High-Quality Pre-K can be Further Strengthened With Greater Support for Multilingual Learners

New research finds structural supports needed to reinforce teachers' existing value for multilingual students in New York City Universal Prekindergarten.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, October 4, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a new study from Fordham University, Instructional Practices and Supports of Emergent Multilingual Learners (EMLs) in Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) Classrooms in New York City (NYC), authors Tiedan Huang, Chun Zhang, and Caitlin Coe examined classroom practices in support of EMLs in 50 NYC UPK classrooms and the extent to

Fordham University Graduate School of Education

FOUNDATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT | Connecting research, policy and practice to create systems that work.

Foundation for Child Development

which teachers nurtured a culturally and linguistically responsive environment in support of these students. Despite the strengths in current practices, gaps remain between teachers' positive mindsets and classroom practices that must be designed and implemented to meet the varied needs of EMLs. The findings stress the importance of program improvements to support EML students in NYC where UPK classrooms have a high concentration of EMLs. Accompanying the study findings are policy recommendations to strengthen instructional practice for the benefit of teachers, students, and families.

The research, conducted from January 2018 to June 2019, finds that despite the high degree of emotional support, the gathering of EMLs background information, rich curriculum materials, and regard for student perspectives in the classrooms observed, there are opportunities for improvement in cultural inclusion and integration, assessment, and supports for EMLs' home language.

"Key takeaways of this study are the strengths in current practice and the positive, asset-oriented drive of teachers to support these students," says Coe. "But there is not yet that translation from

attitudes and beliefs to practice. Teaching staff have identified tools they need to support EMLs and how we can strengthen their capacity. There are classrooms where quality instruction supporting cultural and linguistic needs is happening—these can serve as exemplars moving forward."

Among the classrooms studied, the average proportion of EMLs was 40% with a majority (57%) speaking Spanish. There were at least 31 home languages spoken in the 50 sampled classrooms. Classrooms varied in language diversity; in 40% of classrooms with EMLs, one home language was represented, in 38% of classrooms 2-3 home languages were spoken, in 16% of classrooms 4-5 languages were spoken, and in 6% of classrooms 6-8 home languages were spoken.

Also notable is that 98% of lead teachers had a bachelor's degree with 74% holding a master's degree, while 25% of assistant teachers/aides had a bachelor's degree. Additionally, 78% of lead teachers had or were on track to obtain certification in either early childhood or childhood education.

"To bridge the prevalent teacher mindset-practice gap, program leaders must be the ultimate linchpin to connect resources from various venues to teachers in the classroom," says Huang. "This requires that program leaders take a learner-centered approach when working with teachers to identify EMLs' needs and best practices to meet those needs. Program leaders' role needs to go beyond compliance and management. They essentially have to become instructional leaders. And NYC DOE and other city agencies need to support this shift."

The report includes important policy recommendations to accompany each key research finding, summarized below:

1. Finding: Although program leaders and teaching teams have positive beliefs about EMLs and value multilingualism, they recognize a lack of pedagogical capacity to deliver culturally and linguistically responsive instruction.

Recommendation: Formally incorporate professional learning (for program leaders and teachers) into district- and city-wide improvement strategies.

2. Finding: While information on EMLs' cultural and language backgrounds is gathered and available, it is not strategically used by program leaders and teaching teams to strengthen instructional support for EMLs.

Recommendation: Use the Emergent Multilingual Learner Language Profile, approved by New York State, to collect students' home language information as part of the enrollment process across all sites; strengthen partnership with parents and guardians in joint decision-making concerning EMLs' learning.

3. Finding: Although many assistant teachers and classroom aides are multilingual, their

language expertise and instructional resources are underutilized, restricting their potential contributions to culturally and linguistically responsive instruction.

Recommendation: Leverage the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of assistant teachers and support them by providing professional learning opportunities; strategically recruit, assign, and retain lead teachers and assistant teachers to mirror the cultural backgrounds of students more closely; provide lead teachers with professional development to promote collaborative team teaching with assistant teachers.

4. Finding: Teachers want more systematic and targeted professional development opportunities to support EMLs.

Recommendation: Provide teaching teams with focused professional development for high-quality instructional support.

"It's a missed opportunity when early childhood programs are hiring so many bilingual and trilingual assistants and aides to not utilize their expertise," says Zhang. "The language diversity of teaching teams is there but is not utilized for kids and families. How we use those resources and support teachers in their role is not defined and we should use their cultural backgrounds to support kids."

NYC UPK professionals are intentional and dedicated in their support of EML students. With improved structures, job-embedded training, greater capacity, and other resources to implement more culturally aligned instruction, there is much opportunity to strengthen support for both EML students and their families.

Key research findings and the accompanying policy recommendations are available in the full report.

###

CONTACT INFO
Tiedan Huang
Fordham University
thuang15@fordham.edu

Chun Zhang
Fordham University
czhang@fordham.edu

Caitlin Coe
Fordham University
ccoe1@fordham.edu

Maki Koyama
City University of New York
maki.koyama@cuny.edu

Jeanine Genauer/Fordham Graduate School of Education
Sherice Brammer/Foundation for Child Development
+1 973-980-0100
email us here
Visit us on social media:
Facebook
Twitter
LinkedIn
Other

This press release can be viewed online at: https://www.einpresswire.com/article/594144948