

# Enhancing Teaching Practices to Improve Language and Literacy Skills for Latino Dual-Language Learners

#62 | November 2010

Are specific practices learned through professional development programs effective for promoting language and literacy among dual language learners?

**E**ARLY CHILDHOOD IS A CRITICAL TIME IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALL CHILDREN, but Latino children may also face the added challenge of developing language and literacy skills in an entirely new language. To complicate matters, many early childhood teachers are generally unprepared to effectively educate children who are dual language learners (DLLs). Although these challenges are evident every day in classrooms across the United States, little is known about the effects of early care and education on DLLs and about how best to support teachers who are not prepared to work with this rapidly growing population.

The Nuestros Niños Early Language and Literacy Project at FPG developed and tested an intervention to improve language and literacy teaching practices for young DLLs. The researchers sought to answer an important question within the early childhood field: Are specific teaching practices learned through professional development programs effective for promoting language and literacy among DLLs?

The Nuestros Niños team developed a professional development intervention based on the best available research on effective teaching practices that promote language and literacy skills in pre-k children, and especially those who are DLLs. The program consisted of three components: 1) a series of training institutes; 2) ongoing support from a bilingual consultant to help teachers implement new teaching strategies; and 3) opportunities for reflection and questions with other teachers through regular meetings. The researchers used a battery of measures in the fall and spring to evaluate changes in teaching practices, the quality of the literacy environment, and children's progress in language and literacy development in both English and Spanish.



The findings suggest that initial attempts to design a professional development intervention produced better overall outcomes for the teachers, but more time and research may be needed to generate improvements in outcomes for DLLs. The professional development intervention led to improvements in the quality of teachers' language and literacy practices for all children and those specific to working with Latino DLLs. In addition, the children showed gains in phonological awareness skills in their primary language (Spanish) and in English. There were no statistically significant signs of growth in other English and Spanish literacy and language skills among DLLs. The researchers concluded that it may have been too early in the process of the intervention to expect children to show measurable improvement as a result of their exposure to the

The Nuestros Niños program consisted of three components:  
1) a series of training institutes;  
2) ongoing support from a bilingual consultant that would help teachers implement new teaching strategies;  
and 3) opportunities for reflection and questions with other teachers through regular meetings.

new practices, since teachers began implementing the intervention in the spring of the school year.

The early childhood field is at an early stage of understanding the most effective ways to support DLLs in early education programs, and more time and larger studies are needed to flesh out these issues. The Nuestros Niños project's findings are an important step in the research that will guide early childhood educators, administrators, and policymakers to develop high-quality education experiences that address the needs of every young learner, especially Latino DLLs. Research on the

Nuestros Niños intervention continues: the current study will allow researchers to assess the effects of the intervention on teachers and young Latino DLLs over two years of participating in the program, assessing effects on Latino DLLs in Pre-K and Kindergarten. ■

## To Learn More

Buysse, V., Castro, D.C., and Peisner-Feinberg, E. Effects of a professional development program on classroom practices and outcomes for Latino dual language learners, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Volume 25, Issue 2, 2nd Quarter 2010, 194-206.

### **Nuestros Niños Research Program**

<http://nnrp.fpg.unc.edu/>



**S**napshots are summaries of research articles, books, and other publications by researchers at the FPG Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill. Permission is granted to reprint this *Snapshot* if you acknowledge FPG and the authors of the article on which this Snapshot is based. For more information, call the Public Relations Director at 919-966-0867 or email [FPGmedia@unc.edu](mailto:FPGmedia@unc.edu). Visit FPG at [www.fpg.unc.edu](http://www.fpg.unc.edu).