

Background to the problem

Over the years, longitudinal studies and brain research have clearly demonstrated the importance of high quality early learning experiences that foster young children's social, cognitive, and language development (Boston University Medical Center, 2003; Bailey, Bruer, Symons, & Litchman, 2001; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001). But, parents and practitioners in low income neighborhoods aren't reading the research and are unaware of the critical impact of early learning experiences. This lack of awareness paired with a growing number of children in non-parental care makes it challenging to ensure rich language experiences in low income neighborhoods.

Research has shown that children living in poverty are less likely to receive high quality early language experiences, therefore increasing their risk for language delays, other developmental delays, and even special education placements in grade school (Hart & Risley, 1995; Olberg, 2003; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001). Parents and practitioners serving children in low income neighborhoods need information on how and why to provide high quality early language interventions. Both parents and early childhood practitioners will benefit from evidence-based strategies that can be easily understood and implemented during daily routines in children's natural environments (Neuman & Dickinson, 2001).

Evidence-based practices that can be used to support the needs of children at risk for language delays have been outlined in the literature. For example, modeling language and using time delay have been described in detail in a number of research articles (Ingenmey & VanHoulton, 1991). But navigating the literature to find evidence-based practices and then describing them in a simple yet effective manner is a time-consuming and challenging task for any parent or practitioner. The early childhood field needs more efforts that translate evidence into practice.

The proposed project will introduce a communication toolkit designed for parents and practitioners living in low income neighborhoods (Robbins & Johnson, 2008). The communication toolkit summarizes eight evidence-based practices for improving young children's language (McCathren, 2000; Harjusola-Webb & Robbins, in preparation). The strategies are described in a format that is easily understood and designed for implementation in any environment. The toolkit is usable by both parents and practitioners and requires little training for successful execution.

Purpose of the Project

- To increase the number of infants and toddlers in low income neighborhoods exposed to high quality early language experiences by
 - Forming partnerships with parents and practitioners with a shared vision of fostering young children's language development
 - Disseminating the communication toolkit
 - Providing training and follow-up support to parents and practitioners with the intent of improving language interventions for infants and toddlers in natural environments and increasing awareness of how and why to implement high quality early learning experiences

Methodology

- Setting
 - Four (4) Early Head Start (EHS) settings in Cleveland, OH will be utilized to disseminate the toolkit and to provide in-service training and follow-up support
- Participants
 - The study will take place over the course of 12 months. 12 EHS practitioners, 18 Help Me Grow (HMG) early interventionists, and parents receiving EHS or HMG services will be involved. The number of parents and children involved in the study will be determined by the number of children in each of the 12 EHS classrooms, the number of children on each HMG interventionist case load, and the number of parents interested in attending the trainings. All parents and children will continue to receive intervention whether they attend the training or not.
- Procedures
 - Reproduce and disseminate the communication toolkit and training schedule to EHS settings and HMG coordinators
 - Provide introductory training for all EHS practitioners, HMG early interventionists, and parents receiving EHS or HMG services
 - Provide follow-up support to EHS practitioners and HMG interventionists
 - EHS practitioners and HMG interventionists can provide follow-up support to parents receiving EHS or HMG services
- Research Design
 - Quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest, nonequivalent control group design
 - EHS practitioners, HMG early interventionists, and parents from another county with similar demographics will participate in the pre and post testing but not the intervention

- Outcomes/Measures
 - Expected Practitioner Outcomes:
 - increased parent and practitioner knowledge/awareness of how and why to implement high quality early learning experiences (pre-post survey)
 - improved language intervention for infants and toddlers in natural environments (caregiver fidelity checklist)
 - Expected Child Outcomes:
 - Increased exposure to high quality early language experiences (caregiver fidelity checklist)
 - Improved language development (developmental language measure)

- Timeline

Month	Activity	Deliverables
1	Reproduce and disseminate the communication toolkit and training schedule to EHS settings and HMG coordinators	Communication Toolkit Training Schedule
2 & 3	Gather baseline data for experimental and control groups	Child assessment – developmental language measures
4	Provide introductory training to all EHS practitioners, HMG early interventionists, and parents receiving EHS or HMG services	Training materials Survey of parent and practitioner knowledge/awareness
5 & 6	Provide follow up support	Caregiver fidelity checklists
7	Provide follow up training to all EHS practitioners, HMG early interventionists, and parents receiving EHS or HMG services	Training materials
8, 9, 10	EHS practitioners and HMG early interventionists provide follow up support to parents	Caregiver fidelity checklists
11 & 12	Gather post intervention data for experimental and control groups	Child assessments – developmental language measures Survey of parents and practitioner knowledge/awareness

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