Integrating Culture and Language Into Intervention

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Cultural & Linguistic Foundations of Interventions

• Most existing language interventions are based on research on White, middle-class children and their families.
• As a result, interventions are grounded in White, middle-class language and culture.
• If the linguistic and cultural foundations of interventions do not complement families’ backgrounds, the interventions may not be maximally effective for young children and their families.
• Lack of alignment may be found in:
  • Targeted activities & materials,
  • Parenting goals,
  • Beliefs about social interactions.

• Efforts are needed to integrate families’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds into interventions. These efforts may:
  • increase families’ engagement and participation &
  • maximize the effectiveness of the intervention.

However, it is recognized that some aspects of interventions may be based on the middle-class culture, because of lack of research on other cultures.

In these cases, it is important to discuss potential cultural differences with families (van Klode, 1984).

Purpose

• Present a model for developing culturally and linguistically responsive interventions.

• Discuss how the model was used to develop a book-reading intervention, *Educating Their Children*, that was designed for Latina mothers and their Head Start children who are dual language learners (DLLs).

Development of Culturally-Sensitive Interventions

Step 1: Establish a theoretical & research foundation

• Theoretical and research framework of Mothers Educating Their Children.

  Socio-cultural theory (Rogoff, 2004; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986):
  • Parenting practices are based on cultural norms and values, with the goal to help their children become competent members of their culture.
  • Language, communication & culture are inseparably linked.

  Emergent literacy perspective (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998):
  • Literacy emerges from outside-in processes (language & understanding of the context) and
  • inside-out process (letter knowledge & phonological awareness).

• Importance of home language

  • Language is linked to one’s identity.
  • Mothers’ use of Spanish supports children’s Spanish language growth and is not harmful to English development (Hammer et al., 2006).
  • Mothers’ use of English did not impact English vocabulary and slowed Spanish vocabulary growth (Hammer et al., 2006).
  • Home (English) language growth supports reading development.

  • Spanish and English language growth during 2 years in Head Start predicted English and Spanish early reading in kindergarten and first grade (Hammer et al., 2007; Davison et al., 2011).

Step 2: Learn about the families’ culture

• We consulted the existing literature:
  • Research on Latino culture revealed:
    • Mothers may possess both traditional and progressive beliefs about parenting & culture (Green & James, 2004; Hammer et al., 2007; Hussman & Galindo, 2000).
    • Mothers use a variety of book reading strategies (Hammer et al., 2005).
    • Text reading style – Focus on reading the text of the book
    • Labeling style – Label pictures in the book
    • Story-teller style - Encourage children to make up their own story
    • Interactive style – Read the text and ask children about the text (similar to a dialogic reading style)

• Mothers were more engaged in book reading interventions when their cultural values are incorporated (James & Kerem, 2001).

• We interviewed Latina mothers from the community

  • We conducted semi-structured interviews w/ 20 Latina Head Start mothers
  • The interviews revealed:
    • Mothers wanted children to know and identify with the Latino culture.
    • ‘I want them to understand where we come from and where it all started’ & ‘He needs to know he’s a Puerto Rican’.
    • Several aspects of the Latino culture were important to the mothers:
      • Traditional foods, music, and festivals/fiestas
      • History of their home country
      • Cultural values
        • The importance of family
        • “At home, it’s that the education is based on family, for us.”
        • Relationships with elders – such as asking for elders’ blessings
        • Helping others whenever they are in need
        • Being “well-educated” – good manners, good relationships with others, being a good communicator, & being respectful
          “Teach them manners. And that they respect others’ & … teach her to be respectful of other people, … to feel the pain from other people, because I believe that when you can put yourself in someone else position you learn more.”
    • Mothers wanted their children to know Spanish and English.
      • “…so you have to learn how to read Spanish out of Puerto Rican, so you have to learn, “It’s better for you, you speak two languages.”
    • Mothers viewed themselves as responsible for teaching their children school-related concepts.

Step 3: Obtain input from staff & parent teams

• We created teams of Latino staff members and parents to provide input about the intervention as it was developed.

  • The Staff Team
    • consisted 2 teachers, 2 assistants, and a staff member,
    • met with the team one timemonth for 4 months, provided input on:
      • design of the intervention, and
      • possible themes for the 8 books that we were developing for the intervention
  • The Parent Team
    • consisted of 5 Latina, Head Start mothers
    • met 8 times & provided input on each book as we developed it
    • reviewed the story line and text of each book,
    • provided input on the authenticity of illustrations.

Step 4: Develop the intervention

• Using the information gathered through Steps 1-3, we developed the book-reading intervention.

  • Title – Mothers Educating Their Children/Madres educando a sus hijos
  • The Parent Team named the project. The name reflects that mothers are responsible for educating their children.
  • Eight books were developed for use during 8 home visits
    • The books tell the story of the Alvarez family and their visit to their homeland.

  • A Trip to Abuela’s House
    • Un viaje a la casa de Abuela
    • Fiesta Patriotas
    • Rosea learns a lesson
    • Rosita aprende una lección
    • Beto & the Chickens
    • Beto y los pollitos
    • Even Poorer Neighbors
    • Hasta los peores vecinos
    • Getting to the River
    • Going to the River
    • El viaje a la casa de Abuela
    • The Flower & the Hummingbird
    • La flor del colibrí

  • A Wonderful Trip (un viaje maravilloso)
  • The family reflects on their visit

The Intervention

• Eight home visits were conducted by bilingual home visitors
  • Presented the intervention as an opportunity for mothers to
    • share their culture with their children
    • support their children’s language and literacy development.

  • During the initial home visit, home visitors talked with mothers about how they read books to their children.
  • Encouraged mothers to continue their style
  • Discussed how teachers read books with children
  • Encouraged parents to supplement what they do using dialogic reading strategies

  • In subsequent home visits, home visitors taught mothers how to use dialogic reading strategies, promote vocabulary, expand their children’s utterances, and engage children in narrative activities.

  • During each home visit, mothers were provided with:
    • A new book about the Alvarez family
    • Each book included example questions for mothers to ask their children
    • Reminder cards that highlighted strategies targeted during the home visit
    • Supplemental activities that targeted:
      • Vocabulary
      • List of new vocabulary words to target (form the books with photos)
      • Narrative abilities
      • Mothers were encouraged to tell stories from their childhood and/or about their homeland.
      • Children’s activities in copying of the targeted books & retold stories to family members.
    • Commercially-produced bilingual books (generalization of strategies)

  • Mothers provided feedback on the theme of each book, expressed interest and/or interest in continuing the intervention.

Results

• Intervention vs. Control Differences
  • No differences were observed on standardized tests.

  • Children in the intervention group exhibited greater gains in:
    • the number of different words produced (lexical diversity) during narratives &
    • mean length of utterance (grammatical complexity) during book reading.

• Social & Cultural Validity
  • Almost all mothers (95%) in the intervention group read the project’s weekly book at least once and used the targeted strategies.
    • Mothers reported learning that book reading is more than reading the text.
    • Mothers were more interactive and enjoyed reading to their children.
  • Most mothers (87%) completed the supplemental activities.
  • 65% of mothers expressed that the books allowed them to share their culture with their children.
    • One mother stated that the project “helped parents that come from another country to keep practicing their culture and prepare their children for kindergarten.”
  • Several mothers shared that the books reminded them about aspects of their culture that had been lost in their homeland.
  • Half of the mothers reported that their children enjoyed the books so much that they shared the books with others (including grandparents, fathers, siblings, cousins, and teachers).
    • One mother stated that her child “even tells his bus driver about the books… she could not wait for her to read the next book to him.”
  • Several mothers shared that their children’s teachers noticed a change in their children’s reading interest and/or ability.

Discussion

• The model resulted in the successful development of a culturally and linguistically-responsive intervention.

• Mothers appreciated the integration of their culture and language into the intervention.

• Mothers enjoyed reading with their children and consistently reported using book-reading strategies.

• The pilot study showed promising results. Lessons learned included:
  • The need for culturally and linguistically responsive interventions.

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