Research Summary

The HANEN I'M READY!™ Program for Building Early Literacy in the Home

1. Program features

The *I'm Ready!* Program translates the latest research in early literacy development into practical, immediately usable strategies that benefit children at risk for literacy difficulties and also enrich language and literacy development in children who are developing typically. The program is delivered by a Licensed Hanen Certified *I'm Ready!* Program Leader to a group of parents, with assistance from support staff. It includes:

- six parent group training sessions, plus an Orientation Session facilitated by the *I'm Ready!* Program Leader
- six children-only groups occurring simultaneously with the parent groups, facilitated by support staff (the children-only group is optional for the Orientation Session)
- six live practice sessions occurring after each of the parent and children groups

I'm Ready! is supported by user-friendly resources:

- the parent guidebook *I'm Ready: How to Prepare Your Child for Reading Success* (Greenberg & Weitzman, 2014)
- Program Slides that include video examples for the group sessions
- HANEN I'M READY!™ *Making Hanen Happen* Leaders Guide, a detailed manual for the Program Leader

The slides and Leaders Guide are all available as downloadable resources for Licensed *I'm Ready!* Program Leaders.

2. Program rationale

The HANEN I'M READY!™ Program for Building Early Literacy in the Home shows parents of young children (three to five years of age) how to build emergent literacy support naturally into shared reading and other parts of the day. Numerous studies have demonstrated the power of shared reading in promoting language and literacy development in young children (Aram *et al*, 2013; Baker, 2013; Britto *et al*, 2006; Bus *et al*, 1995; Hill & Diamond, 2013; Kalb & van Ours, 2014; Manolitsis *et al*, 2013; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Silinskas at al, 2012; Walker, 2014; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

In 2014, the American Academy of Pediatrics highlighted the importance of reading regularly to young children by issuing a

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Policy Statement. The Academy recommended that pediatric providers promote early literacy development for children beginning in infancy and continuing at least until kindergarten entry by advising all parents that reading aloud can enhance parent-child relationships and promote language and literacy development.

Shared reading and other literacy-related activities in the home support the development of emergent literacy. Emergent literacy includes a wide array of skills that are acquired before conventional literacy is learned, such as phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print concepts, narrative awareness, vocabulary and oral language (Justice & Pullen, 2003; Justice & Kaderavek, 2004). Emergent literacy skills prepare young children to become successful readers and writers, which is critical for their future academic success.

Emergent literacy includes meaning-related and code-related skills. Meaning-related skills refer to the skills children need to understand the meaning of text they read or have read to them, such as vocabulary, narrative comprehension and inferencing (the ability to read between the lines). To construct meaning, children must draw on narrative knowledge and higher-level language that goes beyond the here and now to connect to past experiences and future events, to predict and to make inferences that are removed from the immediate context (Westby, 1991).

Meaning-related skills highlight the critical link between language and literacy development. The extent to which children have developed their oral and receptive language skills (vocabulary, syntax (grammar) and morphology (word endings that mark tense and number)) directly influences comprehension of literacy texts and is long lasting. For example, observational studies have linked language experiences and associated language ability to reading ability from age two to Grade 4 (Walker, Greenwood, Hart, & Carta, 1994), from age three through Grade 3 (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005), from kindergarten through Grade 8 (Catts *et al*., 2006; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001) and from Grade 1 through high school (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).

Code-related skills allow for the translation of written symbols into sounds and include print knowledge, letter knowledge and phonological awareness. Language skills have also been found to predict code-related skills such as phonemic awareness and letter-sound knowledge, particularly due to the effects of increased vocabulary (Dickinson *et al*, 2010; Manolitsis *et al*, 2013).

In 2008, the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) examined the evidence regarding key skills that are observed prior to conventional literacy (i.e., between birth and age five) and are related to children's success in later reading and writing. They reviewed approximately 500 research articles completed through 2003 and identified four unique predictors of later literacy success:

- alphabet knowledge
- phonological awareness
- invented spelling
- oral language

The NELP findings provide strong evidence for the predictive power of both meaning-related skills (oral language-vocabulary, grammar and listening comprehension) and code-related skills (alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness and invented spelling that reflects letter-sound knowledge). Code-related skills more strongly predicted beginning reading when texts were easy

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to understand. Meaning-related skills played a bigger role in later literacy achievement, beginning around Grade 3. When children move into later elementary grades and middle school, language ability and associated world knowledge emerge as the abilities most associated with skilled reading rather than the code-related abilities associated with early reading ability (Catts, Adlof, & Weismer, 2006; Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010; Vellutino, Tunmer, Jaccard, & Chen, 2007).

Children who develop these important meaning- and code-related foundations for reading during the preschool years are well-prepared for formal instruction in reading and writing. However, children with poor early literacy skills are less able to take advantage of reading instruction in kindergarten (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Positive literacy-related experiences in early childhood have the potential to raise the school-readiness skills of all children, including those at risk from their home environments (e.g., because of minority or socio-economic status), language impairment and impoverished literacy experiences (McGinty & Justice, 2009). This means that for children at risk for academic failure, early and intensive language support is critical (Biemiller, 2005; Biemiller & Boote, 2006).

Shared reading is a particularly effective context for promoting meaning- and code-related emergent literacy skills since it:

- exposes children to unfamiliar and often less frequently used vocabulary (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001)
- provides opportunities for children to hear the more complex syntax of written language (Hill & Launder, 2010)
- promotes joint attention through visually appealing, stationary illustrations that make it easy for adults to responds to children's interest
- provides frequent opportunities for responsive interactions about word meanings and events in the book (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Dickinson *et al*, 2012)
- is a springboard for conversations about the world that would otherwise occur infrequently (Hindman *et al*, 2013)
- models how printed words communicate meaning and how sound awareness pairs with letter recognition

Given the power of shared reading, it is not surprising that increased frequency of shared reading has been associated with:

- stronger language, literacy and interaction skills (Hill & Diamond, 2013)
- stronger reading, cognitive and numeracy skills up to at least 10–11 years of age (Kalb & van Ours, 2014)
- better reading, math and sustained attention and fewer negative behaviors in preschool (Baker, 2013)
- larger receptive and expressive vocabulary (Pillard-Durodaol *et al*, 2011)
- better word reading skills in kindergarten (Silinskas *et al*, 2012)
- letter knowledge and phonological awareness that predicted reading fluency in kindergarten and Grade 1 (Manolitsis *et al*, 2013)
- better executive functioning skills/self-regulation (ability to be organized, pay attention and stay focused on tasks) (Duncan *et al*, 2007; Walker, 2014)

Advising parents to read to their children is helpful, but it is also important to consider what parents do during the reading (Britto *et al*, 2006). The quality of the reading is as important as the quantity! Providing parents with clear guidance about what to talk about when they read, and how to actively engage their child

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in discussing the book, will significantly enhance the impact of the reading.

Hindman *et al* (2013) examined the shared reading practices of nearly 700 families of diverse ethnic, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The children in the sample ranged from three years, eight months to five years, two months. Results are reported for meaning-related talk and code-related talk.

Meaning-related talk

- Parents demonstrated a variety of meaning-related talk but generally used more descriptive, concrete talk that focused on content that was immediately apparent on the pages of the book, such as labeling and discussing illustrations or describing the characters and the actions. This kind of talk occurred 85 per cent of the time.
- More elaborated talk that expanded on the story, acted out the story or related the story to the children's lives only occurred about 50 per cent of the time.
- Less than 20 per cent of the talk summarized or discussed vocabulary.
- A wider variety of meaning-related remarks by parents that included elaborated talk and discussion of vocabulary was linked to more advanced language skills among the preschoolers. Specifically, children had higher vocabulary at four years of age when their mothers related the story to the children's own lives and experiences. Children's vocabulary skills were weaker for mothers who emphasized recalling/summarizing the story.
- The variety of meaning-related talk was predicted by the level of parent education.

Similarly, Aram *et al* (2013) reported that relating the story and characters to specific references from a child's life and discussing the story during and after completing the book boosted narrative (story) comprehension and recall of facts. Sparks *et al* (2012) found that mothers' elaborative forms of talk during reminiscing about behavior-related events was linked to children's semantic and print knowledge.

Others studies have also found the amount of elaborated meaning-related talk to be related to the parent's level of education. Ninio (1980) found that less educated mothers tended to talk less and use fewer verbs and adjectives. Dickinson & Tabors (2001) reported similar results but found significant variability among the families.

Code-related talk

Hindman *et al* (2013) found that parents focused primarily on the meaning of the story with little attention to the code of the text, with less than one per cent of the parent talk referring to letters or sounds. Price *et al* (2009) also found that only six per cent of parent talk focuses on print. This limited use of parents' code-related talk is concerning since children's code-related skills have been found to predict children's literacy development (Justice & Kadavarek, 2002; Piasta *et al*, 2012). Hindman concludes that this result is not surprising since children are mainly interested in the illustrations not the text and other activities beyond book reading could potentially foster code-related skills. Nevertheless, Justice & Ezell (2002) found that children made gains in print concepts when parents explicitly referenced print during reading.

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3. Why the HANEN I'M READY!™ Program is effective parent education

Key principles of adult education assert that adults are motivated to acquire new skills when instructional activities are clearly tied to their needs and reflect content they require in the practice setting (Foorman & Moats, 2004; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Landry, Swank, Smith, Assel, & Gunnewig, 2006; Powell, Steed, & Diamond, 2010). Adults learn best when they are actively engaged in the topic, when the learning takes place in authentic contexts and when specific skill practice is included (Landry *et al*., 2006).

Drawing on these best practices for adult learning, *I'm Ready!* includes opportunities for participants to:

- reflect on their own practices
- analyze videos examples of parents supporting emergent literacy with their children
- participate in discussions on strategy implementation in the home
- create *Home Plans* for incorporating strategies into their read-alouds and daily interactions with their children

A growing body of research recommends that individual practice opportunities, with one-on-one feedback from a coach to support a participant's skill acquisition and generalization of newly learned strategies are essential components of successful parent training (Rush & Shelden, 2011; Friedman *et al*, 2012; Hanft *et al*, 2004; Mulvey, 2013.) In the *I'm Ready!* Program, parents practice new strategies in live interactions with their children with support and feedback from the program leader and support staff. Parents then continue their practice at home and return to the following session to report back to the group on their successes and challenges.

The *I'm Ready!* coaching model is drawn from Rush & Shelden (2011) who describe effective coaching of parents to support behavior change as being both relationship-based and performance-based. The coaching in *I'm Ready!* is relationship-based since it aims to build parents confidence and autonomy in regards to how to read to their children and build emergent literacy in the best ways possible. It is also performance-based since it focuses on supporting parents to select and apply specific strategies to support their children's development of emergent literacy.

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4. How HANEN I'M READY!™ integrates the research on emergent literacy

Drawing from the available evidence and the NELP study, *I'm Ready!* focuses on meaning-related skills, such as vocabulary and listening comprehension and on code-related skills, such as print knowledge, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and letter-sound knowledge.

Skills found predictive of literacy success in NELP study:	***Where these skills are addressed in* I'm Ready!:**
Oral language	Session 1: Turn Book Reading into a Time to Talk
Oral language — vocabulary	Session 2: Make New Words Sparkle

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Skills found predictive of literacy success in NELP study:	*Where these skills are addressed in* I'm Ready!:
Oral language — listening comprehension	Session 3: Help Children Understand the Story Session 4: Deepen Your Child's Understanding
Print concepts Alphabet knowledge	Session 5: Build Your Child's Understanding of How Print Works
Phonological awareness Letter-sound recognition (related to invented spelling)	Session 6: Help Your Child Hear the Sounds in Words

The NELP report also reviewed studies to determine which interventions are linked to later outcomes in reading, writing and spelling. *I'm Ready!* integrates the NELP findings into its training sessions.

The NELP report found that meaning-related skills were promoted with shared reading that:	*The* I'm Ready! *Program integrates these findings by:*
...was interactive	...including strategies for how to turn book reading into a time to talk, including OWL (Observe, Wait and Listen), Follow the Child's Lead, and Keep the Conversation Going ...making interactive shared reading the context for developing vocabulary, narrative understanding, language for thinking and learning, and print knowledge
...incorporated a scaffolding approach	...teaching parents to scaffold children's emergent literacy skills within child-initiated, responsive interactions (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978)
...targeted children who were at risk or typically developing	...including parents of children who are developing typically, children who are at risk and children with mild language delays

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The NELP report found that code-related skills were promoted when intervention:	*The* I'm Ready! *Program integrates these findings by:*
...included training in phonological awareness	...including a specific strategy targeted at the development of phonological awareness, Listen... and Find One Like It, which can be used in natural situations throughout the day
...included training in letter knowledge with phonological awareness rather than phonological awareness alone	...including the POP (Point Out Print) strategy to build letter knowledge and the Four S's strategy to build letter-sound knowledge
...was not limited to rhyming activities as the primary teaching approach	...addressing rhyming but also encouraging awareness of alliteration (phonemic awareness)

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5. How HANEN I'M READY!™ strategies reflect current literature on emergent literacy

Session 1: Turn Book Reading into a Time to Talk

Many researchers have suggested that shared storybook reading is an ideal context for teaching emergent literacy skills to preschool children (Boudreau, 2008; Justice & Kaderavek, 2002; Schuele & Boudreau, 2008; van Kleeck, 2008). Shared book reading has been employed in interventions to promote both coding-related skills, such as print concepts, alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness (Justice *et al*, 2005), and oral language foundations for literacy, such as receptive and expressive vocabulary, narratives and inferences (Arnold *et al*, 1994; Dale *et al*, 1996; Peterson *et al*, 1999; van Kleeck *et al*, 2006; Wasik *et al*, 2006; Whitehurst *et al*, 1994). Interventions focusing on oral language skills during storybook reading have been found to enhance later reading comprehension (Wasik *et al*., 2006).

***I'm Ready!* strategies to support interactive book reading**

Strategy	*Supporting literature*
OWL Follow the child's lead	The reader must be sensitive to the child's level of engagement and interest (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002).
Keep the Conversation Going	More opportunities with extended conversations predict better language and literacy outcomes (Dickinson *et al*., 2001). Reading is most valuable when it is accompanied by interactive discussion, including questions to invite responses and opinions (Morrow & Gambrell, 2004; Whitehurst *et al*., 1998; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

Session 2: Make New Words Sparkle

Vocabulary growth is directly linked to success in learning to read (Storch *et al*., 2002; Snow *et al*., 1998) and to overall

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achievement in school (Biemiller, 2007; Snow *et al*, 1995). Many studies have found that vocabulary size in kindergarten and grade one predicts reading comprehension at the end of grades two and three (Hemphill & Tivman, 2008), in middle elementary years (Scarborough, 2001) and 10 years later (Cunningham *et al*., 1997). Children who begin school with larger vocabularies also show a greater sensitivity to sound patterns within words, which provides them with an advantage in learning letter-sound correspondences (McDowell, Lonigan, & Goldstein, 2007).

Children's acquisition of vocabulary is not based on age but on experiences (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). To learn a new word, children need multiple, meaningful opportunities to hear new words, use them and receive feedback before they can understand them, remember them and make them part of their vocabularies (Sénéchal & LeFevre 2002; Hindman & Wasik, 2006). Hart and Risley (1995) and Lee and Burkam (2002) found that by four years of age, the size of a child's vocabulary is largely determined by the number of different words and the total number of words spoken by his or her parents, with especially large differences in vocabulary knowledge between high- and low-income homes.

There is a substantial body of research supporting a positive relationship between the frequency of book reading and the size of children's vocabulary (Sénéchal *et al*, 1998). Storybook reading provides highly contextualized exposure to novel words in a routine that is authentic, familiar and often motivating to young children (Roth *et al*, 2002).

It is not only vocabulary breadth or size that is important, but also the depth of understanding of word meanings. Depth of understanding reflects world knowledge and background experiences that underpin discourse comprehension. For example, studies that evaluate children's ability to define words orally (a more semantically demanding task that measures depth of vocabulary knowledge) report stronger associations with reading comprehension than are found with measures of receptive vocabulary (measuring single word recognition or breadth) (Roth *et al*., 2002; Snow *et al*., 1995).

I'm Ready! strategies to support vocabulary development

Strategy	*Supporting literature*
Step it up	Books provide a unique opportunity for children to come across more sophisticated words (Tier 2) that they wouldn't typically hear in everyday conversations (Tabors *et al*, 2001; Beck *et al*., 2002; Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Children's exposure to and use of rarer Tier 2 and Tier 3 words has been linked with higher scores on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and with later reading and school achievement (Beals & Tabors, 1995).

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Strategy	*Supporting literature*
SSTaRS – **Stress** the new word to focus the child's attention	Children must focus their attention on new words amid other distracting factors (Siegler & Stern, 1995). Initially, children learn new words through explicit labelling of actions, objects and modifiers by a more advanced speaker of the language. After about two years of age, children start to infer meanings of new words from hearing them used in context in real-life conversations or in the text of a book (Dickinson & Smith, 1994; Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987; Beals & Tabors, 1995).
SSTaRS – **Show** the child what the word means	Books often provide children with illustrations of new words to facilitate their understanding and can also be used as a springboard for additional conversation so children have even more opportunities to hear and use new words (Wasik & Bond, 2001). Gains in children's vocabulary scores resulted when props representing target words were given to them and then made available to children in other areas of the classroom to provide opportunities to use the vocabulary (Wasik & Bond, 2001).

Strategy	*Supporting literature*
SSTaRS – **Tell** the child what the word means	After about three years of age, children acquire word meanings paired with verbally created referents. Their acquisition of new meanings in the absence of concrete referents now requires instruction or explanation (Biemiller, 2005). Reading with direct instruction of word meanings in kindergarten and grades one and two resulted in more new words learned by children compared with a control group without direct instruction (Beck & McKeown, 2007a, 2007b; Biemiller *et al*., 2006; Dickinson *et al*., 1994; Justice *et al*., 2005). Children can often construct word meanings simply from hearing a story, but this is only the beginning of word meaning acquisition. To more significantly promote new word learning, vocabulary teaching though storybook reading needs to be more explicit (Bus, van Ilzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Sénéchal *et al*., 1998).

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Strategy	*Supporting literature*
SSTaRS – **Relate** the new word to child's experiences and knowledge, as well as to other words and situations	Defining words with language and examples already familiar to children and drawing on ideas from their background knowledge will increase the likelihood of the children integrating and remembering a new word and its meaning (Ewers & Brownson, 1999; Sénéchal, 1997). The learning of a new word depends on how the new word relates to words children already know, for example, synonyms and antonyms (Hindman *et al*., 2006; Hoover & Storkel, 2005). New words are best learned when encounters with words cause children to engage with them deeply rather than superficially (Schickedanz, 2006). Children better understand the meaning of a word and get more practice using the word when they participate in active discussion of the meaning of the word and how it relates to other words, and have experiences with the word in several contexts (Sénéchal *et al*., 1998).
SSTaRS – **Say** it again – and read the book again	To learn new words, children need multiple opportunities to be exposed to an unfamiliar word and learn its mean-ing, and then many chances to use that new word and make it part of their own vocabularies (Biemiller *et al*., 2006). Rereading books several times helps children cement their knowledge of words and concepts and fosters enjoyment of reading (Biemiller *et al*., 2006; Hindman *et al*., 2006; Sénéchal *et al*., 2002; Shickedanz, 2006).

Session 3: Help Your Child Understand the Story

Children are expected to understand the narrative structure of their teachers' explanations and instructions, share personal experiences during classroom show and tell, and listen to, interpret and re-tell stories (Milosky, 1987). Comprehension of written narratives (story grammar) is a major source of learning and is at the centre of academic achievement (McKeown & Beck, 2006).

Familiarity with text structure aids comprehension since the listener/reader has an organizational scheme with which to think about what is being read and to remember and reconstruct the story (Westby, 2005; Schickedanz, 2006). Narratives are typically constructed around a problem that has to be resolved. Good readers intuitively try to figure out a story's problem, but young children find story problems challenging since the problem is not usually directly stated in the story (Paris & Paris, 2003). Young children tend to focus on characters and actions rather than an overall theme or the "point of the story" (Stein & Glenn, 1979).

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The more exposure children have to narratives, the better they get at understanding how stories are organized. Narrative interventions have been found to improve children's use of story grammar and causality (Petersen *et al*, 2010; Schoenbrodt at al, 2003) and their ability to answer story comprehension questions (Westerveld & Gillon, 2008).

I'm Ready! strategies to support story understanding

Strategy	*Supporting literature*
Ask questions that further children's understanding of the story	Asking questions scaffolds children's comprehension of how events from different parts of the story are connected (McGee, 2007; McKeown & Beck, 2003) Encouraging children to explain, elaborate and connect their ideas "grows" thoughtful talk (McKeown & Beck., 2003, 2006).
Use CSPAR Names	Highlighting elements of the story (characters, setting, problem, actions and resolution) during the reading with comments and questions enables children to better understand the storyline (McGee, 2007; McKeown & Beck, 2003; Schickedanz, 2006). Referring to illustrations helps children understand the story (Snow & Ninio, 1986). Using props helps make the meaning of the story clear (Stadler & Ward, 2005).
Make "Thinking-Out-Loud" Comments	Using the phrase "I'm thinking…" scaffolds the development of inferences by showing children how reading between the lines is sometimes necessary to figure out what the problem is and why events are unfolding as they are (McGee, 2007).
Use repeated readings	Repeated read-alouds increasingly enhance children's un-derstanding of a narrative (McGee, 2007)
Reenact the story	Preschoolers and kindergartners who frequently act out stories that have been read aloud have better vocabularies, use more complex syntax and have better comprehension than children who draw or talk about stories (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982; Saltz *et al*, 1977). Children gain sophisticated understanding of a narrative by acting out the story (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Bennett-Armistead *et al*, 2005).

Session 4: Deepen Your Child's Understanding

Language for thinking and learning refers to abstract language that mediates children's ability to share past experiences, hypothesize, predict, reason, fantasize, imagine and problem-solve (van Kleeck *et al*., 2006). This type of language is decontextualized, since it goes beyond the here and now

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and imparts information about abstract objects, events and situations that are outside the immediate context (Westby, 1991; van Kleeck *et al*., 2006). Words alone must convey the meaning in the absence of supports in the immediate environment. Decontextualized language is often associated with cognitive verbs such as "think," "know," "remember" and "believe (Torrance & Olson, 1985). Decontextualized language provides children with the opportunity to process language more deeply (Zucker, Justice, Piasta, & Kaderavek, 2010) and engage in cognitively challenging talk (Justice & Kaderavek, 2004).

Many studies have found positive effects on language and literacy development and on academic achievement of engaging children in cognitively challenging conversations that include decontextualized language (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Hindman *et al*, 2008; van Kleeck *et al*, 1997; van Kleek *et al*., 2006).

Books offer many opportunities to use decontextualized language because they describe events and concepts that are not restricted to the here and now. Children are exposed to decontextualized talk during story reading when they are encouraged to "read between the lines" and infer information that is not directly conveyed in the text or illustrations in order to analyze characters and events, predict, connect story events with real life, explain, interpret, explain vocabulary or evaluate the story (Westby, 2004; van Kleeck, 2008).

Most book sharing with young children draws on literal comprehension, but a greater percentage of discussion involving inferencing (explaining, summarizing, defining, evaluating, comparing, contrasting and anticipating or predicting future events) occurs as the curriculum shifts from learning to read in grades one and two to reading to learn in grades three and four (Westby, 2004; van Kleeck, 2008).

Children develop the foundation for decontextualized language during the preschool years. Engaging preschoolers in inferential language starts to build skills that will develop into reading comprehension strategies when they are independent readers (Snow *et al*., 1986; Westby, 2004). Studies have shown that even by three years of age, children are capable of "reading between the lines" to infer characters' feelings or predict what characters might do to achieve their goals (Curenton & Justice, 2004). Differences in inferencing ability may appear at this early age, and children who start school behind are likely to stay behind (Justice & Ezell, 2002). It is important to promote decontextualized language early on in young children who may have difficulty or be at risk for use of decontextualized language, especially for children from low-income households who are often at risk for literacy development.

I'm Ready! strategies to support language for thinking and learning

Strategy	*Supporting literature*
Use EE's and PP's comments and questions: **E's:** Explain, talk about Experiences **P's:** Predict, Problem-solve	At-risk preschoolers demonstrated positive gains in abstract language when adults were trained to ask embedded open-ended inferential questions (van Kleeck *et al*., 2006). Use of abstract, decontextualized language had a positive impact on the development of language skills in Head Start preschoolers with language impairment (van Kleeck *et al*., 2006).

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Strategy	*Supporting literature*
(CONT'D) Use EE's and PP's comments and questions: **E's:** Explain, talk about Experiences **P's:** Predict, Problem-solve	Teachers asking predictive, reactive and recall questions that went beyond the book text related positively to language development (Wasik *et al*., 2006). There was a positive relationship between the level of abstract language that parents modelled in storybook reading (to help children infer and predict future events) and children's use of abstract language development one year later (van Kleeck *et al*., 1997). Dialogic reading with open-ended questions enhanced the language skills of two-year-olds from low-income families in a day care setting (Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992). Educator–child discussions that included frequent analysis of storybook events and predictions were associated with higher outcomes for children's story comprehension one year later (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

Session 5: Build Your Child's Understanding of How Print Works

Children learn a lot about print before they are ever introduced to formal reading or writing instruction, or even know letters of the alphabet. Print knowledge includes knowledge of:

- the purpose of print as a specific symbol system that conveys meaning
- how to handle books (orientation, print on cover indicates author and title, etc.)
- how print is organized (moves from left to right and top to bottom)
- how letters make up words and words make up sentences, meaning of punctuation marks, etc.

Children's knowledge about print follows a loose developmental sequence, with some children becoming interested in print as early as one year of age. At around two to three years of age, children begin to respond to and interact with print that occurs naturally in the environment, such as signs, labels and logos with visual cues. They then begin to interact with print in storybooks and acquire book- handling skills and a vocabulary oriented to print (e.g., "read," "page," "story"). At around four to five years of age, children realize that words are discrete units of oral and written language and that words are made up of rule-governed strings of letters. Children then begin to recognize that some words start with similar letters. By six years of age, children should understand how letters and words relate to one another.

Children learn to recognize print and become familiar with its purpose and potential value through exposure to storybooks and other printed material, observation of the behaviour of others (e.g., watching adults read recipes, shopping lists, maps, road makers, building signs, web addresses, etc.) and opportunities to explore print with support from adults. Most children arrive at kindergarten with at least a general sense of how print works and what it does. However, there is considerable variability in the timing of print knowledge because of varying levels of background knowledge and experience with storybook reading and other

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forms of print, especially for children from disadvantaged homes (Worden & Boettcher, 1990; Ezell & Justice, 2005).

Children continue to develop print knowledge as they experiment with writing and use early writing attempts as a means of communicating. Children generally learn to write before they learn to read. They acquire their initial knowledge about writing through interactions with adults who use writing meaningfully in social contexts. Children often begin to "sign" their names on their artwork at about three years of age, initially with just a scribble or a line.

Even very young children can benefit from thinking and talking about print, as long as the adult is sensitive to the child's developmental stage and literacy interests, and print is presented within a meaningful, functional context (e.g., story reading or a meaningful sign).

I'm Ready! strategies to support story understanding

Strategy	*Supporting literature*
POP (Point Out Print)	Interventions to improve print concepts have been successful (Justice, Skibbe, Canning & Lankford, 2005). Adults must engage children in conversations during focused, scaffolded activities to draw attention to the organization of print and how it functions both in books and in the environment. This is especially important for at-risk children, who often fail to learn about print from implicit instructional strategies (Justice & Kaderavek, 2004; Justice, Skibbe *et al*, 2005).
(CONT'D) POP (Point Out Print)	Use explicit cues to recruit children's attention to print within the natural context of storybook reading (Ezell & Justice, 2000; Justice & Kaderavek, 2004). Four-year-olds showed increased attention to print and larger gains in letter knowledge when they viewed child models asking questions about print rather than models asking no questions at all (Horner, 2001). When adults learned to increase their use of verbal print references, typically developing children made substantial gains in responses that included print references, and on measures of print and sound recognition (Ezell & Justice., 2000). Children's development requires exposure to concepts that are slightly beyond their current independent capabilities. Encourage active exploration of various print concepts through scaffolding with questioning, modelling and coaching. As children approach independence, adults should move from high to low support (Vygotsky, 1978).

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Strategy	*Supporting literature*
(CONT'D) POP (Point Out Print)	Support children to gradually master more difficult skills. For example, front-to-back directionality is generally mastered before understanding how words and letters relate to one another; children first learn to recognize the cover and title of a book before being able to indicate the direction in which print is read (Justice & Kaderavk, 2002).
POP during book reading	When adult readers used print referencing during shared reading, children verbalized more about print than when no print references were used (Justice & Ezell, 2002). Print referencing should not be the primary focus of book reading because it can intrude on the narrative. Only use about three to five print references during a storybook reading (Justice & Ezell, 2004). When shared reading of alphabet books includes directing children's attention to letters, children spent more time focusing on print, which correlated to children's ability to name letters (Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1988).

Session 6: Help Your Child Hear the Sounds in Words

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to detect and manipulate the sound segments of spoken words independently of their meaning. Children's understanding that speech can be broken down into smaller and smaller units – words, syllables, onsets, rhymes and, finally, phonemes – helps them "break the code" of written language and understand the relationship between speech and print. They are then able to grasp the alphabetic principle that connects graphemes with phonemes. The alphabetic principle is challenging, since English has more sounds than letters (44 vs. 26) and individual letters can represent several sounds. It can take children two to three years to learn how to match sounds to letter names. Phonological awareness, letter-name knowledge and letter-sound knowledge are all predictive of reading. Growth in one skill can set the stage for and increase improvement in another (Manning & Kato, 2006; Foorman, 2003).

The development of phonological awareness does not follow a sequential stage model where children must master one level of phonological awareness before developing skills at another level. Rather, skills may develop in overlapping, simultaneous stages. Children can show the beginning levels of skill on more complex levels while still working toward mastery of less complex levels (Phillips *et al*, 2008). Generally, children tend to become aware of larger units (words, syllables and rhyming) before developing awareness of the smallest units (phonemes), but children can do syllable, rhyming and phoneme tasks by four years of age. It is important to include phonemic awareness, as it is only phonemic awareness that directly and strongly relates to reading performance. However, it is also useful to include syllable and rhyming activities because these activities pave the way for success with phonemes, especially for younger children or for children who struggle (Gillon, 2004).

There is wide variability in phonological awareness performance in typically developing three- and four-year-olds, depending on their involvement in preschool experiences that foster attention to parts of words and their ability to shift their focus from meaning

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to form (Manning *et al*., 2006). Not every child will acquire explicit instruction in phonological awareness, but many children profit from explicit instruction. According to Lonigan (2006), a core phonological processing deficit is present in nearly all poor readers. Phonological awareness instruction may be especially critical for preschoolers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who tend to demonstrate poorer phonological awareness than their more affluent peers. This is likely related to differences in their early language and literacy environments.

Phonological awareness intervention prior to formal literacy instruction is not aimed at mastery of complex phonemic tasks that should develop through ongoing successful reading and spelling experiences. Instead, it aims to ensure that young children have the necessary base in phonological awareness skills to contribute to early reading development.

Interventions that focus on letter names and phonological awareness (McNamara *et al*, 2008) have been successful, and interventions focusing on phonological awareness have been found to have a positive impact on reading skills (van Kleeck *et al*, 1998).

I'm Ready! strategies to build phonological awareness

Strategy	*Supporting literature*
Listen… and Find One Like It	Phonological awareness instruction should be playful, engaging, interactive and social, and stimulate curiosity and experimentation with language (Yopp, 1992). The evidence supports use of an instructional approach that teaches multiple phonemic awareness sub-skills concurrently (Ukrainetz *et al*., 2000).
Listen…and Find One Like It with rhyming	Rhyming helps children learn to attend to words as forms rather than just meaning. Since rhyming requires attention to onsets and rhymes, it bridges to the level of segmenting and blending phonemes (Gillon, 2004; Walpole & McKenna, 2004).
Listen…and Find One Like It with phonemes	Phonemic awareness is one of the strongest predictors of early reading acquisition when measured in preschool and kindergarten children (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Children who enter kindergarten with the ability to segment words into sounds and to identify names or sounds of letters make faster progress in learning to read in the first two years than children who are taught these abilities (Share *et al*, 1984). Initially, focus only on the sound, not the letter, since letters represent a variety of sounds that may confuse children (Justice, 2006). Emphasize only one consonant sound at a time, so as not to overwhelm and confuse the child (Justice, 2006). Provide opportunities to hear the same sound in different words (Justice, 2006).

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Strategy	*Supporting literature*
Use the Four S's to build letter-sound knowledge	Letter-name knowledge positively correlated with later reading achievement, but letter-sound knowledge accounted for more variance in early reading achievement (Duncan & Seymour, 2000). Children whose parents taught them about letter-sound correspondences had higher invented spelling scores at 4.5 years of age (Hess *et al*, 1982).
Use the Four S's during writing activities	Children who had phonological awareness emphasized during naturalistic writing activities made gains in phonological awareness and also showed more interest in literacy activities than the no-treatment group (Ukrainetz, 2006). Children gradually acquire knowledge of spelling as they become more aware of the sounds of speech and participate in guided writing activities that support them as they invent their own spellings (McGee, 2007). Children who were better invented spellers at the beginning of kindergarten were better word readers by the end of the year. They gained implicit phonological awareness through invented spelling that aided their later reading performance (Richgels, 1995).
Use the Four S's when you share books	It is important to talk about letter names and letter sounds. Read aloud books that draw attention to sounds with alliteration and rhyming (Yopp & Yopp, 2009). Read-alouds with alphabet books produced greater gains in phonemic awareness than read-alouds with other types of children's books (Murray *et al*, 1996).
Use the Four S's throughout the day	Young children need to use newly acquired skills in multi-ple settings to help them gain proficiency. Set up the class-room and teacher–child interactions to provide children with multiple opportunities to explore and use newly ac-quired skills. Teachers should make connections through-out the day to reinforce phonological awareness (Phillips *et al*., 2008).

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6. Effectiveness of the HANEN I'M READY!™ strategies in the ABC and Beyond™ Program

A formal RCT study has not yet been conducted on the *I'm Ready!* Program, but the efficacy of the *I'm Ready!* strategies were demonstrated with a similar program, ABC and Beyond™, which has been delivered to early childhood educators (Girolametto *et al*, 2012; Milburn *et al*, 2014; Milburn *et al*, 2015; Namasivayam

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et al, 2014; Rezzonico *et al*, 2015). In the *ABC and Beyond* Program, early childhood educators are taught to implement a very similar set of literacy-promoting strategies in early childhood settings as parents do in the home in the *I'm Ready!* Program.

Studies on the *ABC and Beyond* Program found that post-program, the educators in the experimental group:

- used significantly more abstract language than the control group during interactive storybook reading. They made more comments or questions that linked events or actions in a story to events or actions from the children's experiences, introduced elements from outside the picture into a conversation about the story and referred to the characters' feelings or children's emotions. They also used more language to imagine, infer, predict, explain and project.
- used more print referencing keywords (such as "spell," "letter," "write," etc.), letter names and references to the sounds letters make during storybook reading and a post-story craft activity.
- asked more open questions.
- extended conversations with more turns
- made more responsive comments.
- used a greater variety of words and talked more about word meanings

Post-program, the children's results mirrored those of the educators. They:

- increased their responses to educators' abstract language.
- increased their responses to educators' references to print-referencing keywords, letter names and sound references.
- made more comments.
- used a greater of variety of words and talked more about words introduced by the educators.
- took more turns in the conversation.

This research demonstrates that ABC and Beyond, an in-service education program with an explicit focus on educators' emergent literacy practices, is effective in increasing educators' use of strategies that promote children's use of vocabulary, abstract language, print knowledge, alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness. Although these results cannot be directly transferred to the *I'm Ready!* Program, which has a different structure and targets parents rather than educators, it is not unreasonable to assume that use of the same set of literacy promoting strategies by parents would have a similar positive effect on children's emergent literacy development. In fact, collection of observational data so far does suggest that parents, like educators, can effectively promote early literacy development when training and coaching is provided.

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