

Intervention offered in school readiness program boosts children's self-regulation skills

December 14 2017, by Megan McClelland



Researcher Sara Schmitt works with a child. Credit: Oregon State University

Adding a daily 20 to 30 minute self-regulation intervention to a kindergarten readiness program significantly boosted children's self-

regulation and early academic skills, an Oregon State University researcher has found.

Self-regulation skills - the skills that help children pay attention, follow directions, stay on task and persist through difficulty - are critical to a child's success in kindergarten and beyond. The [intervention](#), co-developed and tested by OSU's Megan McClelland, a nationally-recognized expert in child development, uses music and games to help preschoolers learn and practice self-regulation skills.

The intervention was added to a three-week summer school readiness program at a large school district on the East Coast for children entering kindergarten that had no prior preschool experience. The school district asked McClelland and her colleagues to evaluate their use of the intervention. It was the first opportunity for researchers to evaluate the program's effectiveness in a "real-world" setting, where teachers, rather than researchers, led the students through self-regulation games.

The researchers found that use of these games daily for three weeks improved the children's self-regulation skills. They also found that the children's broader school readiness skills, including early math and literacy skills, improved as a result of the intervention and the children saw greater-than-expected growth in the months following the program.

"It was a test to see if the results of this intervention look similar in a less-controlled environment, and it appears that they do," said McClelland, the Katherine E. Smith Healthy Children and Families Professor in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences. "It helps demonstrate the feasibility and scalability of this kind of program."

The findings add to McClelland's growing body of research demonstrating the value of teaching self-regulation skills to children entering kindergarten, particularly those who are at higher risk of

struggling academically in school and opens the door for the intervention to be used more widely by teachers and schools.

The evaluation of the school district program was published recently in the journal *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. Co-authors are Robert J. Duncan and Sara A. Schmitt of Purdue University and Maura Burke of Fairfax County Public Schools. Duncan and Schmitt both earned their doctorates at OSU.

The school district added the self-regulation intervention at some schools participating in a summer "Bridge to Kindergarten" in 2013. It was also offered in 2014 and 2015. Researchers evaluated data from about 150 children from each year.

"The [school](#) district wanted an explicit focus on self-regulation in this program designed to get children ready for kindergarten," McClelland said.

Teachers were trained to lead the children through the intervention, which uses movement and music-based games that increase in complexity over time and encourage the practice of [self-regulation skills](#). The games require few materials and the children can help make the props as part of their lessons.

One game is "Red Light, Purple Light," which is similar to "Red Light, Green Light." The instructor acts as a stoplight and holds up construction-paper circles to represent stop and go. Children follow color cues, such as purple is stop and orange is go, and then switch to the opposite, where purple is go and orange is stop.

Other games include "Freeze," where the children are encouraged to do the opposite of the teacher's instructions; and "Sleeping," where the children pretend to sleep and then wake up as something different and

must remain in that character.

Additional rules are added later to increase the complexity of the game. The game requires children to listen and remember instructions, pay attention to the adult leading the [game](#) and resist natural inclinations to stop or go.

"The findings from this evaluation support our previous randomized controlled studies of this program, which is a promising sign that the intervention will also be effective in practical applications," McClelland said. "If we can make the [program](#) more accessible to schools and teachers, and still ensure quality, it becomes more feasible to share it more widely."

McClelland and the intervention's co-developer, Shauna Tominey of OSU, also [wrote a guide](#) for parents and teachers in 2015. "[Stop, Think, Act: Integrating Self-regulation in the Early Childhood Classroom.](#)" (Routledge) is designed to help preschool teachers and parents understand self-regulation and help [children](#) ages 3-6 build those skills through developmentally appropriate games, songs and more.

More information: Robert J. Duncan et al, Combining a kindergarten readiness summer program with a self-regulation intervention improves school readiness, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2017.10.012](#)

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