Further Evidence for the Social Validity of the Center for Early Literacy Learning Practice Guides

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The social validity of the *Center for Early Literacy Learning* parent and practitioner practice guides was assessed in a study of parents of young children and practitioners working in early intervention and preschool programs (N = 230). Participants were asked to choose a practice guide posted on the *CELL* website and to make eight social validity ratings of the guide. Results showed that 85% to 94% of the participants agreed with the social validity statements, and that the parent practice guides and practitioner practice guides were assessed similarly.

This *CELLpaper* includes findings from a study of parents' and practitioners' social validity ratings of both the *CELL* parent and practitioner practice guides (*www.earlyliteracylearning.org*). Social validity refers to consumers and end-users judgments of the importance and acceptability of an intervention and the intended benefits of an intervention (Foster & Mash, 1999). The social validity of an intervention is important because it predicts the adoption, use, and fidelity of an intervention which in turn affects its outcome (Dunst, Pace, & Hamby, 2007; Trivette, Dunst, Hamby, & Pace, 2007).

In a number of *CELL* studies we assessed the social validity of the practice guides for parents. These practice guides can be used by parents, or by parents and practitioners in collaboration, to promote the pre, emergent, and early literacy skills of young children birth to six years of age (Dunst, Trivette, Masiello, Roper, & Robyak, 2006). Findings from these studies showed that the parent practice guides received high social validity ratings (Trivette, Dunst, Masiello, Gorman, &

Hamby, 2009), parents and practitioners who used the practices with young children judged the practice guides as more socially valid compared to non-users (Trivette et. al., 2009), and that social validity predicted the likelihood of use of the practice (Trivette, Dunst, & Hamby, 2010). The extent to which parents and practitioners similarly judged the social validity of the CELL practice guides was the focus of analysis in this paper.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 230 parents (N=138) and practitioners (N=92) recruited by posting invitations on both the *CELL* website and parent and professional website newsletters, and by contacting early childhood programs using mailing lists obtained from professional organizations. The majority (92%) of participants were either parents of young children birth to five years of age or practitioners employed in early childhood programs serving either or both children with or without disabilities or delays. Others included parents of older children and program supervisors.

Procedure

A social validity scale used in a previous *CELL* study was used in the present study (Trivette et. al., 2009). The scale includes eight items measuring the *importance* and *acceptability* of both the practices and their intended outcomes (e.g., "This practice would easily fit into my daily schedule," "The practice would be worth my time and effort to use"). Each item was rated on a four-point scale asking participants

to *strongly disagree*, *disagree*, *agree*, or *strongly agree* with each scale item statement.

Practice Guides

Participants were asked to select either a parent practice guide or practitioner practice guide to read and then complete the social validity scale. There are 66 parent practice guides and 66 practitioner practice guides from which participants could select. The practice guides are grouped into sets for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and are organized by seven different literacy domains (Dunst, Trivette, Masiello, Roper, & Robyak, 2006).

Method of Analysis

The social validity of the practice guides was determined by the percentage of participants who either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with each statement on the scale. The extent to which the parents and practitioners differed in terms of their social validity ratings was determined by between participant *t*-tests and Cohen's *d* effect sizes for the differences in the parents' and practitioners' mean social validity scores. The same was done for the differences in the social validity scores for the parent practice guides compared to practitioner practices guides.

RESULTS

Social Validity

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of participants who *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with each of the social validity statements. Nearly all of the parents and practitioners agreed that the practice guides were both important and acceptable. The participants agreed that the practice guides would help a child learn early literacy skills and that the practices would be interesting to a child. The parents

Table 1
Number and Percentage of Study Participants Judging the CELL Practice Guides as Socially Valid

Scale Item	Number	Percent
Would help a child learn literacy skills	216	94
Easy to follow	214	93
Practice would be interesting to a child	212	92
Easy to understand	209	91
Worth my time and effort	207	90
Practices clearly described	207	90
Easy to use	200	87
Fits into my schedule	196	85

and practitioners also agreed that the practice guides clearly described the practices and that they were easy to understand, follow, and use. They also indicated that the practice guides would be worth their time and effort to use and that the practices would easily fit into the participants' everyday activities and routines.

Between Group Differences

We tested for both between type of practice guides (parent guides vs. practitioner guides) and between type of respondent (parents vs. practitioners) differences. The mean social validity scores for the parent practice guides was 3.39 (SD = 0.50) and the mean score for the practitioner practice guides was 3.40 (SD = 0.66), *t* = 0.03, *p* > .90, Cohen's *d* = 0.01, indicating that the two sets of practice guides were judged similarly valid. Examination of the mean social validity item scores comparing the parent vs. practitioner practice guides showed that both sets were also judged the same, *t*s = 0.29 to 1.03, *p*s > 0.30, Cohen's *d*s = 0.07 to 0.22.

The mean social validity score for the parents was 3.35 (SD = 0.51) and the mean score for the practitioners was 3.54 (SD = 0.49), *t* = 2.35, *p* < .05, Cohen's *d* = 0.37, indicating that the practitioners judged the practice guides as somewhat more socially valid compared to the parents. Examination of the mean social validity item scores showed that four of the eight social validity items were rated as more valid by the practitioners compared to the parents, *t*s = 2.55 to 3.38, *p*s < .05 to .001, Cohen's *d*s = 0.42 to 0.56. The items for which there were between respondent differences were: (1) easily fit into my daily schedule, (2) worth my time and effort, (3) practices would be interesting to a child, and (4) practices would promote early literacy learning. The differences in the mean social validity ratings, however, were less than one half a point for all the comparisons.

DISCUSSION

Findings showed that both the parent practice guides and practitioner practice guides were judged as socially valid by the study participants, and that there were no differences in the social validity of either type of practice guides and only a few differences by respondent (parents vs. practitioners). Those differences, however, were quite small and not very revealing.

As part of the development and evaluation of the practice guides, parent versions have been rewritten to lower their readability and the practitioner versions are in the process of being rewritten. The versions of the parent practice guides that were evaluated in this study were written at a 7th to 8th grade level. The rewritten parent practice guides are at a 5th to 6th grade level (Dunst, Meter, Trivette, & Masiello, 2010). Feedback and input from both parents and practitioners were used to simplify the practice guides and to improve their content. The social validity of the practice guides, to-

gether with the fact that the reading levels are three grades below the most widely read material worldwide (Impact Information, 2005), should contribute to their adoption and use. Studies of the effectiveness of the practice guides in terms of influencing child literacy skills are in the process of being completed.

AUTHORS

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