation examined how the Project was delivered at the five expansion sites and how closely this implementation adhered to the Clerc Center's intended Shared Reading Project model. This information was needed to support Shared Reading Project training courses and to lay the foundation for evaluating the long-term impact of the Project on children's reading. The evaluation also determined the extent to which the expansion sites were able to recruit families of the targeted traditionally underserved deaf and hard of hearing children for participation in the Shared Reading Project. The effectiveness of the Shared Reading Project in achieving short-term family outcomes was also evaluated.

The three major questions addressed by this evaluation were:

- 1) How was the Shared Reading Project implemented at each site?
- 2) To what extent did families of traditionally underserved deaf and hard of hearing children participate in the Project?
- 3) Did the participating parents and caregivers read more to their deaf and hard of hearing children than they did before the Project?

The Shared Reading Project logic model summarizes the complex chain of inputs and processes intended to lead to anticipated outcomes for families and children. This logic model guided the data collection and analysis strategies of the evaluation. Sources of evaluation data included demographic data provided by the sites, parent and caregiver pre- and post-participation surveys, tutor surveys, site visits, records of family reading events, and interviews with parents, tutors, and site coordinators.

Shared Reading Project: Developers' Logic Model



CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND TUTORS

A total of 106 families with 116 deaf and hard of hearing children age 11 and younger participated in the Shared Reading Project at the five expansion sites. The average age of the children was 4.6 years. One-third of the children were members of diverse ethnocultural groups. One-fifth of the children had cognitive or physical disabilities. One-fifth came from homes in which a language other than English was spoken. Nearly half of the children lived in rural areas. About 30 percent of the children belonged to two or more of these traditionally underserved groups. The largest overlapping group included children from diverse ethnocultural groups who came from homes in which a language other than English was spoken.

About one-fourth of the children lived in homes headed by a single parent, slightly less than the rate for the nation in general. The median household income in the ZIP code areas in which participating families lived was just under \$30,000, nearly the same as for the nation as a whole.

A survey of the home literacy environment showed that, before the Shared Reading Project began, nearly all the parents reported that their deaf and hard of hearing children had their own books, but 35 percent reported that they had not tried to share a book with their child more than once or twice prior to the Shared Reading Project. More than 70 percent of the parents reported having problems when they tried sharing books. Less than half of the families received a daily newspaper. About one-fourth had a TTY in the home. More than 80 percent of the parents had heard about telephone relay services, but only about 60 percent had ever used it.

The five expansion sites hired a total of 64 tutors. The tutors ranged in age from 18 to more than 80 years. Nearly all of the tutors were deaf. About 20 percent of the tutors were members of diverse ethnocultural groups, and more than 80 percent of the tutors were women. Sixty percent of the tutors had earned a college degree. About three-fourths of the tutors had other jobs in a variety of professions, though more than half were in education.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SHARED READING PROJECT

Each of the expansion sites implemented the essential Shared Reading administration, recruitment, training, and tutoring processes sketched by the project logic model. At the same time, local implementations reflected the unique populations and resources of each site, such as:

- Non-school-based sites networked with schools and other programs that provided services to deaf and hard of hearing persons to recruit tutors and families for the Shared Reading Project.
- Some sites networked with their local deaf communities the first year to identify potential tutors. In subsequent years, the expansion sites depended more and more on “word-of-mouth” within the deaf community to recruit tutors.
- The long distances and widely dispersed populations at the rural sites presented some of the greatest implementation challenges to recruiting, training, and supervising tutors, as well as getting book bags to families.
- Sites used a variety of strategies for matching tutors and families, including considerations of culture, gender, family and tutor preferences, personality, families’ communication skills, tutor literacy, tutors’ experiences with special populations, and traveling requirements.
- In the second year of the Project, the expansion sites refined and improved strategies for training and supervising tutors.
- The Shared Reading Project made accommodations to make tutoring and the materials accessible to families who spoke a language other than English. While these families could choose to have support from interpreters during tutoring sessions, few chose to do so, in order to develop their own sign language skills.
- At the end of the first year, the expansion sites found that some families thought 20 weeks was too long for the expected period of tutoring. They preferred 10 to 15 weeks. While families seemed to prefer a shorter period within one year, many wanted to continue with the Shared Reading Project in following years. Several of the continuing sites allowed families to repeat their participation in the Shared Reading Project, in addition to serving new families.
- Sustainability of the Shared Reading Project after the first year depended on program policies and priorities, available resources, organizational stability, funding, and individual as well as institutional commitment.

TUTORS AND FAMILIES WORKING TOGETHER

Participating families completed from one to 22 tutoring sessions, averaging 15.4 sessions overall. The families of traditionally underserved children completed as many tutoring sessions as did other families.

The Shared Reading tutor was usually the first deaf adult with whom participating parents had ever interacted one-on-one. Both families and tutors were often nervous at first about how they would communicate with each other. Most tutors worked initially with the mother, with other family members sometimes becoming involved in later sessions. Many of the parents viewed their tutor as a coach or partner, rather than as a teacher. As parents got to know their tutors, they asked them questions about deaf culture, what it was like to be a deaf person, assistive devices, educational options, cochlear implants, and many other topics. Successful tutors were mature, dependable, respectful of the family's culture, non-judgmental about parents' sign language skills or the family's educational choices for the deaf child, and effective communicators.

Tutors participated in the Shared Reading Project for a variety of reasons. Some were looking for extra income. Others said they became tutors to be able to help deaf children and their hearing parents learn to communicate and interact in ways that the tutors had not with their own parents when they were growing up. Several of the tutors said their hearing parents had not known how to share books with them. Other tutors wanted to learn new skills. Some whose regular jobs were in schools wanted opportunities to work more with parents. Others loved to read and wanted to pass that on to deaf and hard of hearing children.

Before the Shared Reading Project, participating parents experienced a number of problems when they tried to share books with their deaf and hard of hearing children. These problems included getting and holding the child's attention, not understanding their child's signs, not knowing the signs needed to read the books they had, and having trouble holding the book and signing at the same time. After the Shared Reading Project, parents said they had learned techniques for directing the child's visual attention and how to sign stories to their children, focus on the meaning of the story, utilize storytelling and role-playing, vary the placement of signs while reading, and follow their child's lead.

FAMILY OUTCOMES

The Project seems to have particularly benefited families who shared books less recently before the project began or who spoke a language other than English. The following outcomes begin to provide evidence that the Shared Reading Project was effective in helping parents learn to share books with traditionally underserved deaf and hard of hearing children:

- The expansion sites were successful in recruiting and involving families of traditionally underserved deaf and hard of hearing children to participate in the Shared Reading Project – 87% of the children belonged to one or more of the traditionally underserved groups.
- During the Shared Reading Project, participating families shared books an average of 5.2 times a week. In comparison, the 1996 National Household Education Survey found that 83 percent of 3- to 5-year-old children in the general population were read to three or more times a week by a family member.
- Within individual families, the rate of booksharing remained fairly consistent during the tutoring period. Families who shared books frequently during the first weeks of tutoring tended to share books at similar rates during later weeks

of tutoring.

- There were differences among families in how often they shared books. Higher booksharing rates were associated with families who used a language other than English, families with more adults living in the home, fewer booksharing problems before the Shared Reading Project, familiarity with telephone relay, and participation in more Shared Reading tutoring sessions.
- Before participating in the Shared Reading Project, 42 percent of parents reported that they had read to their deaf or hard of hearing children in the week before a pre-Project survey. After the Project tutoring ended, 74 percent of parents reported reading to their child in the week before a post-Project survey.
- Participating parents reported that their sign language skills improved and that communication with their deaf and hard of hearing children increased.
- Children's attention seemed to increase as parents learned more attention-getting and booksharing strategies.
- Family booksharing before the Shared Reading Project was not predictive of booksharing during or after participation in the Shared Reading Project. However, families who had read less recently before the pre-Project survey tended to participate in more tutoring sessions. In addition, higher booksharing rates during the Project were associated with more recent booksharing after the Shared Reading Project.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this evaluation indicate that the Shared Reading Project effectively translated the lessons learned from research about how deaf adults read to young deaf children into strategies that hearing parents and caregivers learned and used with their own deaf and hard of hearing children. Positive changes associated with the Shared Reading Project took place in family booksharing at the five expansion sites. Among participating families, traditionally underserved children were read to as often as children who have customarily had better access to educational services. In one particular group – families who speak a language other than English – children were read to more frequently than were children from families who speak English.

The evaluation leads to several recommendations:

- Hearing parents of young deaf and hard of hearing children need early exposure to positive deaf role models. Early interactions with deaf adults and deaf families, sign language, and the deaf community can provide parents with valuable support as they learn to communicate with and accept their deaf or hard of hearing child.
- More booksharing opportunities are needed for deaf and hard of hearing children who live in one-parent families. One-parent families generally have less time and fewer resources than two-parent or extended families. Expanding tutoring sessions to include other family members and friends, and more booksharing opportunities in school, are needed to support early literacy development.

- Families indicated that they would like the Shared Reading Project to include books featuring Disney titles and more books about holidays. More Shared Reading book bags are needed that reflect the wide range of family interests.
 - The accommodations built into the Shared Reading Project for families who spoke languages other than English seem to have been successful, not only in increasing booksharing with deaf or hard of hearing children in these families, but also in helping parents improve their command of English. Further dissemination of the Shared Reading Project could help improve family as well as child literacy.
 - The effectiveness of Shared Reading Project adaptations that are distinct departures from the original model and represent alternative delivery systems, such as community-based adaptations, need to be evaluated.
 - The effectiveness of varying intensities of the Shared Reading Project, such as shortening the tutoring period to 15 weeks or enrolling families for a second or third year, need to be evaluated.
 - Further evaluations are needed to determine if families sustain increased booksharing after their participation in the Shared Reading Project ceases, and if they transfer what they have learned to books not included in the Shared Reading Project.
 - Evaluation of the long-term impact of the Shared Reading Project on the reading achievement of deaf and hard of hearing children should be undertaken.
 - The original Shared Reading Project was intended for families of deaf and hard of hearing children age eight and younger. Many requests have been received from other programs across the country to extend the Shared Reading Project principles, training, and materials to target the literacy needs of older children as well.
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For more information about the Shared Reading Project, contact:

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