

The Role of Parental Writing Mediation in Precocious Readers' Literacy Development



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Introduction

This research studies the connection between two theoretical concepts: precocious reading and parental writing mediation. Precocious reading is the ability of a preschool child to read and understand before formally learning reading and writing. This ability is present in only a small percentage of the population. Previous studies on precocious readers found them to be superior to their age group in most literacy skills. There is evidence that precocious reading gives children a distinct academic advantage through elementary school (e.g., Stainthorp & Hughes, 2004).

Writing interactions offer a productive context for studying the complexity and features of parental mediation, because such interactions pose a challenge for both parents and children. Writing constitutes an activity that requires understanding of the grapho-phonemic code and the rules of orthography. The nature of writing mediation is considered an important factor in the development of early literacy and is associated with reading and writing achievements in school (Aram & Levin, 2004).

Precocious readers are usually not precocious writers and thus require substantial writing mediation when trying to write words or texts.

The present research studied the socio-cultural context of the precocious reading phenomenon by analyzing the nature of parental writing mediation and children's literacy achievements.

Research goal

The research focuses on understanding the socio-cultural context of the precocious reading phenomenon. Its goal is to study, via an examination of the characteristics of writing mediation given by parents of precocious readers (PR), the role the home environment plays in the development of precocious reading. We conjecture that the quality of writing mediation given by parents to PR will be found to be higher than that of parents to age comparable nonprecocious readers (NPR).

Method

Three groups participated in the study; each comprised 20 child parent pairs:

1. Precocious readers who were identified as such using standard reading tests.
2. Children of comparable age and gender to the precocious readers, from the same preschool as the PR but who have not yet developed reading skills.
3. First graders whose reading level matched that of the PR. These children had a comparable reading level (CRL).

The children's assessment:

- Children's literacy skills: reading, Phonological awareness, letter knowledge, writing letters and words, and reading comprehension.
- Children's cognitive skills from K-abc: Matrix shapes, Arithmetic test and Language.

Parental writing mediation assessment:

We also videotaped three child-parent writing interactions where the parent helped the child in writing tasks:

1. Writing an invitation to an imaginary birthday party.
2. Writing twelve pre-assigned words
3. Writing in thinking bubbles, the words of characters in a picture book, focusing on their feeling or thoughts.

The quality of maternal mediation was assessed on 3 major scales:

Writing specific mediation

- Grapho-phonemic mediation – Assessed how the parent mediated the child's segmentation of a word into its sounds and the retrieval of the required letter for each sound.
- Printing mediation – Assessed the autonomy that the parent allowed the child in producing the written letters.

General teaching mediation

- General teaching mediation- Assessed the levels of parental intentionality and reciprocity, meaning making, explaining, elaborating, transuding, encouraging transcendence, providing feeling of competence, guiding, discussing, demanding precision, regulating, giving praises and criticism.



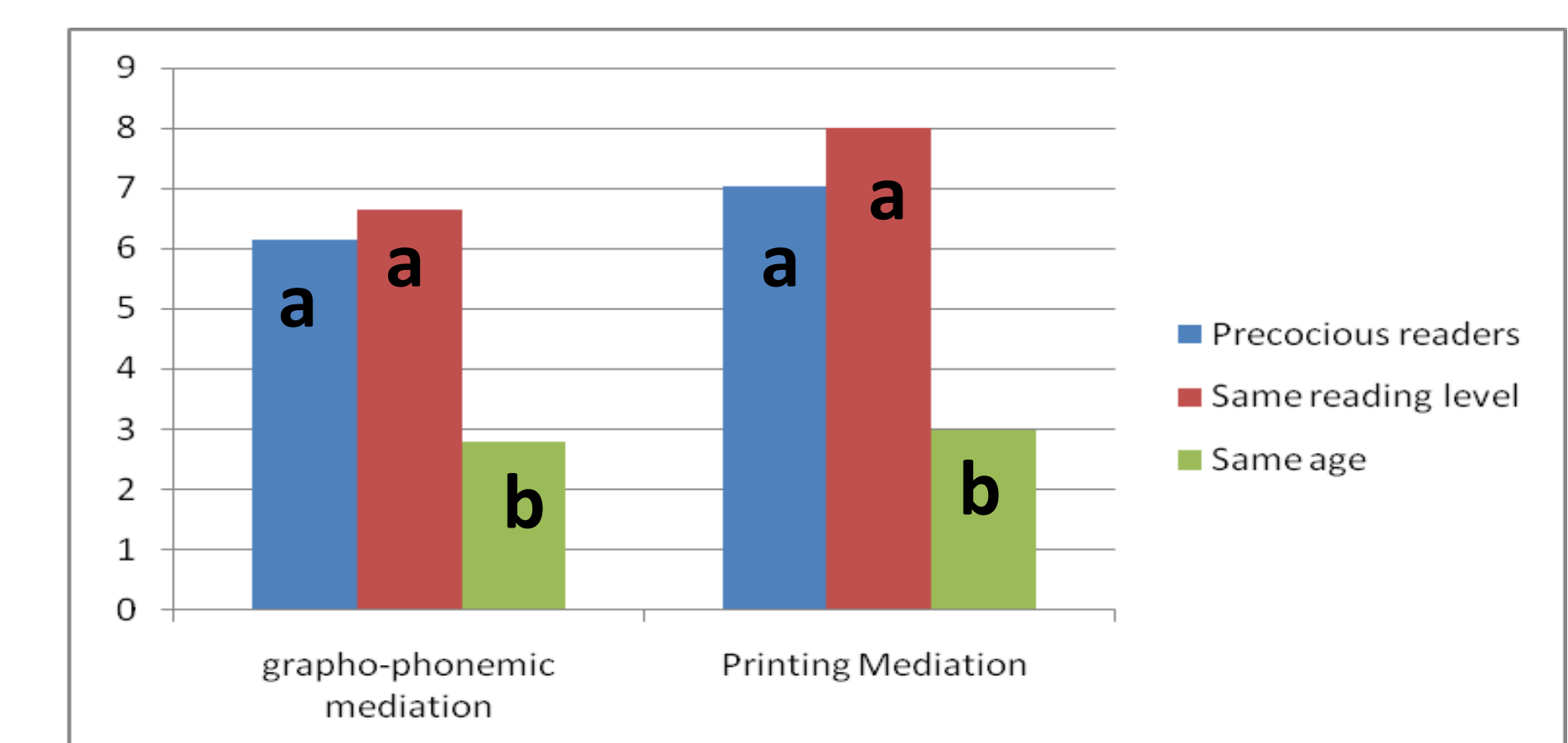
results

Significant differences were found between the three groups on the 3 scales. Parental writing mediation for PR (grapho-phonemic and printing scales) was higher than for the NPR and similar to that of the CRL group.

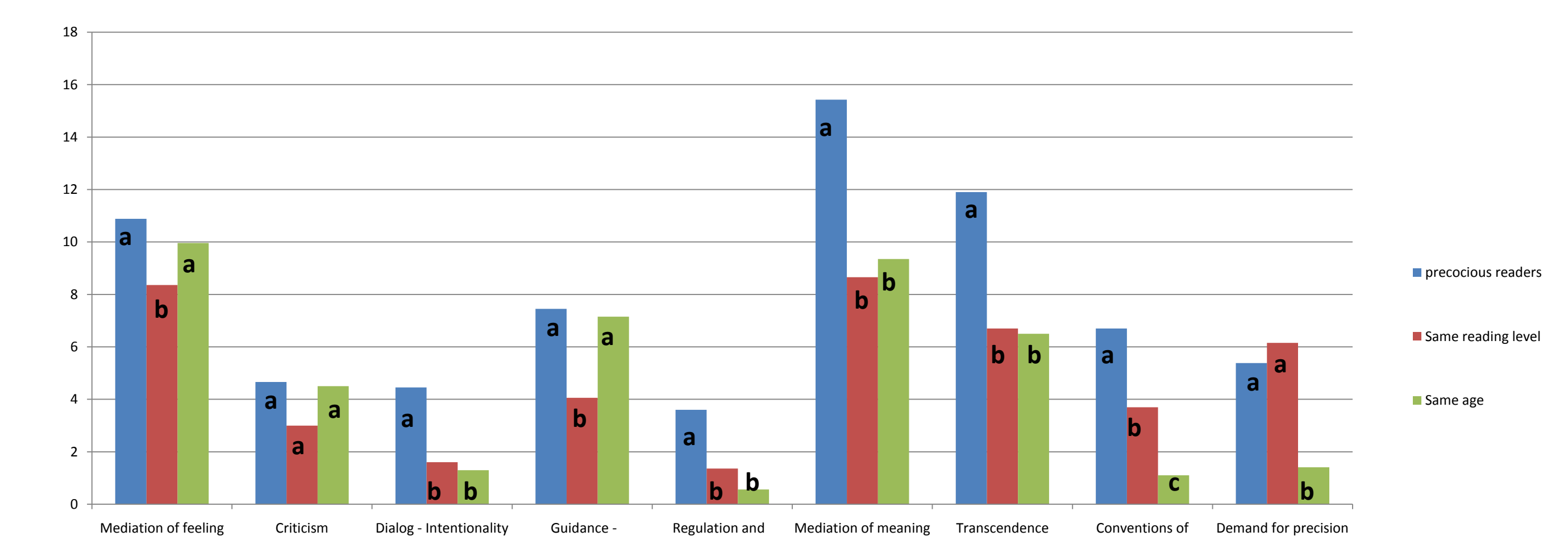
In general parents mediated writing according to their literacy level rather than their chronological age.

Precocious readers' parental mediation was higher in most of the general teaching mediation scale than in the other two groups.

Grapho-phonemic mediation and printing mediation – differences between precocious readers, children in the same age and children with the same reading level beyond the tasks ($p < .05$).



Significant differences among efficient mediation between parents of precocious readers, parents of children in the same age and parents of children with the same reading level beyond the tasks ($p < .05$)



Discussion

We found significant evidence that precocious readers' parents mediated writing more effectively than parents of NPR, both on the writing specific mediation and the general mediation scales. The quality of their mediation may have helped their children to become precocious readers and thereby manifest their talent and abilities.

Precocious reading and effective mediation appear together. The parents of PR were more successful in taking advantage of opportunities during the interactions for turning these encounters into a joyful learning-mediated situation.

We can learn from these parents what one should do in order to turn an everyday situation into a way to learn new things, how to mediate in an effective way and, which mediation tools can be used. These meditational parameters used by parents of PR suggest ways of exploiting meditational potentials in various situations, thereby transforming them into learn

Bibliography

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- Stainthorp, R., Hughes, D. (2004). What happens to precocious readers' performance by the age of eleven? *Journal of Research in Reading*, 27 (4). 357-372.



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"We're very proud of our little Charlie. His reading age is far in advance of his chronological age....."

