

Center for Early Care and Education Research: Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL)

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Project Description.

The Center for Early Care and Education Research: Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL) is a cooperative agreement awarded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The primary goal of the Center is to advance the research field to improve assessment, child care, and education for dual language learners (DLLs) from birth through five years of age. This Center pursues a focused agenda of research and national leadership activities that will: (a) improve the state of knowledge and measurement in early childhood research on young DLLs and the needs of their families as these relate to children's development, and (b) identify and advance the evidence base for the best practices and strategies in early care and education programming to support the overall development of young DLLs and to effectively support their families.

Center Activities.

Research: To accomplish its goals the CECER-DLL is conducting research activities in three phases (1) establishing the state of knowledge about the development and early care and education of young DLLs; (2) developing a conceptual framework for the study of DLLs development and methodological guidelines for conducting scientifically sound research with young DLLs; and (3) conducting a field test study of tools and methods to characterize the family and early education experiences of young DLLs.

National Leadership: An important part of the Center's work is to engage in a dialogue with researchers, policymakers and practitioners. This dialogue is used to identify promising areas of research, share information regarding key methodological approaches, and develop and

complete outreach and dissemination products that will advance the field.

Progress Update.

Research Activities:

Phase 1: The Center has conducted a series of critical research reviews. Four reviews, on the topics listed below, have been completed and manuscripts were submitted for publication at a peer-review journal. Research briefs on these reviews are available at the Center's website:

- Socio-emotional development of DLLs
- Language and literacy development of DLLs
- Early care and education for DLLs
- Using early care and education quality measures with DLLs

A review on the use of language and literacy measures with young DLLs, their psychometric properties and assessment approaches was also completed and the full report is available at the Center website.

Other research reviews are being conducted on:

- Characteristics of developmental measures used with DLLs.
- Family context for young DLLs
- Cognitive development of young DLLs

The Center has also conducted two secondary analyses of data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort addressing developmental outcomes and child care arrangements of young DLLs. Findings from both analyses will be published in peer-review journals. A research brief on the developmental outcomes analysis is available at the Center website. A review paper on development and early care of infants and toddlers who are DLLs is in preparation.

Phase 2: The critical research reviews consistently found several methodological challenges in studies examining dual language learners' development and

their early care and education experiences. Another major conclusion was the need for a conceptual framework to help interpret current research and identify gaps to be addressed in future research. To address these challenges the CECER-DLL is developing a conceptual framework for the study of young DLLs' development. The unique contribution of this framework will be to articulate which elements are common in the bilingual experience and the variations in the cultural processes in the multiple settings DLLs are engaged with (i.e., home, early childhood program, neighborhood), as well as to explain how those elements contribute to define DLLs' developmental competencies. A manuscript for a peer-review journal is in preparation.

Also, methodological guidelines to conduct scientifically sound research with DLL populations are being prepared by Center researchers, focusing on the following aspects of research methodology: sampling and recruitment, selection of assessment measures and procedures and analytic approaches.

The CECER-DLL is developing Family and Teacher/Childcare Provider Questionnaires that can be used to document the home, childcare and classroom experiences of young DLLs. Specifically, the Family Questionnaire will allow researchers to gather information about the characteristics of young DLLs and their families as well as the language experiences of DLLs. The Teacher/Childcare Provider Questionnaire will enable researchers to gather information about the characteristics of DLLs' teachers and classrooms, DLLs' classroom language experiences, and teachers' beliefs and practices.

Phase 3: The Center is beginning implementation of a study to field test the CECER-DLL Family and Teacher Questionnaires in a sample of preschool-aged Latino Spanish-speaking children from low-income families enrolled in early childhood centers. In addition, this study will examine (1) the association between teachers' reports and observations of children's L1 & L2 exposure and use, and (2) the association between DLLs' language exposure and use as reported by their caregivers and the child's language skills in L1 (Spanish) and L2 (English). In the process, this study will demonstrate the use of relevant methodological guidelines for conducting

research with DLL populations being developed by the CECER-DLL.

Implications for research & policy

The CECER-DLL is contributing to identify what we know and what research is still needed to fill gaps in knowledge regarding DLLs' development and their family and early care and education contexts. Given the challenges and limitations in the current research with young DLLs, the Center's work will provide researchers in the early care and education field with tools and methods that we expect will contribute to make DLL research more culturally valid and linguistically appropriate. Also, the information generated by the CECER-DLL can inform the development of ECE policies that are responsive to the characteristics and needs of young DLLs.

For more information:

CECER-DLL website document library
(cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu)

- Listening sessions – Research Briefs #1-3
- Critical Research Reviews & Secondary Data Analysis-Research briefs #4-8
- Bandel, E., Atkins-Burnett, S., Castro, D. C., Wulsin, C. S., & Putman, M. (2012). *Examining the use of language and literacy assessments with young dual language learners.* Research Report #1.

Upcoming:

- Espinosa, L. M., & Garcia, E. (2012). *Developmental assessment of young dual language learners with a focus on kindergarten entry assessments: Implications for state policies.* Working paper #1.
- Assessment approaches and psychometric properties of language and literacy measures used with DLLs– Research Briefs #9 & 10.

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