

## **More Than Words: The Relations between Teacher-Child Interactions, Classroom Context and Latino DLLs' School Readiness**

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### **Project Description**

The overarching purpose of this project is to increase the understanding of classroom factors and processes that can support the language and socio-emotional development of dual language learners (DLLs). In recent years, policymakers have paid more attention to DLLs not only because of their increasing numbers, but also because prior research has shown gaps in achievement between DLLs and their monolingual English-speaking peers. To better serve DLLs, research needs to focus on how having access to two languages uniquely affects their learning.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the associations between teacher-child interactions in the preschool classroom and Latino DLLs' Spanish and English proficiency and socio-emotional outcomes?
2. Controlling for child and family characteristics, do associations between teacher-child interactions and DLLs' school readiness differ depending on classroom setting and DLL classroom composition?
3. Using qualitative methods, what are teachers' language ideologies and how might they influence classroom practice and DLLs' school readiness?

### **Sample**

*Primary data.* Primary data will be collected from a Head Start program in Boston consisting of 11 preschool classrooms with 221 children enrolled. The dominant language and culture is Spanish/Central and South American (73% of families identify as Hispanic). Most teachers and teacher assistants (72%) have credentials beyond high school and have 5+ years of teaching experience. A large proportion of teachers are

Hispanic (40%) and bilingual (40% speaking Spanish and English).

*Secondary Data.* Secondary data will come from the Head Start Family and Children Experiences Survey (FACES) 2009 cohort. Participants in the FACES 2009 cohort included a complex sample of 60 programs, 129 centers, 486 classrooms, and 3,149 children. Included were 919 children whose first language was Spanish. Data collection began in fall 2009 and was completed in spring 2012.

### **Methods**

This study employs an innovative way of applying a mixed-methods approach by using both a secondary data set, the Head Start Family and Child Survey (FACES) 2009 cohort and primary data collected at a local Head Start site to better understand the relations between teacher-child interactions, classroom context, and DLLs' school readiness.

### **Progress Update**

*Primary Data.* During the past 6 months, primary data activities involved completing spring data collection, scoring, entering and cleaning the data and running descriptive analysis. To date, majority of the quantitative data has been scored and cleaned. All of the qualitative data has been transcribed and verified.

Quantitative data collected has been scored, entered and cleaned. Ongoing analysis includes running descriptives and correlations among specific variables of interest and writing up results. Once data sets are ready for analysis, multilevel modeling will be conducted using MPlus. For the qualitative data, preliminary codes were developed

and research assistants were trained to use these codes.

*Secondary Data.* Secondary data comes from the Head Start FACES 2009 cohort. A substantial amount of time for the remainder of Year 2 will focus on running analyses for secondary data. This included creating Latino subsample, testing for any differences in demographic characteristics of the new groups created, and constructing several variables using information from the teacher questionnaire. Once datasets are ready, multilevel modeling will be conducted as outlined below.

## **Results**

Since data analysis is ongoing, only selected descriptive information is available related to the primary data.

## **Implications for policy/practice**

This study can strengthen our understanding of the school readiness of increasingly large numbers of students, who are more at risk for school difficulties than their peers, contributing to the goal of promoting educational equity. While there has been work with children from immigrant families that takes into account parents' roles in their development, this study hopes to expand on the research by looking at how teachers, through teacher-child interactions in the preschool classroom, can influence DLLs' language and socio-emotional competence.

Many groups advocate for a more culturally and linguistically diverse teacher workforce to address the needs of DLLs. However, the reality of cultural and linguistic mismatches between teachers and students in early childhood settings should be addressed and more research is needed to help teachers connect with DLLs, even if they do not share the same background. In considering what kinds of interventions and professional development may be effective, it will be important first to understand what factors influence teachers' language use, classroom instruction for DLLs, and ideologies.

## **Implications for research**

This study hopes to provide a more nuanced understanding of how teacher-child interactions

and classroom context relate to DLLs' school readiness by employing a novel mixed-methods approach, through the utilization of both primary and secondary data as well as quantitative and qualitative methods. By examining national and local samples together, this study will demonstrate how information from both can be used to co-inform one another. Second, by including semi-structured interviews on teachers' language ideologies, this study hopes to illuminate processes evidenced through the quantitative data, as well as add to the limited literature on preschool teachers' language ideologies, which relies heavily on self-assessment questionnaires that may not allow teachers to explain their own beliefs and perspectives clearly.

Further, as part of data collection preparation, a protocol was developed for selecting a subsample of DLLs. Currently, there is no standard way of determining the language proficiency of DLLs in the field. Parent report, teacher report and direct child assessments are common ways to determine language proficiency of DLLs. For determining language proficiency, a comprehensive approach that utilizes multiple methods and combines information gathered from more informal assessments and psychometrically sound direct assessments will best guide assessment (Barrueco, Lopez, Ong, Lozano, 2012). In this study, language dominance was determined through multiple sources of information; parent, teacher and child report and the Pre-LAS, a language screener that assess children's receptive and expressive language in Spanish and English.

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