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Promoting Language and Early Literacy in the NICU

Rebecca Dowling, Lisa Shanty, Susan Sonnenschein, & Brenda Hussey-Gardner

Unique challenges in NICUs

Parental stress
Parent-infant separation

Can inhibit attachment

Private rooms

May delay language development

(Aarnoudse-Moens et al., 2009; Mercer & Walker, 2006; Pineda et al., 2014)

Mother Goose on the Loose Goslings

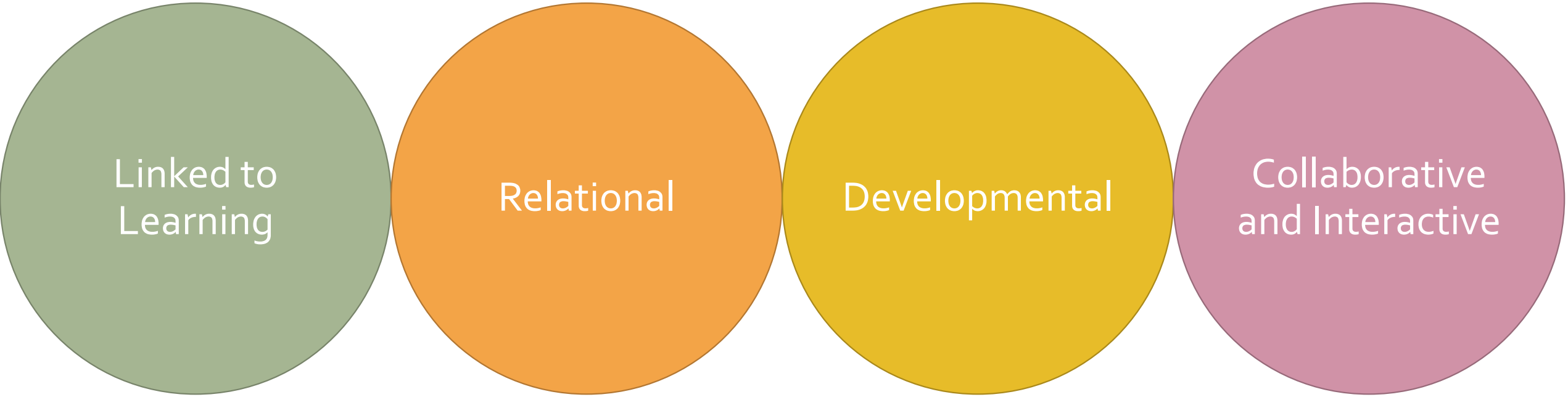
- Adapted from *Mother Goose on the Loose* lapsit program.
  - More information on the original program at www.mgol.net.
- Goslings developed, specifically, for NICU population.
- Aims to provides parents with skills to foster early literacy *and* promote developmentally appropriate stimulation.

Typical Goslings Session

1-hour sessions in NICU family lounge

Pre/post intervention questionnaire

Facilitated by Port Discovery staff



Exploring the successes and challenges of the intervention

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

(Mapp & Kutner, 2013)

Linked to Learning

- Successful programs connect families to learning goals.

Linked to Learning

- Increased motivation when programs enhance ability to support child.

Goslings aligned with unique challenges in NICUs

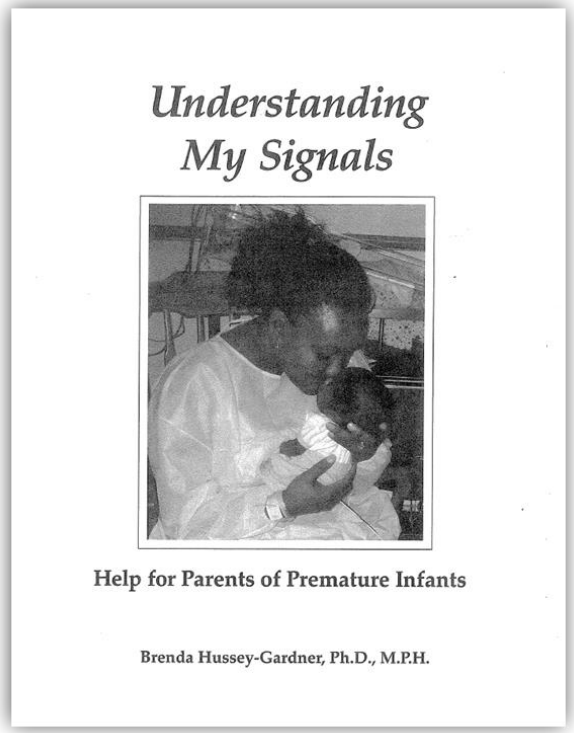
"Yeah, cause at one point in time, I was scared to even touch him."

Linked to Learning

"…What do babies need you to read to them for and stuff like that?…

This program say it's okay. You can read to the baby, you can interact with the baby, other than feed them, sleep them, and change them. You can do different things."

Linked to Learning


Understanding My Signals

Help for Parents of Premature Infants

Brenda Hussey-Gardner, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Relational

- Relationships of trust and respect facilitate engagement.

Relational

"…I guess being around different parents and you know hearing the stories about the kids and as a dad, we don't know what women go through, so we hear these stories and you know like, yeah, you know that…"

"I liked, I definitely liked the volunteer, like the happy spirit the volunteer gave off to the parents, she was jolly…you know even though your baby is going through what that baby going through, it's okay to interact with her with these things."

Developmental

- Promote participants' confidence and knowledge.
  - Empower participants to be active and informed.

Developmental

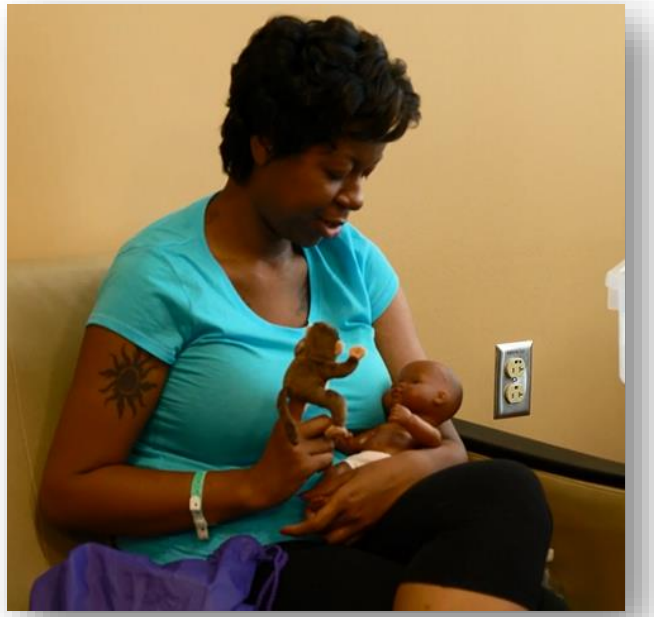
"I just love the program…I wouldn't be doing, you know, most of the stuff I do with her and to deal with the days that, you know, being in the NICU with the baby that you can, there's still things that you can do, and have fun and interact with your child even though they going through different things and it's okay to be you know yourself with, around the baby…Even with singing, you know, reading a book, and understanding your baby like I just loved the whole thing."

Developmental

"… I'm doing okay, I'm doing right so far or whatever and adding on to it. So it did a lot for me…far as knowing what I been doing, for real, like I'm doing the right thing for real, whatever, if I was just coming here, and y'all was saying some different things and I'm doing this certain things, it would have wise of me to do some different things, and we doing the certain things that I was doing or whatever. Like I'm on track, of how to, start instilling things in my children here."

Collaborative and Interactive

- Promote social networks and connections through learning in group settings.
- Provide participants opportunities to practice and hone new skills.



Collaborative and Interactive

"Yeah…um…I think using the baby dolls was good because it made you like actually…not necessarily actually participate but like umm…you could learn like how to do the isolette hug versus like picking them up. Like if you do interact more with a baby versus just the singing songs in a circle and things like that…"

Challenges in implementation

- Medical status of infant

  "She has her trach, she has not been able to cry and her vocal cords, and they were saying it may not be permanent, but they are paralyzed and who knows?"

  "So we have to learn her other cues, so we don't want to overwhelm her with a bunch of other things."

Challenges in implementation

- Developmentally not ready

  "…the toys are a little too much…like I tried the monkeys and he just squinted his eyes and turned away the whole time."

Challenges in implementation

- Infants sleep majority of time

  "She only really wakes up to eat. So she wakes up every 3 hours and even after eating, she normally just seems exhausted and she just kinda like passes out afterwards."

NICU-specific barriers

- Isolette
- Wires/breathing equipment
- Stress/circumstances

NICU-specific barriers

"I think because when he's in the isolette, it's too hard to get him to like focus on things cause there's so much going on…"

"…and then when I'm holding him, it's too hard to try to like hold him and hold a book or things like that, so it's more of just me talking."

Conclusions

Limitations

- Data limited to immediately post-intervention and 1-2 weeks post-intervention.
  - Therefore, limited conclusions can be made about future behaviors.

Overall, a success!

- During implementation --
  - Parents and NICU staff responded favorably to program.
- Post implementation --
  - Using strategies/materials provided.
  - Adapting use of materials/strategies to the specific needs of their child.

Acknowledgements

Mother Goose On The Loose
www.mgol.net

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