

Evaluation Report Brief

Mile High Early Learning and Clayton Early Learning: Cradling Literacy

What is the community challenge?

Adult-child interaction with book-reading and storytelling is a critical opportunity for developing fundamental early literacy skills. Research indicates that there are disparities in children's language and literacy development, with children and families from under-resourced communities receiving less early language and literacy support.

What is the promising solution?

To identify effective language and literacy interventions to alleviate these disparities, Clayton Early Learning and Mile High Early Learning partnered to conduct a quasi-experimental study of Cradling Literacy--a promising early language and literacy intervention for their center-based programs that serve low-income families with children ages 6 weeks to 30 months. The curriculum is delivered to teachers and provides a framework for early language and literacy by focusing on the importance of storytelling, culture, and relationships, as well as how children develop language skills, and ways teachers can support emergent literacy and social-emotional literacy. The program's intended outcomes included: increasing language-rich interactions between children and teachers or parents/caregivers, increasing quality and frequency of book reading, and increasing children's oral language and communication skills.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Cradling Literacy

Grantee: Mile High United Way

Subgrantee: Mile High Early Learning and Clayton Early Learning

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population(s): Low income families with infants and toddlers ages 6 weeks to 30 months

Community Served: Denver, CO

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of the Mile High Early Learning and Clayton Early Learning's Cradling Literacy program began in 2012, with reporting completed in 2017 by the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver. The evaluation assessed whether teachers at centers that were implementing Cradling Literacy in addition to Dialogic Reading (DR; an evidence-based early literacy program that focuses on interactive reading) provided greater support for literacy activities or resulted in families achieving greater gains in children's oral and communication skills relative to those at centers that did not use Cradling Literacy. To determine the impact of the Cradling Literacy program, the evaluation employed a quasi-experimental design with random assignment of three sites to treatment and three sites to the control condition. During the time of the study, 817 children were enrolled in the centers. A total of 333 families enrolled in the research study (41% enrollment rate), with 186 families in the treatment group and 147 families in the control group.

What did the evaluation find?

Mile High Early Learning and Clayton Early Learning engaged in a rigorous evaluation of the impact of the Cradling Literacy program's effect on teachers' support of literacy in their classrooms and with parents. The evaluation of the Cradling Literacy program included an implementation study that focused on observing how the program was implemented and operated. The evaluation also included an impact study that sought to determine the impacts of the program on children's language and literacy levels.

Key findings from this evaluation include:

- Teachers showed short-term gains related to their classroom-level support for learning and their knowledge of practices to support early literacy.
- Parents/caregivers in the intervention group made significant gains over time in the frequency of parent-child storytelling and in children’s verbal and nonverbal communication, while comparison parents/caregivers remained stable or showed more modest gains.
- Attendance was important, with children who attended their intervention center more frequently making greater gains in language skills and words produced than did intervention-group children who attended less frequently.

Notes on the evaluation

Due to the complexity of measuring literacy as a construct, this evaluation utilized multiple indicators of literacy, measured at either the teacher, child, and parent/caregiver level by multiple reporters (parents and teachers) at multiple timepoints. The improvements in scores over time cannot be attributed solely to the Cradling Literacy intervention due to some key threats to the study’s validity, including impact analyses on unmatched quasi-experimental treatment group samples. Therefore, it is unclear the extent to which the observed gains over time for the treatment and comparison groups are due to Cradling Literacy or the Dialogic Reading intervention that was present at both research sites or simply due to participant maturation.

How are Clayton Early Learning and Mile High Early Learning using the evaluation findings to improve?

The early learning centers are expected to continue Cradling Literacy training and coaching, and they are considering ways of modifying its delivery based on feedback from teachers and coaches. For example, centers may explore the possibility of conducting more peer-to-peer trainings.



Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design(s): Quasi-experimental impact evaluation

Study Population: Infants and toddlers ages 6 weeks – 30 months

Independent Evaluator: The Butler Institute for Families

This Evaluation’s Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.