

Individual Experiences in ECE Classrooms: Variation by Home Language

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Disparities in school readiness outcomes by home language are well-documented (e.g., Boyce, Gillam, Innocenti, Cook, & Ortiz, 2013). These disparities exist due to myriad factors including poverty and systemic racism and oppression, resulting in fewer opportunities for Dual Language Learners (DLLs). Despite efforts to mitigate the cumulative risks experienced by families and children within these groups, disparities persist (e.g., Buysse, Peisner-Feinberg, Paez, Hammer, & Knowles, 2013). As recently declared by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, it is imperative to explore the possibility that inequity in early childhood care and education (ECE) experiences may be partly to blame for the persistence of the disparities. Exploration of potentially inequitable experiences in ECE will allow researchers to provide targeted recommendations to the field for best practices in supporting DLLs.

The current study utilizes an intensive observational protocol to examine the classroom experiences of 3- and 4-year-old children ($n = 336$) in a Head Start program. Observations were collected using the Child Observational Protocol, which involves 3 second sweeps of individual children in the classroom. Observers spent approximately 4 hours in the classroom on a typical morning. All children in the classroom were observed and had an average of 9 sweeps per child. Data were aggregated at the child level, resulting in proportions of sweeps children engaged in particular behaviors. The current study specifically focuses on the proportion of sweeps in which a child was listening to talking to someone else in the classroom (in any language) and also the proportion of sweeps a child was observed speaking in English. Enrollment information including home language was provided by the Head Start agency. Children were also assessed using the Pre-IPT Oral English to determine English proficiency. It is important to note that the Head Start program being observed operates using an English immersion model, so nearly all classroom instruction and conversation involving teachers is in English.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine differences in proportion of time children were talking or listening to a peer or teacher and proportion of time children were talking in English. Results indicate that children who speak Spanish at home had more observational sweeps in which they were neither speaking nor listening to anyone else in the classroom (45%) compared to their peers who speak English at home (39%; $F(2, 333) = 3.39, p < .05$). Similarly, children whose home language is Spanish were observed speaking in English in fewer observational sweeps (15%) compared to peers whose home language is English (21%).

A second set of analyses were conducted to consider subgroups within the DLL portion of the sample. Children were categorized as "Bilingual" if they have a home language other than English and they scored in the Proficient range on the Pre-IPT. Children whose home language is something other than English were categorized as "DLL" if they did not demonstrate proficiency on the Pre-IPT. Analyses indicated that children categorized as DLL had more sweeps in which they were neither talking or listening (47%) than either than Bilingual (42%) or English Monolingual (39%) children. Similarly, DLL

children were less likely to be observed speaking in English (12%) than their Bilingual (19%) or English monolingual (21%) peers.

These initial analyses indicate that children whose home language is not English may have more limited opportunities to practice their language skills in the ECE classroom, with a particular disadvantage for children who enter with limited English proficiency. Additional analyses will be conducted prior to the conference to explore whether these variations in experience partially explain children's growth in English vocabulary from fall to spring. Implications for teaching and professional development will be discussed.