Effective English Language Development Intervention to Support Kindergarten DLLs
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Background
- Spanish-speaking Latino/a students comprise the vast majority (about 80%) of the 4.4 million dual language learners in U.S. public schools (Batalova & McHugh, 2010; Kena et al., 2013), and this population continues to grow (Hussar & Bailey, 2013).
- Latino/a DLLs also continue to enter school with lower readiness than their monolingual peers, which means that ethnic disparities in academic achievement begin as early as kindergarten (Bumgarner & Brooks-Gunn, 2015; Castro, García, & Markus, 2013; Entwisle & Alexander, 1992; Halle, Hair, Wanner, McNamara, & Chien, 2012; Hong & You, 2012; Quirk, Nylund-Gibson, & Furlong, 2013).
- Kindergarten school readiness is highly predictive of later academic achievement (Hussar & Bailey, 2013; Winsler, Kim, & Richard, 2014); however, previous research has identified a subset of Latino/a DLL students who enter kindergarten with low readiness and manage to “catch up” to the students who had high levels of readiness begin as early as kindergarten (Bumgarner & Brooks-Gunn, 2015).

Pilot Study
Description
An intensive after-school English language development intervention was piloted at a public elementary school in central California in the 2014-2015 school year. The intervention was targeted to Latino/a kindergarten students from Spanish-speaking homes who entered school with the lowest levels of school readiness (as measured by the Kindergarten Student Entrance Profile [KSEP]) and English language proficiency (as measured by California English Language Development Test [CELDT]). A certified lead teacher and two trained undergraduate research assistants facilitated the intervention for 45 minutes every day after school using the Language for Learning curriculum, which builds students’ oral English skills through stories and vocabulary building exercises. Control students were randomly selected from a group of students in the previous year’s kindergarten cohort who were matched to the treatment group on demographic variables, kindergarten readiness scores, and initial English language proficiency scores.

Participants
- The ELD group had 11 students: 5 males and 6 females.
- The control group had 11 students: 9 males and 2 females.
- All students in both groups were Latino/a and came from Spanish-speaking homes.
- One student in the ELD group had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Analyses
- Independent-samples t-tests were conducted and effect sizes were calculated to compare average differences between the ELD and control groups on various report card variables.
- Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare within-group growth on the California English Language Development Test from kindergarten to Grade 1.

Results
- The ELD group outperformed the control group on three report card indicators, with small to moderate effect sizes (see Table 1).
- The ELD group’s growth on the CELDT from kindergarten to Grade 1 was statistically significant and the large effect size suggested high practical significance (see Table 2).

References

Implications for DLL Instruction
- Despite the magnitude and sustained growth of this population, there is relatively little research on effective early interventions to develop the language skills of young Latino/a DLLs.
- Future research should address the significant barriers to best serving DLLs, including lack of empirically-validated interventions or approaches to choose from, challenges to implementation and fidelity, policy/staffing/resource limitations on bilingual education.
- Best practices in instruction of DLLs:
  - Success for All curriculum (Cheung & Slavin, 2012)
  - Building Language for Literacy curriculum (Gonzalez et al., 2011)
  - Direct vocabulary instruction (Cheung & Slavin, 2012)
  - Dual immersion approach, which builds students’ skills in both languages via common underlying proficiency (Collins, 2012; Cummins, 1980).

Implications for DLL Assessment
- Schools often do not systematically collect data on the language development of young DLLs apart from mandated yearly tests of progress.
- When schools do collect language data, they may favor quick probes (e.g., the report card indicators in the present pilot study), which likely do not capture the full scope of a DLL student’s linguistic abilities or provide teachers with meaningful skill areas to develop.
- Schools or districts may adopt a single standardized assessment to use with their DLLs — commonly used assessments include A Developmental English Proficiency Test (ADEPT), Language Assessment Scales (LAS), Bilingual Verbal Ability Tests (BVAT), Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey (WMLS), and Idea Proficiency Test (IPT).
- Many of these major assessments have significant limitations, including being time- and resource-intensive, requiring bilingual examiners, lacking empirical validity and reliability, not measuring the full scope of language proficiency, and being normed on monolingual samples.
- No language proficiency assessment has been normed exclusively on a bilingual sample (Collins, 2012).

Best practices in DLL assessment:
- Conduct direct assessment with students; do not rely exclusively on parent report for language proficiency.
- Assess both English and the home languages.
- Use standardized assessments of language ability with monolingual norms to gauge DLLs’ language abilities relative to the expectations of the academic context.
- Use a bilingual examiner whenever possible.

Table 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent-Samples T-Test Results for Report Card Indicators by Group</th>
<th>ELD</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables of Interest</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Knowledge (Winter)</td>
<td>20.30</td>
<td>16.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter Sounds (Spring)</td>
<td>28.40</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Frequency Word Knowledge (Spring)</td>
<td>25.10</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All independent-samples t-tests were statistically nonsignificant, but it is possible that the t-test analyses did not detect significant results due to the fact that the groups involved were very small.

Table 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired-Samples T-Test Results for California English Language Development Test</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>ELD Group</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>382.13</td>
<td>59.87</td>
<td>3.55**</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note. *p < .01.