Educare Schools as a Platform for Bridging the Word Gap Acceleration Project Partnership

Juniper Gardens Children's Project, Educare Kansas City, Educare West DuPage and Educare Tulsa

Project Overview

This project brings together three Educare Schools in partnership to demonstrate the feasibility of implementing an evidence-based language intervention to bridge the word gap. Designed to build the capacity of educators and parents to promote the communication opportunities and development of infants and young children, the *Promoting Communication Strategies* intervention will be embedded into randomly selected Educare classrooms in Kansas City Kansas and West DuPage Illinois to provide teachers with additional tools to increase the language-learning opportunities within classrooms. The intervention will also be embedded into community-based initiatives in Educare Tulsa, Oklahoma to extend upon their local initiatives to bridge the word gap with parents of children in the community.

The Word Gap

Disparities observed in the quality and quantity of talk that children from different socioeconomic backgrounds heard before age 4 represented an estimated gap of over 30 million words in experience with language (Hart & Risley, 1995; 2003). The differences in children's earliest language experience impacted school readiness and early literacy (Walker, Greenwood, Hart & Carta, 1994). These, and other studies including the EHS National evaluation study (ACF, 2010; Atwater, Carta, Summers & Staker, 2002; Love, 2005; Pan, Rowe, Singer & Snow, 2005), provide compelling evidence that before children start preschool, their early language experiences can shape their future in ways that can have a profound impact.

Educare Learning Network

Growing recognition of the importance of early language development for later social-emotional behavior, school readiness and literacy has resulted in increased attention to the deficit in early experience with language that children growing up in low SES environments are more likely to experience. The salience of this research is also reflected in the mission and research agenda of the Educare Learning Network. The Educare model draws from a wide range of research-based practices that foster learning environments that support infants, toddlers and young children who are growing up in stressful, impoverished communities.

Project Goals and Approach

This project addresses the strategic priorities identified for the Educare Learning Network: (1) Continuous innovation around teaching and learning; (2) Using the Network as a platform for innovative, applied early childhood research and evaluation; (3) Extending effective Educare approaches beyond the walls of Educare Schools; and (4) partnering with parents to promote positive outcomes. The goals of this project include:

- Utilizing the *Promoting Communication Strategies intervention* with ongoing curricula to provide Educare teachers and adults leading community-based initiatives with additional tools to increase children's language.
- Facilitating the Educare mission to engage parents and the community by extending opportunities that children have in Educare "beyond the walls."
- Expanding local initiatives to bridge the word gap with parents of children across Educare Schools and community agencies to align efforts.
- Leveraging expertise of the Educare Learning Network, the Bridging the Word Gap Research Network, and participating Educare Schools in a Practice-Based Research Partnership to bridge the word gap.

Research Questions to Be Addressed

1. Does the Promoting Communication professional development and coaching model result in increases in teachers'/adults' use of strategies for embedding language opportunities and support within classroom and/or community activities?
2. Do measurable increases in teachers' or other adults' use of the language intervention strategies and overall language interaction with children result in improved child language and communication outcomes for all children?
3. As a result of efforts to build continuity between school and home, do parents report using the strategies at home to scaffold their child's learning and growth?
4. Do efforts to extend Educare beyond the walls result in parents' and community members' reporting increased awareness of the importance and use of the Promoting Communication Strategies along with other word-gap interventions to bridge the word gap?
5. Does the alignment between bridging the word gap efforts at Educare Schools and community-based initiatives result in reported shared benefits around bridging the word gap?

Intervention Description and Expected Outcomes

The *Promoting Communication TALK Intervention* incorporates: (1) Working in partnership to embed the naturalistic language promoting strategies into daily routines in randomly selected Educare classrooms and community-based programs serving infants, toddlers and preschoolers; (2) sharing the Promoting Communication strategies with parents to build their capacity to support their child's early language development and provide continuity from school to home; (3) coaching and professional development for implementing the intervention; (4) documenting teacher, parent and coach fidelity of intervention delivery using multiple methods and reporters; and (5) documenting child outcomes.

Through this Educare Acceleration project we expect to :

- Test a model for how Educare can serve as a platform for bridging the word gap.
- Provide information and lessons learned as to how teachers in Educare schools can increase their instructional support for language learning across classrooms.
- Document continuity between classroom—home support for language learning.
- Document the implementation of the intervention in community-based efforts.
- Share this information across the ELN and with community-based organizations to ensure findings may inform efforts in Educare schools and community wide

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