
Early Literacy Summer Institute Professional Development

Study Overview

The School District of Philadelphia held three Literacy Summer Institutes between summer 2015 and summer 2017. Teachers attended these Summer Institutes as a part of the Early Literacy Specialist (ELS) initiative, which also provided early literacy coaching to K-3 teachers.

The purpose of the Institute was to prepare teachers to implement the District’s Balanced Literacy Framework, enhance their knowledge of best practices in early literacy, and improve the teaching practices of participants through high-quality professional development (PD).

ORE administered a pre- and post-Institute assessment of early literacy knowledge (ELK), administered daily surveys, and conducted observations of selected sessions to answer the following research questions:

1. How does teacher knowledge of early literacy practices change after participating in the Institute?
2. Do changes in teacher knowledge differ by ELK construct (e.g., working with ELs or phonemic awareness)?
3. How do pre- and post-Institute ELK assessment scores differ by years of teaching experience?
4. Were participants satisfied with the quality of the professional development offered at Institute?

Why is this study important to SDP?

Teacher professional development is a crucial component of Anchor Goal 2: 100% of 8-year-olds will read on grade level. In order for all K-3 teachers to implement the 120-minute literacy block with fidelity, they need to have a strong foundation in early literacy best practices and the Balanced Literacy Framework. The Summer Institute PD weeks provided all K-3 teachers with in-depth training around these best practices to ensure consistent implementation of the block District-wide and prepared teachers to work with a full time literacy coach.

About the Summer Institutes

- Beginning in 2015, Summer Institutes were held in June or July for five days each (Monday – Friday).
- A similar schedule of events took place each year. Each day began with a plenary speaker, followed by three 90-minute topic-specific PD sessions. Each day concluded with 30 minutes of school reflection meetings.
- The sessions covered topics such as guided reading, working with ELs, classroom organization during the literacy block, and phonemic awareness.

Who participated?

- 1,935 teachers and school staff from 148 K-3 elementary schools attended Institute over three years (2015-2017).
- A total of 683 teachers completed both pre- and post-Institute assessments that measured their Early Literacy Knowledge (ELK).

Selected Findings

Each year, teachers who completed both the pre- and post-Institute early learning knowledge (ELK) assessment (n=683) had statistically significantly higher scores on the post-Institute assessment than the pre-Institute assessment, suggesting improvements in teacher knowledge due to Institute attendance. Across all three years, ELK scores improved by nine percentage points after attending Institute. Teachers attending the 2016 Institute saw the greatest increase in their ELK scores (+10 percentage points), while teachers attending the 2015 ELK saw the smallest increase (+6 percentage points). All of these increases were statistically significant ($p<.001$).

Across the three years of Institute, the average construct score increased across all constructs from the pre- to post-assessment. A construct score is the combination of responses to multiple questions about a similar topic. In this case, each construct aligns with a session offered at Institute. *Developing Writers in the Literacy Block and Beyond* had the highest construct score, with an average of 76% of teachers answering the construct questions correctly on the post-assessment. *Working with ELs* (English Learners) had the lowest construct score on the post-assessment (48% of teachers answered the construct questions correctly).

New, Early Career, Mid-Career, and Veteran teachers' post-Institute ELK scores were all statistically significantly higher than their pre-Institute scores, suggesting improvements in knowledge due to Institute attendance. New teachers demonstrated significantly less growth between the pre- and post-assessment (+2 percentage points) than teachers in other experience groups (+9, +9, and +8 percentage points, for early career, mid-career, and veteran, respectively) ($p<0.05$). This may indicate that some experience teaching literacy is needed prior to attending Institute.

All three years, participants responded positively about Institute facilitation, use of time, and content of the sessions. Between 80% and 92% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the PD goals and objectives were clear, the facilitators were knowledgeable and helpful, time was used efficiently, and that new practices were modeled and explained. The majority (87%) of teachers also agreed or strongly agreed that they could use what they learned to positively impact their classroom (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percent of Teachers Who Agree or Strongly Agree with the Following Statements on PD Quality

