

# ToggleTalk® Boosts Dialect Awareness, Decoding, and Academic Classroom Language for K–1 Students— *In Just 8 Weeks!*

In 2010, leading researchers were awarded a federal grant to develop and pilot a supplemental Contrastive Analysis curriculum program designed to foster dialect awareness and code-switching skills for kindergarten and first grade African American English (AAE) dialect speakers. Research goals included determining whether Contrastive Analysis instruction would produce increased dialect recognition and decreased AAE feature production for such young students, and to assess program feasibility, implementation fidelity, and teacher acceptance.

The researchers developed the curriculum over a three year period, in four elementary schools in a highly socioeconomically challenged urban district located in the upper Midwest. The materials underwent many iterations based on ongoing data collection. The completed program was named ToggleTalk in order to highlight the need for students to learn to switch back and forth between formal and informal language forms as appropriate. ToggleTalk consists of dialect recognition and dialect shifting lessons, sorting tasks, 9 original storybooks, and a multiple-scale Dialect Assessment Battery (DAB) designed to measure changes in Dialect Recognition (DR), Elicited Imitation (EI) and Translation (T) tasks.

## Contrastive Analysis

Students learn to distinguish between African American English (AAE) and Standard Academic English (SAE), and to translate highly frequent AAE features to SAE forms when prompted to do so.

## Fast Facts

- Mid-sized urban school district
- 11 elementary schools
- 84% Free & Reduced Lunch
- <10% proficient 3rd grade reading
- Predominantly minority status

## ToggleTalk Research and Development Phase

The researchers developed and continually refined appropriate sentence contexts for the production of AAE and SAE dialect features based on a sophisticated, ongoing auditing system, and feedback from an expert advisory panel, a linguist, teachers, and numerous students. An award-winning children's book author provided story lines for the nine original storybooks, and two award-winning artists created the storybook artwork. A psychometrician tested the three Dialect Assessment battery scales using Item Response Theory.

## Spring 2013 Pilot

The final prototype materials were piloted in a school that had not been involved in the development process. A researcher and a Reading Coach led training workshops, modeled instructional best practices, and provided coaching support to the participating classroom teachers. The researchers compiled data using field notes, structured observation forms, open-ended interviews, running records, and questionnaires.

## Results

### The qualitative outcomes indicated that ToggleTalk:

1. Supplemented the English Language Arts curriculum in a financially limited school district.
2. Supported the learning needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population.
3. Enabled the students to transfer the skill spontaneously to other academic classroom activities.

### The quantitative pre-test/post-test measures determined:

1. Program feasibility, implementation fidelity, and teacher acceptance received high questionnaire ratings.
2. Kindergarten and 1st grade students demonstrated an increased awareness of dialectal differences, and they learned to dialect shift.
3. In the relatively short eight-week duration of the pilot, students also made gains on a standardized test of decoding.

## Gains in Reading

DAB pre/post scores were compared for 28 K/1 students using pairwise *t*-tests. Gains were significant on the Dialect Recognition and Elicited Imitation subtests, with moderate to large effect sizes. Mean gains in bi-dialectal skill co-occurred with statistically significant gains on the Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement Letter Word Identification subtest, at a level approaching significance,  $t(27) = 2.00$ ,  $p = .06$ , with effect size  $d = .38$ .

*"I was impressed by the academic content, the quality materials, and the effectiveness of the program."*

Joanne Schnesk,  
Reading Coach

## About the Program Author

Dr. Holly Craig is Emerita Professor and Emerita Research Professor at the University of Michigan. Funded by numerous grants from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, the National Institutes of Health, and private foundations, she has published extensively on the positive role of strong oral language skills in classroom success.

## About Ventris Learning

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