

Early Language Development and Facilitation Strategies in First Nations Childcare Settings

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Purpose of Study

This project will document and strengthen community-driven approaches to ensuring culturally appropriate parent and ECE led English language facilitation for young Aboriginal children.

Background

Current effective strategies and programs to promote effective language facilitation by caregivers, including parents, early childhood educators, and speech-language therapists have been based largely on social interactionist accounts of how children learn language from adult language input. These accounts have been based on research with white middle-class cultural groups in metropolitan areas. Options need to be considered for adjusting language facilitation and intervention strategies to match cultural values, beliefs and priorities (Girolometto et al., 1999; Johnston, 2002; van Kleek, 1994).

Aboriginal leaders have argued that lack of services, as well as culturally inappropriate education, services and screening procedures, result in serious negative consequences for Aboriginal children. Current research has emphasized the recognition of cultural context as a foundation for meaningful assessment and service delivery, as well as the definition of 'quality' and methods to evaluate effectiveness through a socially inclusive, collaborative process that incorporates cherished aspects of indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and goals for children (Ball & Pence, 1999; Ball, 2000).

Method

To further explore community-driven approaches in language facilitation, the research team will survey speech-language pathologists for their opinions about serving First Nations preschool children in BC, gathering their evaluations of published training materials for facilitating language in Aboriginal children as well as anecdotal reports on Aboriginal children's language development. Interviews, questionnaires and a forum with representatives will be used in each of two Aboriginal communities to explore parents' and communities' views on children's language development, desired forms of early verbal behaviour, and current strategies in early language facilitation. A second round of interactive interviews will elicit Aboriginal caregivers' views about the potential utility of

strategies thought to facilitate early language and pre-literacy development. Observations of language facilitation strategies will be made in two First Nations communities' child care and development programs to guide the design of culturally meaningful and useful language assessment protocols.

References

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