Translational Research in Education: The Benefits of a Partnership that Examines the Impact of Professional Development on Early-Literacy Outcomes

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Translational research addresses the dichotomy between research and practice and provides those who care deeply about public education with an opportunity to partner in an effort to close the research-to-practice gap. This study explored translational research at an Early Literacy Lab School, a kindergarten through Grade 4 school located in a city in the northeastern United States. The researchers detail the collaborative partnership between university faculty and school faculty as they came together to reform early-literacy outcomes and to address the needs of the school’s students, who were largely identified as English language learners and of low socioeconomic status. The study explored both the use of specific literacy practices for improving early-literacy outcomes and the efficacy of professional development to increase teachers’ skills in early literacy. The study contributes to the emerging paradigm of translational research in education and highlights transformative benefits between schools and universities in education.

Introduction to the Study

Educators are well versed in lamenting the disconnection between what professors research and what teachers practice. This disconnect helps to make a convincing argument for university and public leaders, school and university faculties, and federal and private grant makers to join efforts and adopt the emerging paradigm of translational research for integrating educational research and practice—for efficiently and effectively translating educational science into benefits for real people and closing the lab-to-classroom gap. By inference, insisting upon a two-way link between what education professors should produce—relevant research—and what teachers should do—evidence-based practice—might complement and facilitate current steps toward reform of both teacher education and evidence-based educational practice. That link, we suggest, is provided by the translational paradigm and is the heartbeat of the intrinsic co-dependence of research and practice, of professor and practitioner, and, in addition, outlines the potentially strong benefits of school and university partnerships.

Translational research gets its foundation from the medical sciences. This form of research suggests a bench-to-bedside approach, where the research has an immediate impact