

# Supporting Children's Language & Literacy Development

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# Areas of Research

- Understanding bilingual language and literacy development in young children
  - & the role of cultural and environmental influences on development
- Developing language & literacy assessments for young bilingual children
- Creating and testing the effectiveness of interventions that promote children's language & literacy development
  - Professional development training for teachers
  - Home programs for parents

With an emphasis on children from low-income homes

# Current projects

- Development of a phonological awareness test for bilingual Spanish-English speaking children ages 3 to 6 years
- Development of a training program for parents of kindergarteners with language disorders
  - Training sessions are provided on a app for their tablet or cell phone
  - Visits to the home from a language coach who is a speech-language therapist

# Current Projects Cont'd

- Will talk about two additional projects
- Training program for parents of children learning two languages
- Professional development program for kindergarten teachers



# TRAINING PROGRAM FOR PARENTS

# The Program

- Title: Mothers Educating Their Children
- A book-reading intervention that
  - Teaches mothers to use high-quality language strategies
- The goal is for parents to promote their children's development of their home language (Spanish) and English

# Development of the Program: “Mothers Educating their Children”

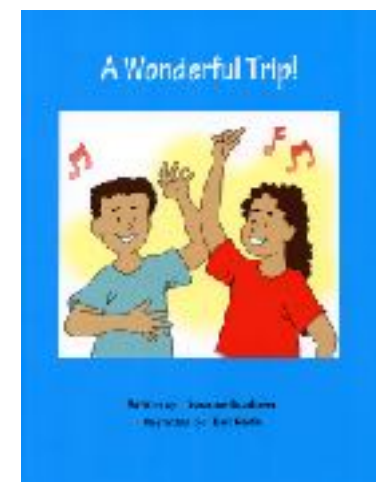
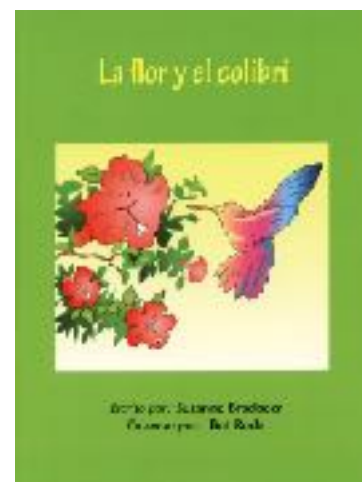
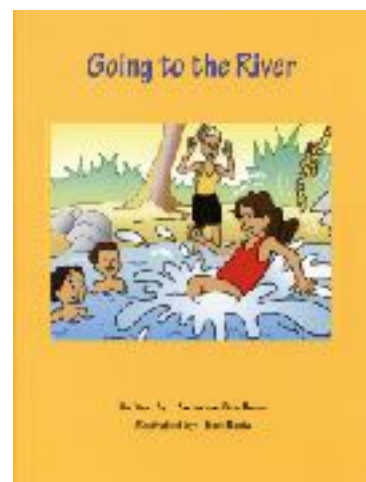
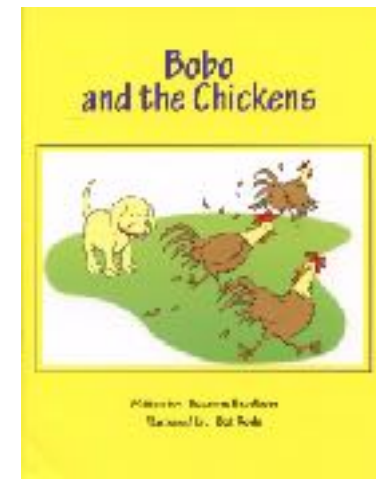
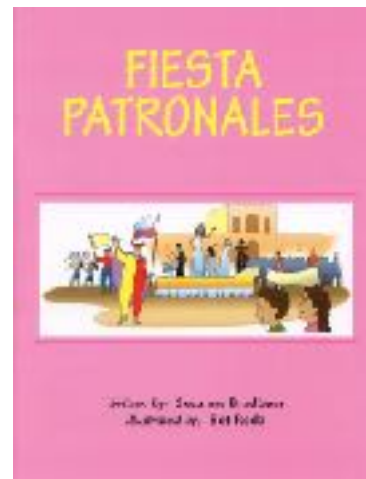
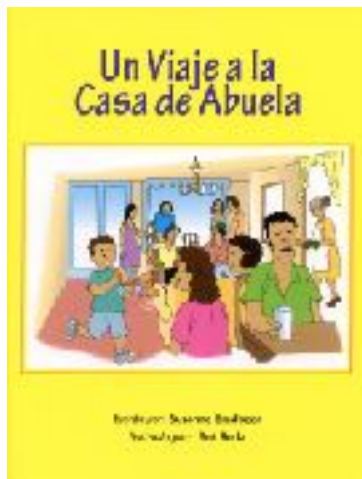
- Consulted to research literature on
  - Language & literacy development
  - Book-reading interventions
- Interviewed mothers about
  - their beliefs about language & literacy development
  - what they do to support their children’s language & literacy development
  - what they wanted their children to learn
  - what they wanted from a parent training program
- Obtained input from teachers and parents about the program as it was developed

# Developed Books for the Program

- Created 8 books with meaningful stories
- Taught parents to
  - teach vocabulary words to their children in home language & English
  - ask questions about the story
  - use high-quality language strategies to promote language skills
  - engage their children in conversations about the books



# The Books



"Do you need any more help, Abuelita?" Rosa asks. "No thank you, Nieta. I think there is someone outside who would like to see you now."



*Who is waiting outside to see Rosa?*

*Why is Abuela smiling at Rosa?*

# The Parent Program

- Eight visits with parents
- During each visit,
  - taught parents key strategies for promoting language development
    - Asking open-ended questions
    - Modeling language for children
    - Expanding the phrases/sentences that children said
  - provided parents with a book to read to children in their home language & English

# The parent program cont'd

- Also provided parents with
  - Supplemental activities to promote language development
    - Vocabulary development
    - Story telling activities

# The Effectiveness of the Intervention

- Intervention & Control group
  - Pre/Post Testing
    - Child assessments
      - Vocabulary
      - Narrative abilities
- Intervention Group
  - 8 home visits carried out by bilingual staff
- Control Group
  - Received packets targeting math activities

# Results

- Children in the intervention group increased their
  - vocabulary skills and
  - oral language skills

# Parents reported that they

- Enjoyed all the books
- Learned
  - To ask questions about books
  - that there's more to book reading than reading the text
- Interacted more with children during book reading
- Used key language strategies when reading other books to their children



# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS



# Language Quality in Classrooms

- In the US, the quality of language used by teachers for instruction is very low (Justice et al. 2008).
- Little time is spent teaching children new vocabulary words and building children's oral language development (Beck & McKeown, 2007).
- Children learning English as a second language receive little supports for their language development
  - Unless they are in a bilingual school

# Language Quality cont'd

- Most curricula do not focus on building children's vocabulary and oral language (Wright & Neuman, 2013).
- Teachers do most of the talking in classrooms and ask many close-ended questions
  - Close-ended questions
    - Questions that can be answered with one word
      - Is he happy?
      - What is he doing?
- Teachers ask few open-ended questions
  - Open-ended questions
    - Questions that have many possible answers & that require children to create a whole sentence
    - What happened?
    - Why was he scared?

# Goal: To improve teachers' language quality when talking with children and ultimately children's language skills

- My colleagues & I developed ExCELL (Exceptional Coaching to Enhance Language and Literacy)
  - Professional development program for kindergarten teachers
- Trains teachers to use high quality language practices in the classrooms to promote children's later reading skills
  - Language is the foundation for reading
    - Children need a strong vocabulary and good oral language skills in order to understand what they read

# Online Intervention: ExCELL-E



- Teachers access language and literacy-related content online, including exemplary videos
- Ongoing assessment of teacher and child progress
- Teachers practice the targeted strategies and then video record themselves using the practices in their classrooms
- Their coach provides feedback using teacher videos
- Example lesson plans

# Learning Modules

- Module 1

- Foundations for learning about oral language development

- Module 2

- Components of conversation

- Module 3

- Developing the oral language abilities of children learning two languages

- Module 4

- How to develop vocabulary

- Module 5

- Developing oral language and vocabulary through book-reading

- Module 6

- Developing oral language and vocabulary through repeated readings

- Module 7

- Developing oral language and vocabulary through center activities

- Module 8

- Developing oral language and vocabulary through circle time activities

- Module 9

- Connecting vocabulary to phonological sensitivity activities

# Book Reading and Vocabulary Development

- Excellence emphasizes the use of research-based strategies for teachers to implement during book-reading.
- Reading books provides teachers with excellent opportunities to:
  - teach oral vocabulary words
  - promote oral language skills

# Book Reading cont'd

- Teachers are trained to:
  - teach the vocabulary words to children before the book reading
    - Including defining the words using a definition appropriate for children
    - For example, engine - an engine makes the train go. It pulls the train cars on the tracks.
  - talk about the vocabulary words as they read the book
  - ask children questions about the story before, during, and after the book is read
    - Using open-ended questions
    - The goal is for teachers to have conversations with children to build their oral language skills

# ExCELL-e results

- Three randomized control trials showed
  - Significant increases in the language quality of classroom teachers
    - Teaching more vocabulary
    - Defining more words
    - Reading books more frequently to children
  - Significant increases in children's vocabulary skills
- A recent study of the on-line version showed
  - Significant increases in the language quality of classroom teachers



# Currently, we are

- Expanding ExCELL-e to include
  - Training for assistant teachers
  - Ways of engaging parents in promoting their children's language skills
- Implementing ExCELL-e in
  - New York City
  - Classrooms that have large numbers of children who are learning two languages
- Goal is to improve the language skills of children who are learning English

**Thank you!**

**THESE SLIDES WILL NOT BE PRESENTED  
ONLY IF THERE ARE QUESTIONS  
RELATED TO THESE SLIDES**

# Current Study

- Research Question: Does this online version of ExCELL result in changes in teacher vocabulary-enhancing practices during book-reading?
  - Are teachers more likely to identify words to focus on?
  - Do teachers define more words?
  - Do teachers provide more talk during book-reading?
  - Do teachers ask more questions/prompts (both closed-ended and open-ended)?
  - Do teachers increase the time they spend on book-reading?

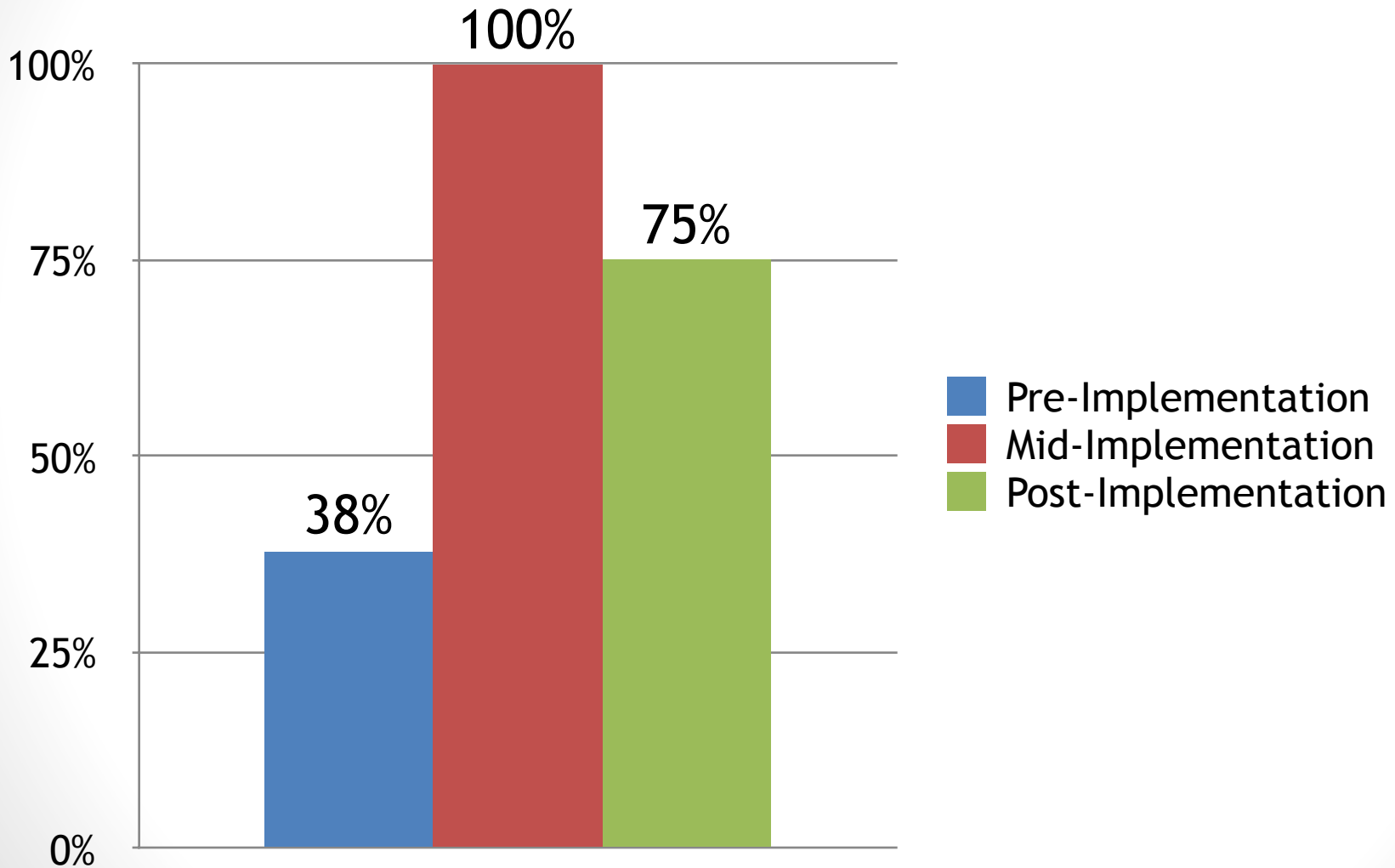
# Current Study

- Sample:
  - Pilot year sample: 9 PreK, 3 Kindergarten, and 4 First Grade classrooms in two East Coast cities
  - Average class size 22 children; 1/3 English Language Learners
- Measures
  - Video data from pilot year teachers (Pre-, Mid- and Post-Intervention)
  - Teachers read a story-book of their choice to their class
  - Counts of targeted book-reading behaviors (i.e. presenting words, defining words, asking questions) both pre- and post-intervention

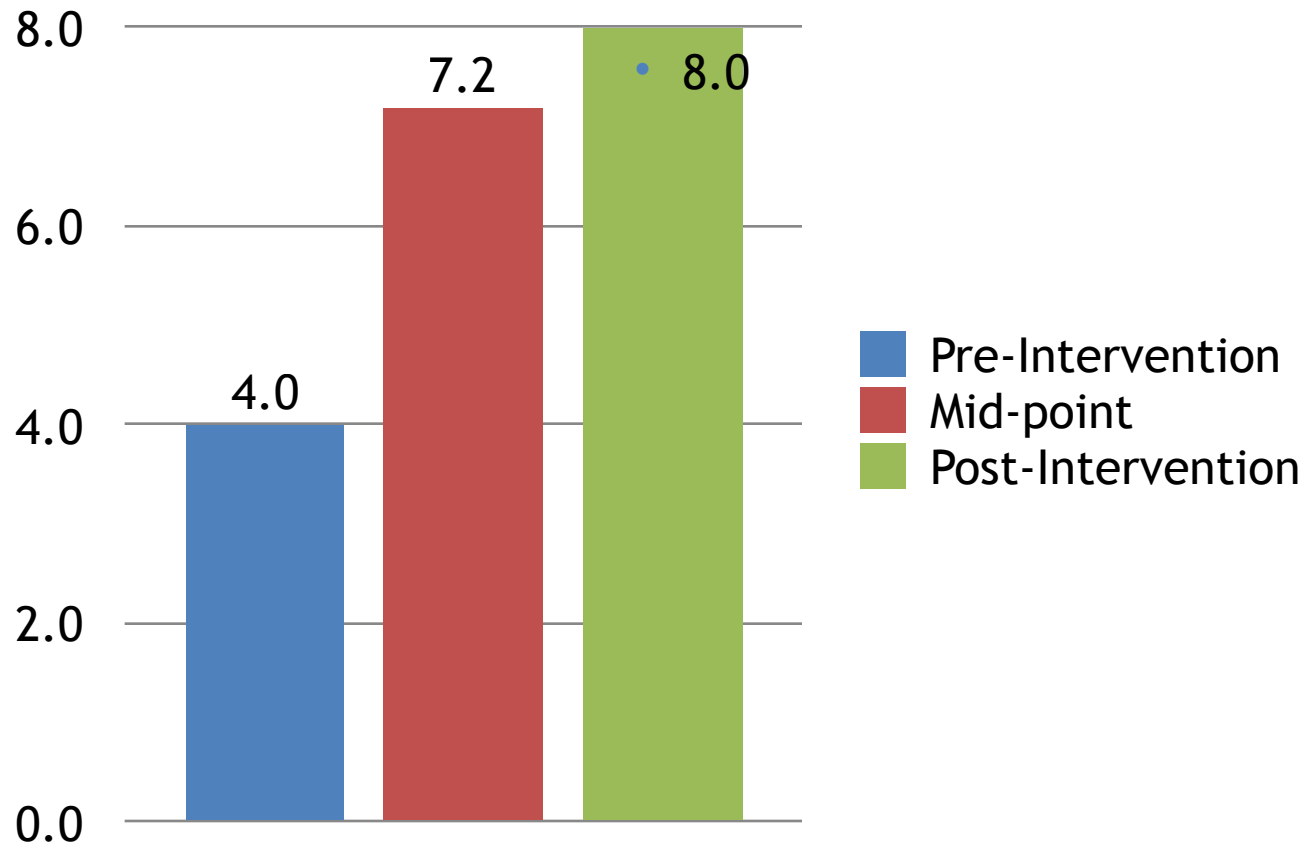
# Results

- Large, statistically significant differences pre- vs. post-intervention for all targeted outcomes

# Percentage of Teachers Who Presented Words During Book-Read

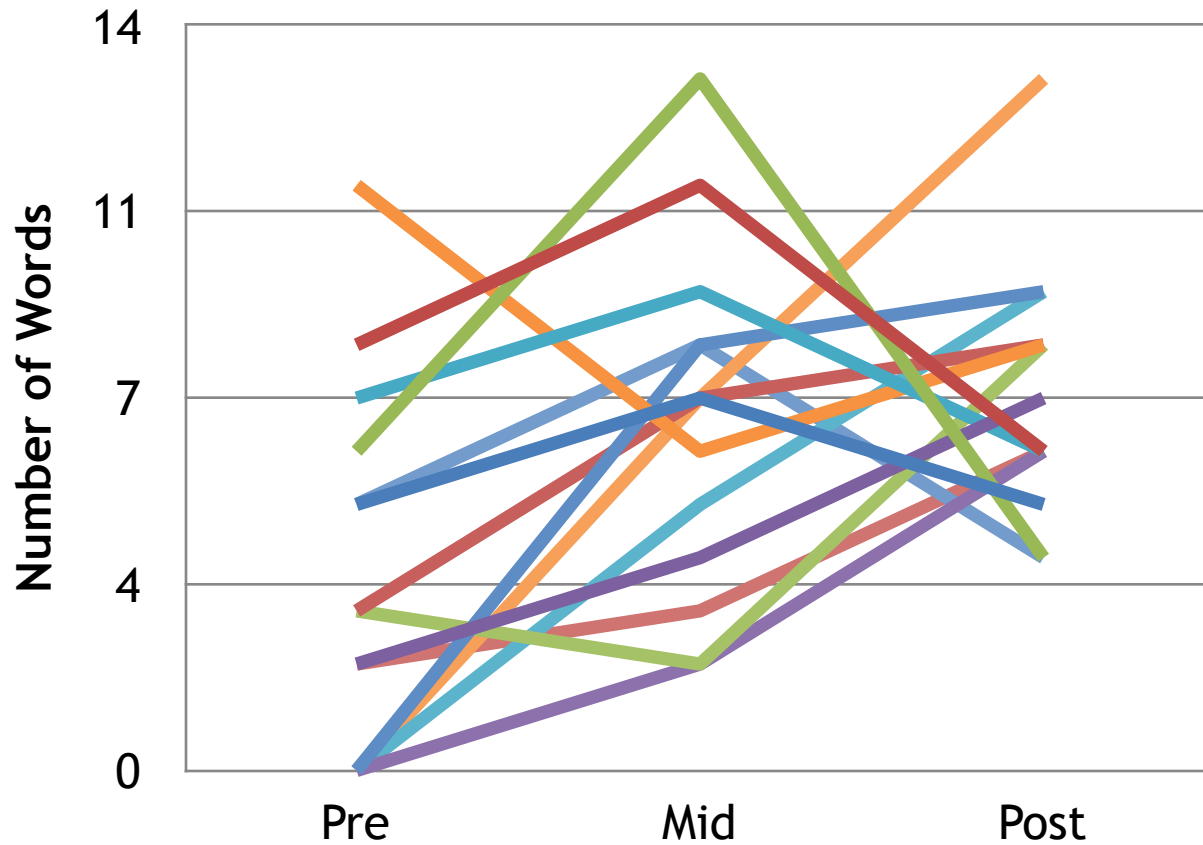


# Number of Words Defined





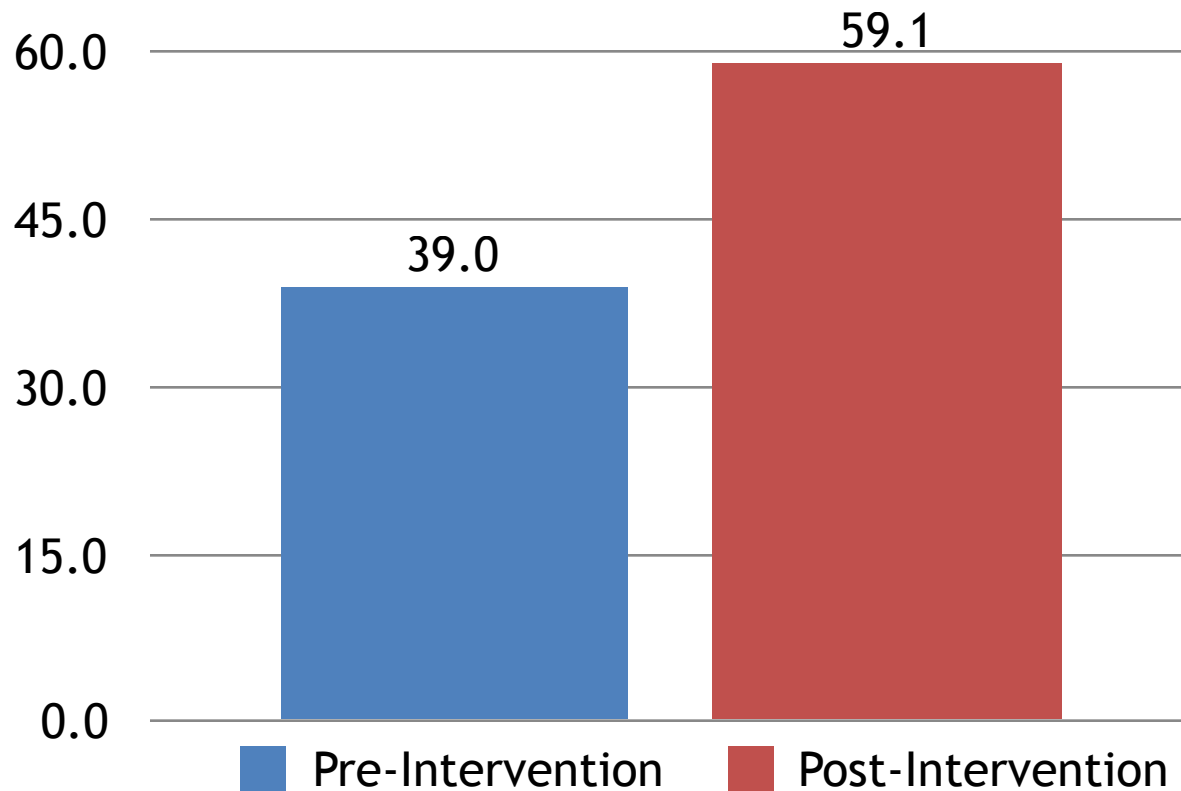
# Number of Words Defined, by Teacher



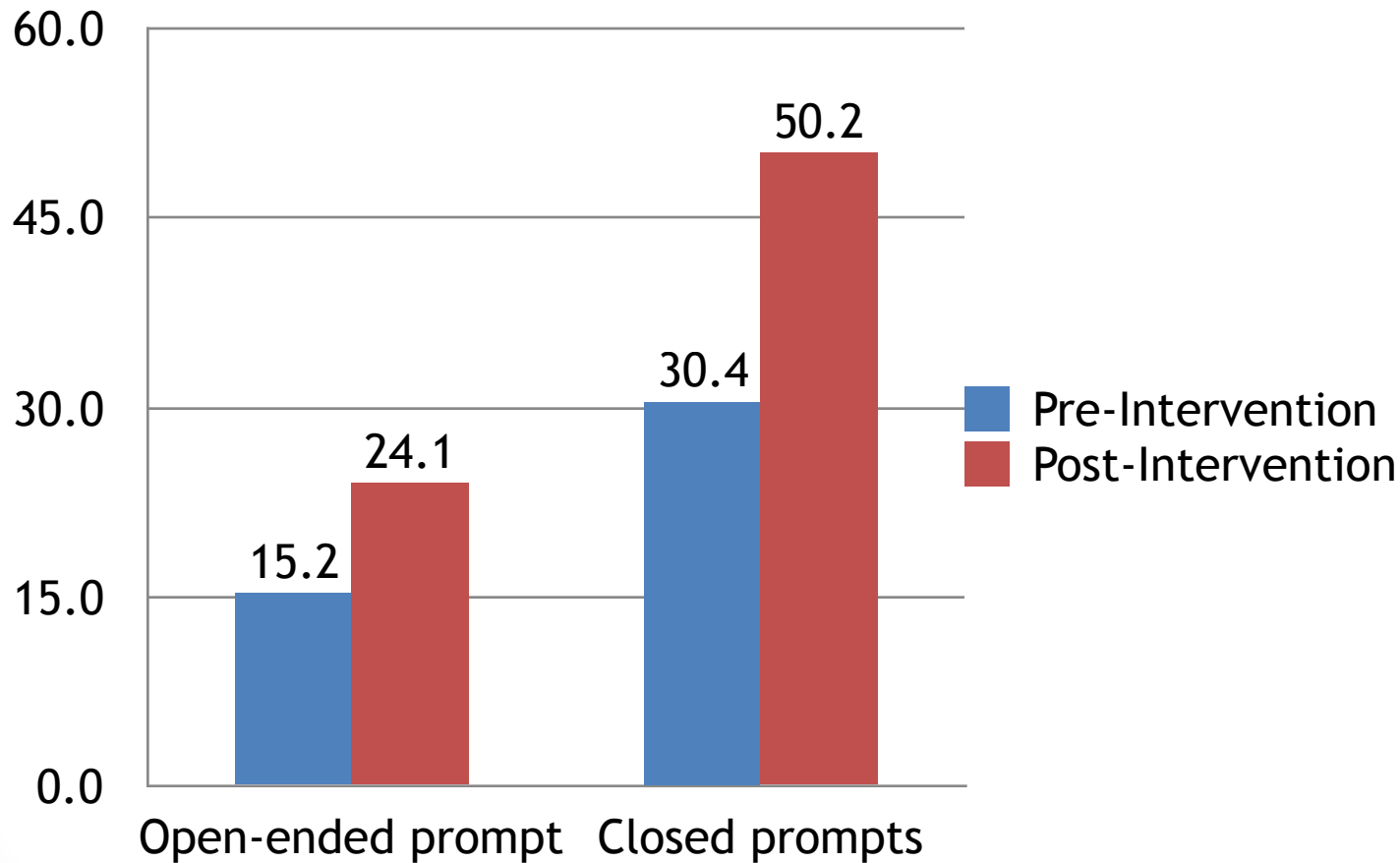
# Words Defined in PreK

Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
snore, rumbled, rattled, hogged, share	fruits, vegetables, dairy, protein, sweets
brother, sister, stretching, cradle, run away, ignore, mutter, prediction	fresh food, vacation, motor home, exercise, gulping, healthy
blanket, sigh, odd, mutter, cellar, greenhouse	fond, fussy, rare, difficult
brave, swooped	carnivore, jaws, hunted, herbivore, claws, museum, huge
<i>No words defined</i>	curious, plain, hyena, termite, hooves, loping, clatter, figure out, clatter
chicks, hatch, struggle	shark, ocean, prey, extinct, cartilage, predatory, tiny, plankton,
<i>No words defined</i>	chick, hatch, habitat, squeal, lowed, bray, hay, hoe, farm, barn, weathervane, rooster, bunny, duck, goat, horse, farmer, crops, silo, barn, tractor, udder, pitchfork, colt, nocturnal
cabin, clomp, nod, scarecrow	pond, dragonfly, waddle, hover, heron, muskrat, cattails, habitat, hibernate
	browsing, title, show off, chores, jester,

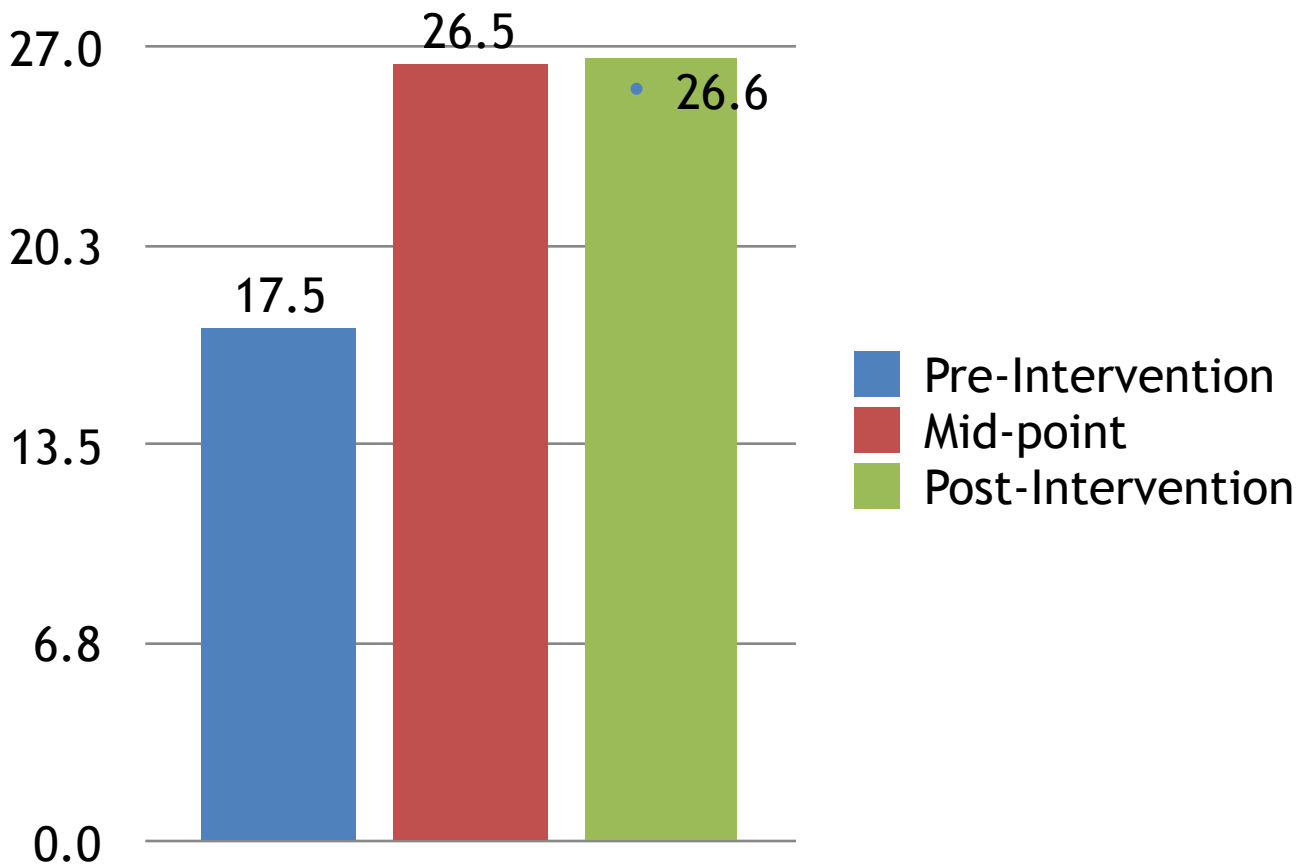
# Comments during Book Reading



# Questions and Prompts During Book Reading



# Minutes Spent Book-Reading



# Implications and Next Steps

- Teacher vocabulary-related practice during book-reading changed substantially
- The online version of ExCELL appears to have promise, compared to the more resource-intensive, in-person version
- 2015-2016 school year: random-assignment evaluation

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