Designing Innovative and Evidence-Based Preschool Programs to Promote Early Math and Science Learning: A Collaborative Partnership between Researchers, Media Developers and Preschool Educators

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Project Goals
Two projects – Next Generation Preschool Math (NGPM) and Science (NGPS) – seek to promote early math and science learning by:

- Supporting children’s understanding of content,
- Using interactive touch-screen tablets,
- Integrating digital with non-digital activities (1:5 ratio);
- Providing professional and technical support materials for preschool educators.

NGPM & NGPS Cross-Disciplinary Design Teams

Curriculum designers and Researchers, focused on:
- Learning Trajectories Research
- Identifying and supporting key math concepts
- Repeated exposure to key math concepts
- Integrating student centered learning pedagogies
- Encouraging joint media engagement (child to teacher, child to child)
- Encouraging children and teachers to engage in rich math talk

Assessment designers, focused on:
- Identifying learning goals
- Identifying evidence that a child has mastered a learning goal
- Developing an assessment that can reliably differentiate between students who have and have not mastered the learning goals

Media and technology designers, focused on:
- Affective engagement
- Time on task (that is enjoyable)
- Rich contexts for children’s play
- Approachable and attractive characters
- Intuitive game mechanics that align with learning goals
- Tracking of student data to support teacher instruction

NGPM Pilot Implementation Findings

- The digital games resulted in child and teacher engagement with the math
- Integration of tablet/technology “center” into preschool classroom was seamless.
- Teachers varied widely in how much they interjected into children’s gameplay and provided scaffolding above and beyond that in the game.
- Teachers and children needed more explicit links between digital and non-digital activities.
- Games needed increased scaffolding and visually-based directions.
- Child learning of unit content improved and was statistically significant from pre- to post-testing.

User studies of existing games

Development of Learning blueprint

Initial assessment/ curricular materials development

Pilot test of assessment/ curricular materials

Revision

Small-scale experiment

NGPM Pre- and Post-Assessment

NGPM Experimental Study

- Blocked, cluster-randomized trial; 16 preschool classrooms matched and randomized within each pair into condition: NGPM (n=8) or business-as-usual control group (n=8)
- Baseline equivalence on unit-specific and general math pre-test scores
- 2 level hierarchical linear model (HLM) analysis (students nested in classrooms)
- Statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups post-test scores on the unit-specific content (subitizing and equipartitioning) when classroom level mean prettest scores were statistically controlled (α=.026, effect size=.51)
- Results provide preliminary evidence that NGPM improves preschool children’s understandings of unit-specific content and adds credence to our approach of selectively integrating tablet-based games into the preschool learning environment.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the National Science Foundation (DRL-1119118). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the National Science Foundation.

We thank our advisors who have provided valuable feedback on these projects. Advisors for NGPM include Art Baroody, Doug Clements, Herbert Ginsburg, Julie Sarama, Elizabeth Tubbes, and X. Christine Wang, as well as our external evaluator David Reider from Education Design, Inc. Advisors for NGPS include Doug Clements, Kimberley Brennanman, Darcy Greenfield, Bonnie Haggard, Raphael Diaz, and Randy Penfield, as well as our external evaluator Christine Paulsen from the Concord Evaluation Group. We also wish to thank all the project staff at EDC, SRI, and WGBH. Finally, sincere thanks go to the children, teachers, and center directors that participate in our ongoing development process.

NGPS Materials Currently Being Developed

- Classroom Toolkit to support inquiry/science practices
- Simulations and games to support learning of science concepts
- Non-digital activities and games
- Teacher professional development resources
- Online Teacher Guide
- Evidence centered design (ECD) science assessment

NGPS Framework

Development and Research anchored on Learning Blueprint that is based on research evidence and crosses content areas (physical, life and earth sciences) and practices (e.g., observing, predicting, etc.). Blueprint used to:
- Guide development of activities and resources (setting learning goals)
- Guide development of assessment (following ECD principles)

Researchers and Designers aim to develop activities and resources that:
- Respond to the needs of preschool classrooms (teachers and children) and can easily be integrated into existing curricular frameworks
- Are grounded on research (following learning goals from blueprint)
- Are developmentally appropriate (following NAEYC guidelines and engaging)
- Integrate media and technology into hands on activities activities to compliment learning that occurs during science investigation by capitalizing on the unique affordances of technology (e.g., ability to document via photos and videos, ability to simulate phenomena that are hard to observe repeatedly, opportunity for efficient repeated practice, etc.)
- Promote 1) understanding of science concepts, 2) engagement in science practices and 3) science talk

Researchers and Designers engage in design-based research in partnership with advisors and teachers and conduct implementation studies (including observations and feedback meetings) in classrooms where teachers pilot activities and provide feedback.

Assessment designers with early childhood and ECD expertise focused on:
- Identifying focal knowledge and skills,
- Identifying evidence that a child has mastered a learning goal, and
- Developing an assessment that can reliably differentiate between students who have and have not mastered the learning goals.

NGPS Emerging Pilot Implementation Findings

- Children were highly engaged while using many of the digital resources.
- Teachers were able to integrate most technologies into their teaching without difficulty.
- Digital resources worked best when teachers scaffolded their use and added additional explanations.
- Children demonstrated knowledge of most target learning goals.
- Children engaged in various science practices and science talk, but teachers would benefit from more training to support further learning in these areas.

Sample Subitizing Games

Sample Equipartitioning Games

NGPM Boundary Object: The Learning Blueprint

Sample Assessment Item: Equipartitioning

These are my two dogs; they each have some bones. (Tap the pictures of the two dogs and bones, left to right). Do the dogs each have the same number of bones? (Wait for child’s response).

How do you know?

NGPM Pilot Implementation Findings

- Understudy of existing games
- Development of learning blueprint
- Initial assessment/curricular materials development
- Pilot test of assessment/curricular materials
- Revision
- Small-scale experiment

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