

# Community College Developmental Education Services: Perspectives of Spanish-Speaking Latino Early Childhood Educators

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## Abstract

The purpose of this **single case study** was to understand the perceptions of Latino Spanish-speaking English learners on the efficacy of developmental education services at a western United States community college. Research questions focused on how the developmental education services contributed to the successful completion of the child development practicum for Latino Spanish-speaking English learners. The primary data collection method was in-depth individual interviews of a purposeful sample of nine successful students. Findings indicated that participants relied on **Spanish instruction for comprehensible context**, but needed consistent education support services and information from a culturally responsive institution in a language they understood.

## Problem

Latino Spanish-speaking English learners (ELs) attending the community college were enrolled in the college's Child Development Spanish Language Pathway. Through these college courses taught entirely in Spanish, students obtained a local certificate or a state Child Development Associate Permit while concurrently enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. While many students met the minimum certificate standard, most **failed to become proficient in English** thereby not meeting the higher permit requirements mandated by the state. This resulted in a stagnation of local career advancement and job losses.

The career stagnation created a **dilemma for local preschool operations** as they were unable to hire teachers that represented the cultural diversity of the children they served.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to **heuristically report on the experiences of Spanish-speaking Latino students** as they transitioned to academic English courses and how they used the District's developmental education services to facilitate this transition.

## Relevant Literature

The conceptual frameworks used in this investigation encompassed **critical theory** (Habermas, 1985, 1987) with regard to human emancipation and **social learning theory** (Bandura, 1986) related to facilitating second language acquisition. More recent **persistence theory** provided a context for understanding motivational factors of students learning English at the college level (Tinto, 1975, 1988). Contemporary adult **language acquisition theory** also closely related to understanding the experience of the adult EL at the college level (Krashen, 1979, 1981, 1985, 1992).

Colleges often enrolled students learning English in **developmental or remedial education courses prior to admission in mainstream** English college courses to improve student academic progress (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2014; Rutschow & Schneider, 2011).

Developmental education, including ESL instruction, was crucial for ensuring the college success of Latino students (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Nora & Crisp, 2012). Santiago, Kienzi, Sponsler, and Bowles (2010) recommended that national policy for higher education **emphasize programs for Latino college success** and articulated clear best practices for increasing Latino graduation rates.

## Research Questions

The guiding question of this study aligned with the previously referenced objectives and problem observed at the community college District. How do the developmental education services provided by the District contribute to the successful completion of the child development practicum for Spanish-speaking Latino ELs?

The following specific subquestions illuminated the college experience of these students using the District's development education services:

1. Which District developmental education services do Latino Spanish-speaking ELs use?
2. Why do Latino Spanish-speaking ELs use some developmental education services provided by the District and not others?
3. How do Latino Spanish-speaking ELs think the District could improve or modify developmental education services?

## Procedures

I used a **purposeful sample** of nine current or former students who successfully completed the child development practicum and previously completed the prerequisite curriculum course in the Spanish Language Pathway.

Data were collected with **audiotaped, semistructured interviews** using a research-designed protocol. Member checking was used to ensure accuracy.

## Data Analysis

Using Wordle™, I identified 10 key words and conducted an initial review of the data in order to identify the major codes for analysis.

Then, I clustered the codes to form categories thereby leading to the broader themes and concepts required to answer the research questions.

## Findings

**Theme 1: Comprehensible context for learning English.** All of the participants believed that the Spanish language classes in child development provided context for their acquisition of English.

**Theme 2: Consistent educational support services.** The participants universally noted their need for consistent writing, tutoring, and counseling support.

**Theme 3: Informal, disconnected support network.** Participants consistently reported that they learned about the District's classes and services through an informal network of friends, families, and teachers.

**Theme 4: Culturally responsive support services.** Although the desire for native language support appeared frequently in the data, the participants also reported evidence of a need for greater staff empathy and support.

## Limitations

Only a single community college was represented in this study, with only one narrow topic of community college developmental education.

## Conclusions

There is a strong need for **culturally responsive education** support services in languages understood by students.

Academic programs that facilitate the transition to English while supporting **native language instruction** have the potential to remove linguistic barriers.

## Social Change Implications

Through programs that facilitate English acquisition, the District will be able to provide an **ethnically diverse and well-qualified workforce** of bilingual preschool teachers. These teachers are an essential component of providing a culturally responsive learning environment for young children.

Moreover, the data from this study will **raise the consciousness of administration, staff, and faculty** at the District concerning the needs of Latino Spanish-speaking ELs. It may also provide the impetus for administration to develop and provide training for a faculty-student mentoring program specifically designed to support ELs.

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