

Growth on ToggleTalk® Dialect Assessment Battery Correlates with PALS™-K Gains

Background

In November 2014, St. Catherine Elementary School principal Ms. Deborah Zabinski and kindergarten teacher Mrs. Sandi Smith enthusiastically agreed to implement ToggleTalk as part of a replication research study conducted by Dr. Maura Moyle, Associate Professor in the Department of Speech Pathology & Audiology at Marquette University.

Ms. Zabinski and Mrs. Smith both said that St. Catherine's greatest instructional challenge is teaching standard Academic English grammar to their students who are all African American English speakers living in the Sherman Park Neighborhood in Milwaukee, WI.

ToggleTalk

ToggleTalk is a K–1 curriculum developed with funding from a three year research grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 to Holly K. Craig, Ph.D., Professor Emerita at the University of Michigan.

ToggleTalk complements the core English Language Arts/Literacy curriculum by equipping teachers with the understanding and lesson resources necessary to teach Academic English to kindergarten and first grade students who speak African American English.

“My students love ToggleTalk! From the very beginning of the program, they have been engaged and have enjoyed the stories. So many students are quickly picking up on the concepts and truly retaining them between lessons. I appreciate that the emphasis is not on ‘the right way’ and ‘the wrong way’ to speak, but rather the school way and the home way.”

Mrs. Smith,
Kindergarten teacher

Implementation

Following a half day onsite training session, Mrs. Smith delivered the ToggleTalk lessons to her kindergarten students 15–20 minutes per day several times each week from the end of February through mid-June. She set up a center in one corner of her room for the whole class lessons involving the two pocket charts, laminated photos and sentence strips, and she projected the nine online original ToggleTalk storybooks onto a white board for easy viewing by the students.

Evaluation

Dr. Moyle's formal evaluation incorporated a variety of standardized language and literacy assessments administered at the beginning of the spring 2015 semester:

- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Fourth Edition (PPVT-4)
- Expressive Vocabulary Test-Second Edition (EVT-2)
- Narrative Language Sample (recording of child retelling *Frog, Where Are You?*)
- Sentence Imitation tasks (developed by Dr. Moyle and based on Charity et al., 2004)
- Dimensional Change Card Sort Test
- Flanker Test
- Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener-Kindergarten (PALS–K) which measures children's knowledge of: Rhyme Awareness, Beginning Sound Awareness, Alphabet Recognition, Letter Sounds, Spelling, and Concepts of Print.
- Dialect Assessment Battery (DAB), a research tool designed to measure growth on Dialect Recognition, Elicited Imitation, and Translation Task scales.

Dr. Moyle and her graduate students also administered the PALS-K and DAB at the end of the spring 2015 semester.

Qualitative Outcomes

Ms. Zabinski and Mrs. Smith reported that the students enjoyed the ToggleTalk lessons and that they identified with the multicultural storybook themes, characters and settings. “We really like the way that the lessons interweave with the curriculum,” said Ms. Zabinski. “ToggleTalk is definitely not just another standalone reading product.” Ms. Zabinski also noted that ToggleTalk was well received by the students’ parents.

Quantitative Outcomes

The DAB was the only pre-test measure that related to gains on the PALS-K. After removing the children with the 3 highest DAB scores at pre-test (scores that were greater than one Standard Deviation above the group mean), the remaining 14 children showed a significant and moderately strong correlation between growth on the DAB and growth on the PALS-K.

Correlation between gains on the DAB and PALS-K

Pearson correlation	$r = .601$
Significance (1-tailed)	$p = .012$
Number of children	$N = 14$

Discussion

For the majority of the students, gains on the DAB were correlated with gains on the PALS-K, which provides more evidence for the relationship between code-switching skills and literacy acquisition.

Additional research is needed to more fully understand the nature of this relationship, and Dr. Moyle and her team will continue to evaluate ToggleTalk during the 2016/17 school year in Milwaukee area schools.

Based on observations and feedback from the study, Ventris is enhancing the ToggleTalk training with supports for Active Participation Strategies, Oral Language Development and Culturally Relevant Practices that are expected to further bolster language and literacy outcomes for all students involved.

“It was interesting to see how the children related their new skills to their families and everyday speech. They were all able to relate to the program and the stories told in class. It was very promising to see their progression through the program.”

Francis Landoy,
Marquette student

About Marquette University

Marquette University is a Catholic and Jesuit University located near the heart of downtown Milwaukee, Wis., that offers a comprehensive range of majors in 11 nationally and internationally recognized colleges and schools. To learn more about Speech Pathology & Audiology at Marquette, visit the department’s website at www.marquette.edu/speech-pathology-audiology/index.shtml.

“If ToggleTalk is used skillfully, it promotes the development of meta-linguistic awareness which is critical for written language development.”

Maura Moyle, Ph.D.

About Ventris Learning

Our Academic language development resources support teachers to better meet the instructional needs of underserved students. To learn more, visit www.ventrislearning.com.