

**Sullivan County Imagination Library
Impact Study with Kingsport City Schools
2016-2017 School year
Final Report**

Background:

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library program has been founded on the following principles:

- A. Children exposed to reading at an early age are more likely to read at an early age than those who are not so exposed.
- B. Children develop an affinity for reading if their parents read books to them that are age-appropriate during their early development.
- C. An affinity for reading and the resultant reading skills impact children throughout their education and adult lives.
- D. Books are delivered to any registered child regardless of economic status. Parents are no more or less likely to read to their children based upon their economic circumstances.

Impact Study Methodology:

The Sullivan County Imagination Library (SCIL) partnered with the Kingsport City Schools (KCS) to evaluate reading readiness among former Imagination Library participants who registered for Kindergarten during the 2016-2017 school year. The SCIL provided the KCS with a list of Imagination Library “graduates” in 2016. The KCS then identified entering kindergarteners on the graduates list who had participated in the Imagination Library and who had taken the entry assessments for kindergarten. These assessments were given prior to the beginning of the kindergarten year and documented in their student record. The data was collected and analyzed by Aaron Gourley, a teacher at Dobbins Bennett High School, as a part of his doctoral graduate work at ETSU. Mr. Gourley completed his work under the guidance of Amy Doran, Ed.D., Director of Early Childhood Education for the Kingsport City Schools. The work was also reviewed by Tammie Davis, M.Ed., retired Chief Human Resources Officer for the school district. All data collection and analysis was performed within accepted academic standards. This study was completed on a one time basis only at the request of the SCIL in order to provide local data to comply with United Way requirements.

Instrument Used:

The 2016-2017 study compared average scores on the Early Reading Assessment (ERA) between Imagination Library “graduates” and those who had not received Imagination Library books during their preschool years. The ERA is the only instrument done by the KCS as part of the screening process for kindergarten, so it was the sole way to compare differences between the two groups **prior** to the start of instruction. The ERA included the following key attributes:

- Book Handling Skills: The ability to orient and identify text and page organization.
- Story Concept: The ability to summarize book theme after one or more readings (by an adult).
- Letter Identification: The ability to identify individual letters upper and lower case.

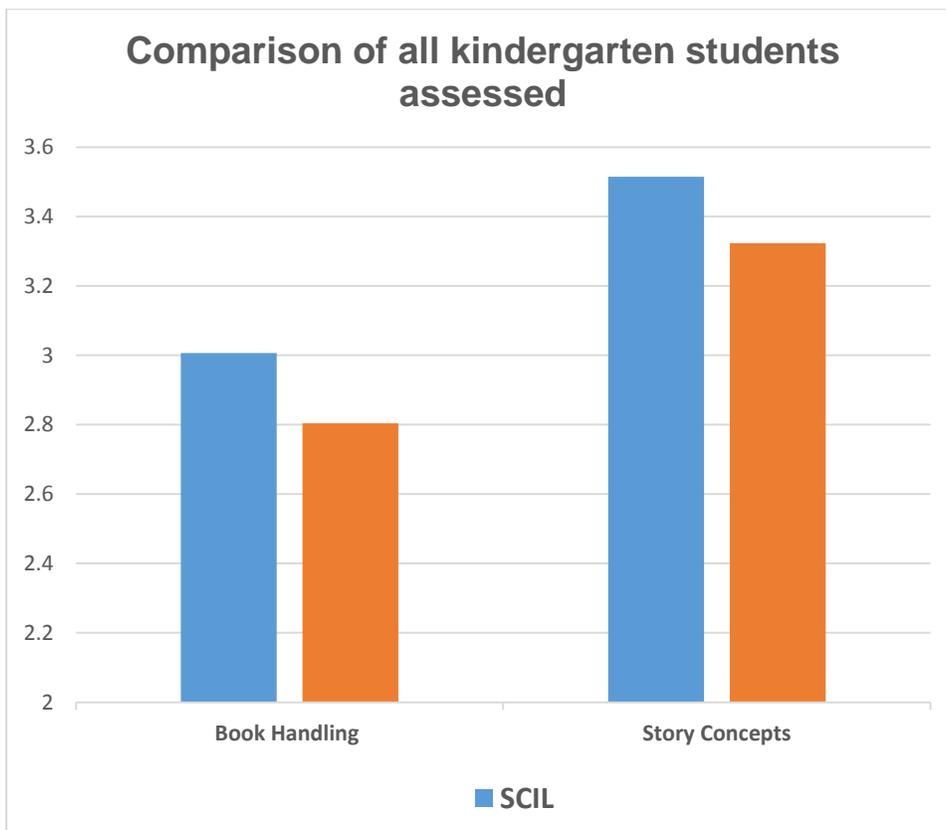
Scoring of Instrument:

The scoring was made using a specific standard numeric scale uniformly applied by all teachers. The Book Handling Skills and Story Concepts were rated on a 5 point scale. Letter Identification was rated on a 52 point scale A,a,B,b,etc).

Survey Results:

Of the 568 kindergarten students assessed in fall 2016, 29% were listed on the “graduates” list of the SCIL.* (*See discussion on pp. 4 – 5.)

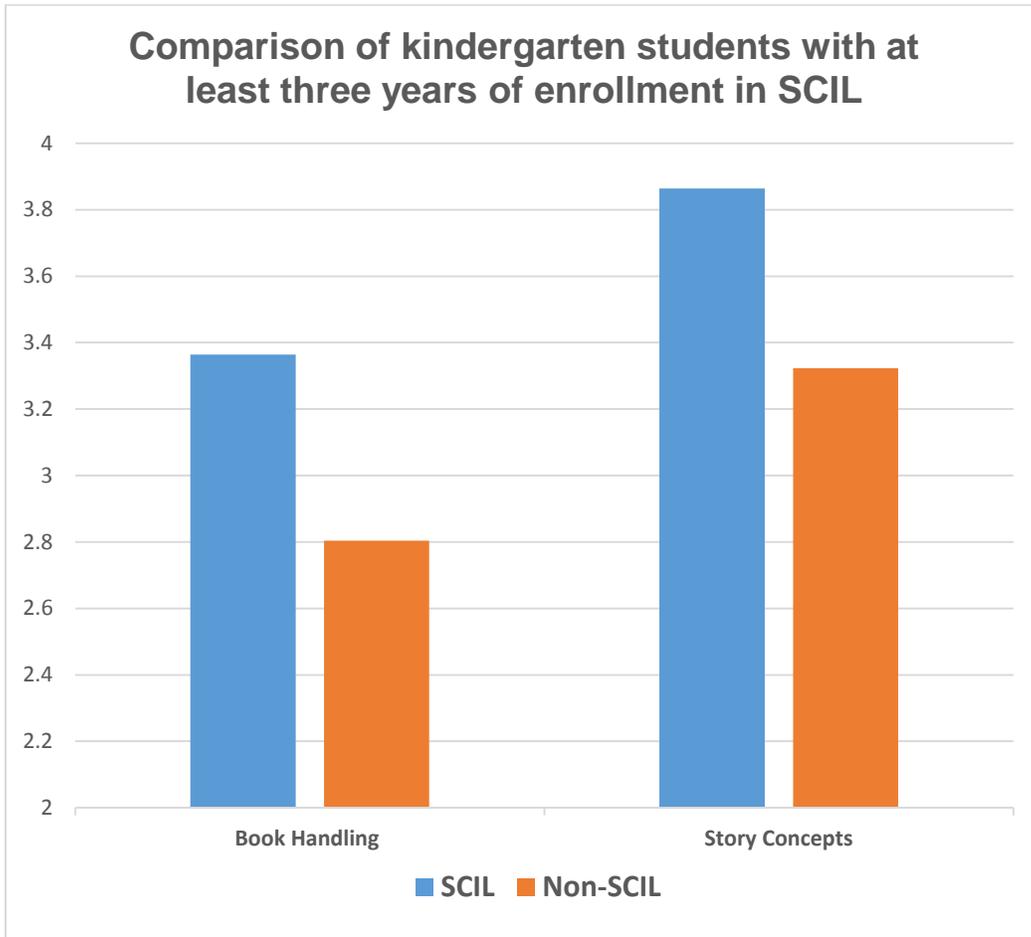
The following chart details those differences in book handling and story concepts:



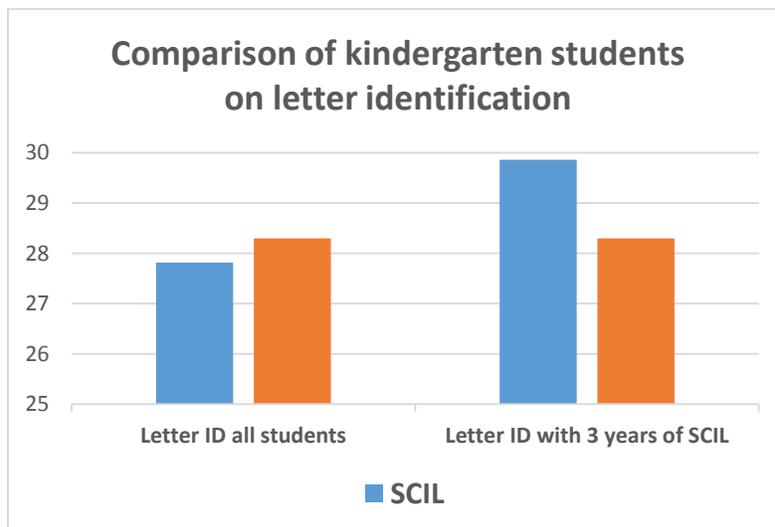
Although the differences shown in this chart do not appear to be large (about a 2% improvement on a 5 point scale), the improvement occurs across all of the evaluation categories.

Further analysis highlighted significant improvement (6-7% improvement) in students with who have been registered with the SCIL for three years or more over those students who were not on the SCIL “graduates” list.

This following chart details these results:



Additionally, similar results were gathered for letter identification:



In a comparison of all students, non-SCIL students actually had greater success on letter identification. **However, students who were in the SCIL program for at least three years scored much higher on letter identification than students not on the SCIL “graduates” list.**

Discussion:

The above study demonstrates a conclusive impact of the SCIL program, particularly among those children who have participated for three years or more. The study echoes similar results to those demonstrated in state-wide and nation-wide studies: The benefits of the program are demonstrable especially among those children who have participated for as few as three years.

It is clear from the analysis that some exposure to SCIL improves reading skills. However, to achieve the best results, exposure from birth or very early childhood is more beneficial. We believe that the best results are an outcome from the following:

- A. Children and their parents are involved in reading their books.
- B. Children develop their own libraries often in otherwise print-poor environments.
- C. Children who receive a book of their very own each month are continuously presented with delightful books they love. The arrival of the book in the mail each month becomes the stimulus for parents/caregivers to read with their children. The books spark not only a love of reading, but also, the children develop essential vocabulary, book handling, and reading skills as a result of their exposure to the program.

National surveys indicated that children exposed to books and reading develop vocabularies of 10,000 words before entering schools. Children without exposure to books begin school with a vocabulary of around 4,000 words.

Discussion of information at asterisk on p. 2:

The fact that only 29% of the children who entered kindergarten were listed on the SCIL “graduates” list is puzzling. After careful analysis, we believe that several factors may be involved in this percentage. These include:

- A. This study included all students regardless of their mobility. As a result, those students who recently moved to the city but who had participated in the Imagination Library program in a different county would not have been included. Likewise, some SCIL participants likely moved out of the city as well.
- B. Due to the mobility of the population, children who were registered at birth may have moved to another location within the Kingsport area and not informed us of their address. They may have been deleted from our system when we discovered that their books were undeliverable. Low income children tend to move numerous times and busy parents may be less likely to keep the SCIL informed of their new address. Consequently, it is likely

that there are children listed as being “non SCIL” who actually did receive the books at some point.

- C. Newborn babies have the opportunity to register at birth at the Mountain States Health Alliance hospitals as a result of an agreement between the Mountain States Hospitals, the Niswonger Foundation, and the GBBF Birthing Hospital Initiative. The Niswonger Foundation funds the first book for all newborns at Mountain State Health Alliance hospitals. Wellmont hospitals do not provide that opportunity at this time. They put registration brochures in the “new parent” packets but do not actively register children, as occurs at the MSHA hospitals. As the largest hospital in Kingsport is a Wellmont facility, SCIL may be missing a greater proportion of Kingsport children. The GBBF hopes that the impending merger of Wellmont and MSHA will result in the Birthing Hospital Initiative being expanded to the present Wellmont hospitals.

Conclusions:

Considering the opinions of educators and teachers, as well as the data that has been established both nationally and locally, we are convinced that the opportunity for early reading provided by the SCIL to parents and their young children is a critical program in the development of well-rounded and responsible adults. The few dollars spent establishing lifetime habits of reading far outweigh the cost of remedial programs that would otherwise be required.

“Reading aloud to children is the single most important activity one could do to raise a reader.”

U.S. Department of Education’s Commission on Reading

“You became a reader because you saw and heard someone you admired enjoying the experience, someone led you to the world of books even before you could read, let you taste the magic of stories, took you to the library, and allowed you to stay up later at night to read in bed.”

Jim Trelease

(Jim Trelease is a frequently cited author and educator who has spent more than thirty years addressing teachers, parents and librarians on the subject of reading aloud to children and the benefits of a print-rich environment.)