RESEARCH BRIEF #3

Considerations for Future Research with Young Dual Language Learners

Introduction

The Center for Early Care and Education Research on Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL) convened a meeting of national experts to identify gaps in the state of knowledge and methodological challenges in conducting research with this population (see Appendix for list of meeting participants). Key themes that emerged from the discussion are summarized below and reflect priorities for future research in this area.

Gaps in the State of Knowledge

The research field is lacking a comprehensive theoretical framework or model describing the development of dual language learners. A cohesive conceptual model is needed to guide future research on DLLs. This conceptual model should describe the predictors, outcomes, and contextual factors relevant to DLLs' development, highlighting the different developmental course for DLLs that arises from the experience of being bilingual. It may be useful to consider existing theoretical frameworks from the K-12 literature to better understand the developmental continuum beyond early childhood.

There are several gaps in the research evidence on the development and early care and education of dual language learners.

- There is little normative research on DLLs' developmental trajectories, including studies addressing questions such as whether DLLs develop along the same trajectories as non-DLLs and identifying important outcomes for DLLs.
- Research on DLLs must incorporate salient contextual factors. Family context factors include family practices, cultural influences, child care preferences and access, and the role of extended family members. Early care and education context factors should address center-based care, family-friend-neighbor care, home visiting programs, and programs with unique contexts (e.g., migrant programs). Sociopolitical contexts that may affect DLLs include federal, state, and early care and education program policies on language use.
- Theory and research need to disentangle language status from sociodemographic constructs such as socioeconomic status (SES), culture, ethnicity, and immigration. For example, research is needed on the impact of bilingualism at various SES levels. Such efforts will help identify variables and processes that are unique to DLLs. Indeed, there is emerging evidence that some sociodemographic indicators (e.g., family income, parent education) do not operate in the same ways for DLLs versus non-DLLs. Comparative analyses may be a useful strategy for examining whether certain variables operate similarly across diverse groups (e.g., DLLs versus non-DLLs; DLLs from various language and cultural groups).
- There is little information about what constitutes high quality early care and education for DLLs ages birth – 5, and how to measure it. Defining program quality includes addressing how to provide supports for L1, how to promote learning of L2, how to address possible discrepancies between program quality definitions and goals for DLLs, whether definitions should be unique to the context of a given setting (e.g., percentage of

DLLs, diversity of languages spoken), and whether placement in high quality early care and education programs predicts different outcomes for DLLs. Further, existing measures of program quality vary by content (e.g., broad classroom practices versus specific developmental domains) and by the unit of analysis (e.g., individual child versus whole group), limiting the types of conclusions that can be drawn from a given instrument.

- One particular area of research that is needed is the implications of language of instruction to inform recommendations related to choosing early care and education programs and designing interventions for those settings. Additional research is needed to determine the bidirectional influences of language of instruction on early care and education contexts, teaching and caregiving practices, and children's social and cognitive development. Further, there is concern about inappropriately applying findings from the K-12 literature on language of instruction to the early childhood period.

- Few rigorous studies exist that examine early education interventions targeting DLLs. This literature is characterized by methodological issues (e.g., interventions of short duration) that limit the ability to test for intervention effects, and to provide recommendations about practices that are effective with this population. Future research should test a broad range of interventions for DLLs, informed by a typology that classifies previously tested interventions and includes multiple outcomes and moderators.

There is a need to conduct translational research activities to provide guidance to practitioners and families about how to promote the development and learning of children who are DLLs. Early care and education providers need guidance on best practices for working with DLLs, including what information to collect on DLLs and how to ensure high quality early childhood practices and environments. Parents of DLLs may benefit from summaries of research findings about DLLs' normative development to support home language and literacy practices. It will be necessary to identify the mechanisms through which this information will be delivered to different audiences, and how to develop recommendations and summaries based on limited existing research.

Methodological Issues in Conducting Research on DLLs
The lack of appropriate measures constitutes a long-standing limitation affecting the quality of research with young DLLs and their families.

- Information is needed on the properties of existing measures (including commercially-available, researcher-developed, and large-scale survey questions) to determine their appropriateness, promote the selection of suitable measures, and identify areas lacking measures. Such information includes the stated purpose, availability in multiple languages, and appropriateness for children ages birth – 5. Data on psychometric properties and validation studies are needed to determine whether existing measures operate as intended with DLLs. There are a number of issues related to norms, including a lack of bilingual norms, inappropriate application of monolingual norms to DLLs, the need for DLL-specific norms that also address DLLs' heterogeneity, and determining appropriate comparisons with monolinguals. Information on cultural validity (e.g., cultural and contextual variations at the word, item, and conceptual level) is also needed for measures used with different linguistic and cultural groups.

- Protocols for documenting language status and other sociocultural constructs (e.g., SES, acculturation) of DLLs are needed to address inconsistent and inadequate descriptions and limited analyses of DLL samples in the existing literature. Documentation of language status should consider reflecting a continuum of skills rather than a dichotomy (i.e., bilingual versus non-bilingual), incorporating distinctions between sequential and simultaneous bilingual development, and encouraging use of a linguistic profile (i.e., reflecting development in various language domains) rather than relying on a score from a single language

domain. Specific items for determining language status should reflect key variables and issues related to DLLs' development, including: family members' age of acquiring L1 and L2; number of hours the respondent spends with the child; the child's language partners; quality and quantity of linguistic input from the family, early care and education, and community settings; descriptions of the home language environment; parental language proficiency and literacy in L1 and L2; the child's exposure to media in L1 and L2; descriptions of early care and education contexts (e.g., distribution of DLLs and languages spoken in the early childhood setting, language of instruction, center versus home-based settings); and key sociodemographics (e.g., parental nativity, country of heritage, time in US, generational status).

- Measures are needed that assess DLLs across multiple domains of development and serve different purposes. For content areas that are underrepresented among existing measures, certain capacity factors may influence the development of new measures (e.g., need for observers with fluency in the child's L1, knowledge of early development, and understanding of the child's home culture). In some content areas, certain scoring procedures (e.g., conceptual scoring) may be viable alternatives to creating new measures. Further, measures are also needed that serve specific purposes such

as screening, distinguishing what children know versus what they are learning, providing data on rates of growth over short intervals of time (i.e., static versus dynamic assessment), and differentiating experiences of individual children versus the whole class.

Researchers need guidelines that address research design, sampling, and recruitment for studies with DLLs. These methodological guidelines should be developed with consensus from the research community and should address needs for mixed methods approaches; matching the methodology to priorities of the field; developing an appropriate measurement plan; methods for utilizing data from multiple reports, methods, and settings (e.g., reliance on parent-report data, how to reconcile information from different settings and informants); and obtaining information in and/or about the use of L1 & L2 (e.g., collecting information from families, using different assessors in L1 & L2, counterbalancing L1 & L2 assessments). These guidelines should employ a strengths-based framework, operationalize theoretical constructs used in DLL research, offer a range of options (i.e., necessary versus optimal procedures and information), and highlight cautions about drawing conclusions based on inappropriate methodological procedures. ●

CECER-DLL Roundtable Meeting 2010 Invited Participants

(*member of CECER-DLL Steering Committee, **not able to attend)

FPG Child Development Institute

Dina Castro, PhD, MPH* *Principal Investigator & Director*	Sam Odom, PhD *Director, FPG Child Development Institute*
Virginia Buysse, PhD* *Co-Principal Investigator*	Cristina Gillanders, PhD *Investigator*
Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, PhD* *Co-Principal Investigator*	Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, PhD* *Co-Principal Investigator*
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Federal Partners

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Sharon Yandian, MEd* *Early Language Specialist,* *Educational Development & Partnership Division* *Office of Head Start*	

Additional Federal Representatives

Joan Lombardi, PhD** *Deputy Assistant Secretary & Interdepartmental* *Liaison for Early Childhood*	Shannon Rudisill, MA** *Director, Child Care Bureau*
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Jim Griffin, PhD** *National Institutes of Health (NIH)/ National* *Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD)*	Peggy McCardle, PhD, MPH *National Institutes of Health (NIH)/ National Institute of Child* *Health & Human Development (NICHD)*
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Kris Gutiérrez, PhD** *University of Colorado, Boulder*	Martha Zaslow, PhD *Child Trends* *Society of Research in Child Development (SRCD)*
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Consultants

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About CECER-DLL

CECER-DLL is a national center that is building capacity for research with dual language learners (DLLs) ages birth through five years. CECER-DLL aims to improve the state of knowledge and measurement in early childhood research on DLLs, identify and advance research on best practices for early care and education programming, and develop and disseminate products to improve research on DLLs. CECER-DLL is a cooperative agreement between the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), in collaboration with the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care. For additional information, see http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu

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