



# National Evaluation of Child Care Subsidy Strategies

## Findings from Project Upgrade

Brookings/AEI Seminar

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# Project Upgrade



- ◆ One of four experiments conducted as part of the Evaluation of Child Care Subsidy Strategies, conducted by Abt Associates under a contract with the Administration for Children and Families.
- ◆ A two-year, experimental test of three different language/literacy curricula, conducted in Miami/Dade County between 2003 and 2005.
- ◆ Study was a partnership between the Early Learning Coalition (CCDF quality dollars paid for the interventions) and Abt Associates (contract funds paid for the evaluation).



# The Challenge



- ◆ Nationally, four-year-olds from low-income families lag behind more advantaged children by almost a year as they enter school.
- ◆ This difference persists throughout their school years.
- ◆ In Miami-Dade County, in 2003, low-income four-year-olds scored very poorly on a language assessment.



# Project Upgrade



- ◆ A rigorous experimental test of three language and literacy curricula selected by the ELC.
- ◆ 164 child care centers serving low-income four-year-olds were randomly assigned to one of the three curricula or to a control group. In each center, one classroom was selected.



# Why Focus on Language and Literacy?

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- ◆ Research identifies language and pre-literacy skills as essential foundation for reading and school success.
- ◆ Nationally, these are the areas where low-income children lag behind at school entry.
- ◆ Specifically identified as problem in Miami-Dade County.



# The Curricula Selected



- ◆ All three based on most recent research on what predicts reading success
- ◆ All focused on development of language and literacy skills.
- ◆ All included take-home materials for parents to use with children.
- ◆ Differed in instructional approach, materials provided, use of technology, intensity and cost.



# The Curricula



- ◆ Ready, Set, Leap (RSL) is a comprehensive program, using interactive electronic technology.
- ◆ Building Early Language and Literacy (BELL) is an add-on literacy component with two daily 15-minute lessons.
- ◆ Breakthrough to Literacy (BTL) is a comprehensive program, using interactive computer software to provide individualized literacy activities for children.



# What Questions Did the Study Address?

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- ◆ Does training in and ongoing support for language and literacy curricula have positive effects on teachers' behavior and interactions and classroom environments?
- ◆ Do the interventions have positive effects on children's language and emergent literacy skills?



# Findings: Impacts on Teachers

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- ◆ By late spring 2004, five months after the initial training, all three interventions produced significant impacts on teacher behavior and interactions with children.
- ◆ By Spring 2005, these impacts increased in all but one area.



# Impacts on Teachers



- ◆ Impacts were generally greater for teachers whose dominant language was Spanish.
- ◆ The interventions eliminated the effect of the teacher's educational background on literacy-related behaviors.



# Impacts on the Classroom Environment

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- ◆ By Spring 2005, the interventions had increased by 64% the amount of literacy-related activity in the treatment classrooms.
- ◆ The increase in literacy-related activity did not come at the expense of any other single activity.



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# Findings: Impacts on Children

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- ◆ Two of the three interventions had significant impacts on all four measures of emergent literacy.
- ◆ Impacts were much greater for children in classrooms with Spanish-speaking teachers.



# What is the Practical Meaning of the Impacts on Children?

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- ◆ The impacts brought children close to or above the national norms on three of the four outcomes measured.
- ◆ The impacts represent between four and nine months of developmental growth.



# What Did We Learn?



- ◆ This model of professional development can change teachers' classroom practices in ways that foster language and emergent literacy.
- ◆ Focused training and support eliminated the effect of teachers' education on their support for children's literacy.
- ◆ Amount of exposure to treatment was important.



# What Did We Learn?

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- ◆ The two interventions that had effects on child outcomes wove activities throughout the day and supplemented teacher training with electronic classroom aids.
- ◆ With these strategies, it was possible to achieve large, educationally-meaningful impacts on critical child outcomes.
- ◆ The cost of the two interventions was \$13,000 - \$14,000 per class or \$650 - \$750 per child.



# Why is the Study So Important?

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- ◆ Large “real-life” experiment is unique in child care research.
- ◆ Impacts on children are much larger than we see in other “real-life” studies (e.g., Head Start Impact Study, Early Reading First).
- ◆ The large effects on Spanish-speaking children address an important national policy issue.