Children's School Success Plus (CSS+): A Development Project

Eva Horn, Susan Palmer, Stephanie Parks, Gretchen Jansen - University of Kansas
Gretchen Butera, Amber Friesen, Alina Mihai - Indiana University
Joan Lieber, Debra Drang– University of Maryland
Jean Kang – University of North Carolina Greensboro

Rationale

Within Early Childhood Education a recent trend is the development of curricula that guide the actions of teachers and specify the content of learning experiences that children receive (Fantuzzo, et al, 2011; Fischel, 2007). A key component of IDEA regulations is "participation and progress in the general curriculum" (Federal Register, 2006). Thus, we need to know how to implement high quality early childhood curriculum to benefit all young children including those with disabilities and at-risk for developmental delay

Planned Outcomes
CSS+ Curriculum Model will provide:

- strategies for teacher on incorporating principles of universal design for learning, individualization, and progress monitoring that is tied to early learning standards into preschool curriculum content.
- evidence from teachers in Head Start and community-based preschool classrooms that teachers in these settings can and will implement the critical elements of the curriculum model.
- support for the expected outcome that when teachers provide educational programming incorporating these principles that young children with disabilities and at risk for developmental delay will be actively engaged in the curriculum and make meaningful progress.

Design Plan
CSS+ project conducted over 3 years: (Horn, et al, 2010)

- First year, we refined an existing integrated preschool curriculum (CSS) such that it clearly reflected universal design for learning and addressed feasibility of implementations concerns related to teacher perceptions of its use with all children. In addition, we asked teachers to assess feasibility with a particular focus on children with disabilities.
- Second year, teachers from 12 classrooms across 3 states (Kansas, Indiana and Maryland) are implementing CSS+ for one year and providing ongoing feedback through site visits, written communication, and periodic focus group meetings regarding the feasibility of implementing CSS+ as a curriculum. In addition, teachers are providing us with suggested modifications to ensure the usability and appropriateness of the match with their teaching context. Changes are ongoing with decisions based on maintaining a balance between the integrity of critical elements of the curriculum model and ensuring teacher "buy-in" and willingness to implement.
- Third year, the teachers will implement the refined curriculum. We will assess a sample of preschoolers with disabilities to see whether implementation fidelity is positively related to their learning outcomes. Specifically, we will assess:
  1. Fidelity of Implementation of key aspects of the model
  2. Intervening variables mainly teacher and learning environments variables
  3. Child outcome variables

Tackling Feasibility
Implementation of CSS+ Curriculum Model requires changes in teaching practices that for many early childhood educators requires changes to their current practice. Some teachers may find changes to be minor while others will see the changes as very substantial. Even small changes, however, have the potential to raise questions around the feasibility of implementation.
Thus it is important to carefully analyze the feedback provided by the teachers to provide guidance on how to make appropriate modifications. To guide our decision-making, we are guided by Heifetz & Linsky (2002) organizational change framework. Specifically consideration of the:
   • **Technical Changes required by implementation**. That is, understanding the changes that are needed in concrete tasks of curriculum content, classroom organization, daily schedule, and lesson planning, implementation, and assessment.
   • **Adaptive Changes required for implementation** That is, changes in educators' beliefs, values, expectations, and attitudes of their work and role as early childhood educators.

Current Issues to Resolve
Linking Fidelity and Expected Outcomes for Implementation of the CSS+ Model:
   1. What are the key/unique features of the CSS+ curriculum model that we anticipate will lead to significant positive outcomes?
   2. What intervening variables (components of the teaching/learning enterprise) do we anticipate that these key features will directly impact?
   • Teacher Behavior
   • Learning Environment
   • Curriculum Content Offered
   3. How will child outcomes/learning be affected above and beyond what would occur if the changes did not occur?

CSS+ Curricular Model
1. 110+ Activity Sets – addressing curricular domains of literacy, math, science, and social skills.
2. Activity Plan Sheets which include information on addressing UDL and provide place to plan for and document individualization.
3. Teacher Manual

References
Fantuzzo, J. W., Gadsden, V. L., & McDermott, P. A. (2011). An integrated curriculum to improve mathematics, language, and literacy for Head Start children. American Educational Research Journal, 48, 763-794.
Fischel, J. E., Bracken, S. S., Fuchs-Eisenberg, A., Spira, E. G., Katz, S., & Shaller, G. (2007). Evaluation of curricular approaches to enhance preschool early literacy skills. Journal of Literacy Research, 39, 471-501.
Heifetz, R.A. & Linsky, M. (2002). Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of leading. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
Horn, E., Palmer, S., Lieber, J. & Butera, G. (2010). Children's School Success Plus grant applicant: IES goal 2. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas.