

ToggleTalk® Instruction Contributes to Urban Transformation School's Superior K–1 Interim Test Scores

Background

Late in 2014, the principals from Duval County Public Schools' (DCPS) Carter G. Woodson School of the Medical Arts, Sallye B. Mathis Elementary, and George Washington Carver Elementary expressed interest in implementing ToggleTalk, a new K–1 supplemental resource developed with a research grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education* 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 linguistic understandings and lesson materials necessary to teach Academic Classroom English (ACE) to Kindergarten and first grade students who speak African American English (AAE).

Implementation

Earlier in 2014, DCPS Superintendent Dr. Nikolai P. Vitti expressed his willingness to support a ToggleTalk implementation (for multiple schools based on their interest). The district eventually provided a professional services contract to pay for ToggleTalk training, for 6 Kindergarten and 5 first grade teachers at Carter Woodson. A private foundation grant offset the cost of the ToggleTalk materials.

"Toggle Talk works well as a supplemental curriculum to teach students how to switch between their home and school language in a creative way! As an educator, I have used many Literature and Language Arts programs and NONE have been able to properly address the needs of our students who speak African American English to navigate or learn the rules of Academic Classroom English."

Angela Bruno,
Reading Interventionist

Qualitative Outcomes

Kindergarten and first grade teachers received separate, one-day trainings, followed by two half day, onsite review sessions and ongoing conference call/webinar support. ToggleTalk was extremely well received by the teachers, school administrators, students and parents. During the semester, principals from several other DCPS schools expressed their interest in the program.

"My students have enjoyed this program ever since I started it. They caught on very quickly to the terms and the various examples. Once I read the first story they wanted me to read it every day! This is a GREAT program and my students are engaged, and learning every time I use it!"

Ms. Tiffany Cheff,
First Grade Teacher

District Response

During an April, 2015 conference call with school administrators, a DCPS Regional Assistant Superintendent stated that Ventris would not be permitted to sell ToggleTalk to other DCPS schools until a 2015/2016 school year, independent evaluation could be conducted. Unfortunately, DCPS did not provide documented support for evaluations by the Jacksonville Public Education Fund (an independent nonprofit organization that works to connect research in support of universally high-quality public schools for all children in Duval County) or for Dr. Otilia Salmón, a researcher at the University of North Florida.

Quantitative Outcomes

Although Carter Woodson is part of a DCPS virtual turnaround region, the school's summary kindergarten i-Ready® test scores (between winter and spring 2015) were among the highest, district-wide! While this remarkable success could obviously not be solely attributed to ToggleTalk, the reading coaches and principal felt that the language development elements of the lessons (including Contrastive Analysis) contributed significantly to the students' superior quantitative outcomes in literacy.

"The students feel validated and are learning about language instead of just being corrected all day, which hasn't proved to be successful. I am so glad we are reaching the students and are able to teach them these skills in Kindergarten and First Grade to help them build a strong academic foundation for success!"

Angela Bruno,
Reading Interventionist

Discussion

ToggleTalk is an instructional innovation (Contrastive Analysis for young children) based on five decades of evidence (e.g. Lanehart, 2015) including 20 years of research on child AAE and its relationship to reading achievement (Craig, 2016). The program was created by leading linguistic experts with the specific goal of helping educators reduce the Black White Achievement Gap in reading (Craig, 2014). ToggleTalk contributed to improved literacy outcomes for young, underserved Black children in Jacksonville, FL. Jacksonville is one of eleven *Campaign for Black Male Achievement* cities and one of the 25 most segregated cities in the US (Logan & Stults, 2011).

"This program couldn't have come at a better time. We are about to begin FSA testing. Writing exams have always been a challenge, but because of ToggleTalk, our children are now writing in the language of school. It's amazing!"

Ms. Lachandra Palmer,
School Instructional Coach

School i-Ready data	K		1	
	1+ Year Growth	2+ Years Growth	1+ Year Growth	2+ Years Growth
2014–15	46+ points	92+ points	46+ points	92+ points
Carter G. Woodson	93%	70%	71%	20%
Lake Forest	82%	29%	58%	5%
Dinsmore	79%	20%	69%	19%
Thomas Jefferson	79%	27%	55%	12%
Andrew Robinson	79%	27%	51%	17%
Ruthledge Pearson	73%	18%	41%	3%
Biscayne	70%	27%	50%	7%
Sallye B. Mathis	70%	13%	71%	7%
St. Clair Evans	70%	18%	80%	13%
District Avenue	67%	19%	63%	14%
Brentwood	67%	22%	48%	4%
Martin L. King Jr.	66%	15%	53%	5%
R. L. Brown	66%	12%	54%	6%
DTO AVE	65%	19%	57%	11%

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.

** Disclaimer: Funding for this work was provided by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305A100284 to the Regents of the University of Michigan. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not present views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.*

S. Lanehart (Ed.), 2015. *Oxford Handbook of African American Language*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Craig, H. K. (2016). *African American English and the achievement gap: The role of dialectal code-switching*. New York: Routledge.

Craig, H. K. (2014). *ToggleTalk®: An evidence-based program for teaching young African American English speaking students to switch to Standard American English for academic purposes*. <http://soe.umich.edu/files/2014-summary-of-toggletalk.pdf>.

John R. Logan and Brian Stults. 2011. "The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census". *Census Brief prepared for Project US2010*. <http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010>.