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Early Literacy Matters

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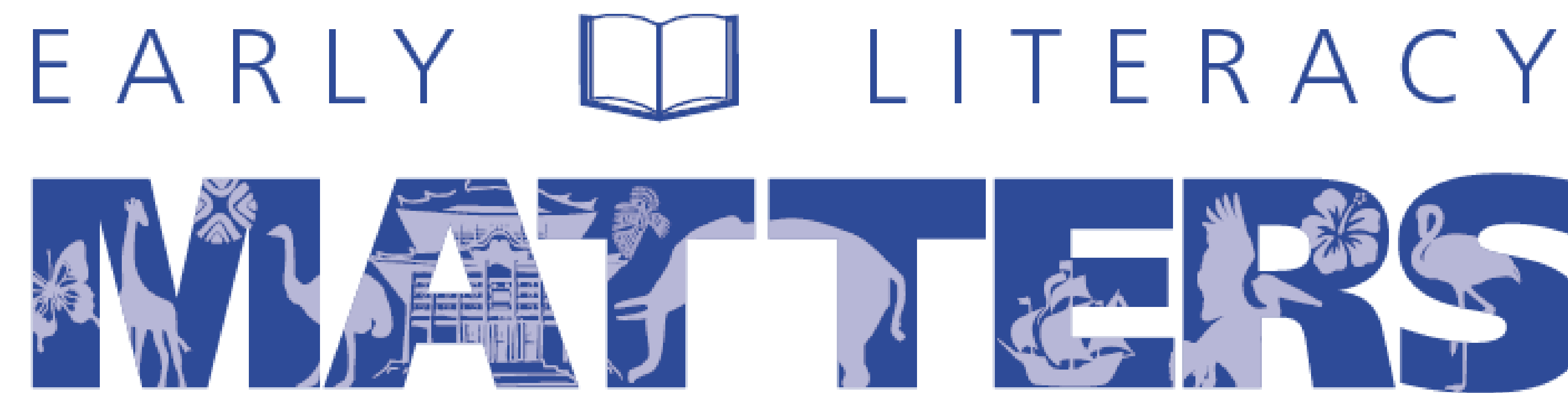
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Summary/Abstract

Early Literacy Matters (ELM) is a partnership between the University of Massachusetts Boston, Lynn Public Schools, and the Gregg Neighborhood House. Our goal is to create 8 preschool centers of excellence impacting 300 children per year identified as “at risk for academic failure.” ELM has transformed 17 classrooms that serve children speaking over 41 languages. 75% of ELM children speak a first language other than English or have limited English proficiency, and 16% receive special education services. ELM offers research-based curricula, professional development, and community/family involvement with intentional instruction proven to enrich children’s learning experiences. We offer professional development combined with an early literacy coaching program, onsite consultation with nationally recognized faculty, coursework for college credit, and in-class support to ensure high-quality classroom practice.

Goals and Objectives

- Goal 1** Improve language and literacy outcomes for all at-risk preschoolers via high quality, age-appropriate language and literacy instruction.
- Goal 2** Provide and model high-quality language and literature-rich classrooms.
- Goal 3** Increase teachers’ knowledge and skills in using scientifically based reading research (SBRR) practices.
- Goal 4** Ensure literacy coaches have knowledge and relationship-building know-how to support teachers’ Early Reading First (ERF) implementation and integration of SBRR practice and knowledge.
- Goal 5** Integrate ERF with Community Literacy Programs to foster children’s language and literacy skills, enhance family literacy, and coordinate with K-3rd grade.

Results/Impact

Teachers implemented the Opening the World of Learning (OWL) curriculum. OWL focuses instruction on building vocabulary, background knowledge, and language and literacy skills; daily shared reading; and opportunities for children to engage in conversations with adults and peers to foster higher-order thinking. Additional OWL-like curriculum units were created. Professional development and coaching supported curriculum implementation. Teachers collected data three times per year on all children. The evaluator, coaches, and professional development days supported teachers in examining this data and using it to inform and differentiate instruction. The Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) were used to measure classroom quality. Data supported changes to the physical, temporal, and emotional climate of the classrooms. Materials and supplies needed to implement OWL and create a “Center of Excellence” were added to classrooms. Significant improvements were made between fall 2010 and spring 2011 to classroom environments. Strongest gains were made in the Instructional Support Dimension of the CLASS, as measured in instructional format, concept development, language modeling, and quality of feedback.

Approaches and Methods

The ELM project is a quasi-experimental evaluation in which pre- and post-tests, comparison groups, and qualitative and quantitative analysis methods are used to measure classroom and student performance. The intervention provided includes implementation of the Opening the World of Learning (OWL) curriculum, regular collection of classroom and student-level progress-monitoring data to inform instruction, and targeted weekly in-classroom coaching and regular professional development.

Conclusion

- **Content-rich curriculum matters.**
- **Quality learning environments** make a difference and include funding for child-sized furnishings, materials, books, facility upkeep, and improvements.
- **Intensive targeted professional development and mentor coaching** is an effective means for supporting teachers.
- **Embracing lifelong learning** impacts teachers’ willingness to embrace new knowledge and skills to augment current classroom practices.
- **Collecting, analyzing, and using progress-monitoring data** improves student outcomes.

References and Resources

Early Literacy Matters website:
<http://elm.drupalgardens.com/>

Partner Information

Gregg Neighborhood House: christ@gregghouse.com
Lynn Public Schools: flynnm@lynnschools.org
Institute for Community Inclusion: lisa.vanthiel@umb.edu
Early Childhood Associates: <http://www.earlychildhoodassociates.com/>

Additional partners include the Lynn Public Library, North Shore Community College, Family and Children’s Services, and Operation Bootstrap.