



# Early Teacher-Child Relationships of Multilingual Children

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Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy

# Teacher-Child Relationships and Children's Behavior



- **Serve as a base** for children as they engage in opportunities to learn in the classroom
- **Have an enduring impact** on children's school adjustment.
- May **protect against the negative effects** of academic and behavioral difficulties
- Frequently measured in terms of closeness and conflict
  - Closeness: warmth, connectedness
  - Conflict: negativity, strained interactions

Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; White, 2013

# Multilingual Students

- In 2012, more than **12 million (22%) children** in the United States spoke a language other than English at home.
- In the past decade, the number of children who speak more than one language has continued to grow; with the **rate of children speaking languages other than English increasing by 2%**



Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2018

# Challenges for Multilingual Students

- Learning an additional language can make **adjusting to school challenging**
- Children learning English have reported:
  - **Lower school belonging**
  - **Lower academic self-efficacy**
- Must learn the culture of the school and classroom while also interacting within the classroom using a language with which they have less expertise or are still learning

Fumoto, Hargreaves, & Maxell, 2007; LeClair, Doll, Osborn, & Jones, 2009; Morrison, Cosden, O' Farrell and Campos; 2003

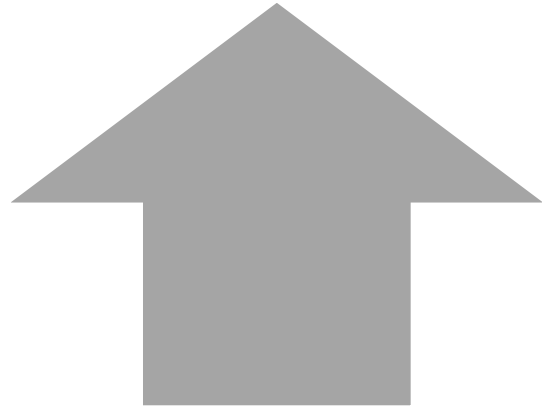
# Culture and Language



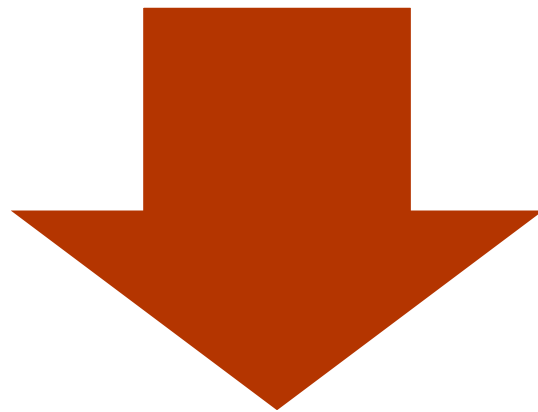
- The **parenting practices** and socialization goals of parents of multilingual children **are distinct** from the practices of monolingual English households
- **Language difficulties might interfere relationship formation**
  - Teachers have more closeness with children with greater language comprehension skills
    - Children with lower language skills experience more conflict in relationships
  - Language development of children with high language skills is intensified when they have a close relationship with their teacher

(Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010 Justice, Cottone, Mashburn, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Luchel et al., 2010; Rudasill, Rimm-Kaufman, Justice & Pence 2006; Spilt, Koomen, & Harrison, 2015)

# Previous Research



In the beginning on the school year teachers in head start classrooms reported more positive relationships children who were bilingual than students who were monolingual



Teachers perceived less closeness at the beginning of the school year with children who spoke multiple languages but differences were not significant by the end of the year, and teachers reported no differences in perceptions of conflict throughout the year.

(Fumoto et al., 2007; Luchtel, Huges, Luze, Bruna, & Peterson, 2010)



# Our Research Questions

1. Do multilingual students experience a different quality of teacher-child relationships than their monolingual peers?

2. After accounting for differences in language skills, do we still see differences in the relationship quality of multilingual and monolingual students?





# Data

- Early Learning Ohio Project through the *Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy*
  - Classroom ecology
  - Cross-sectional sample of children in grades Prek-3<sup>rd</sup> grade

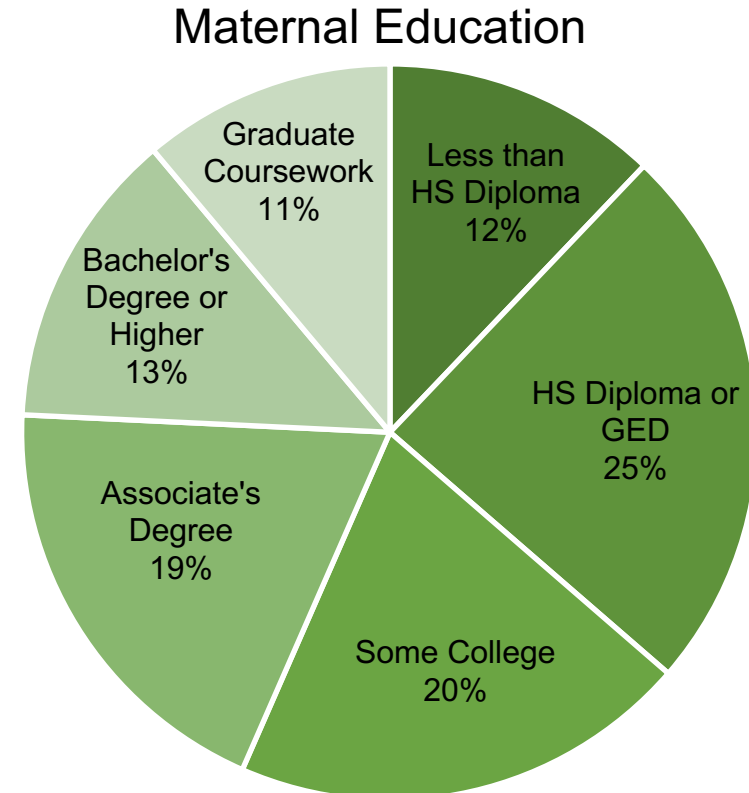
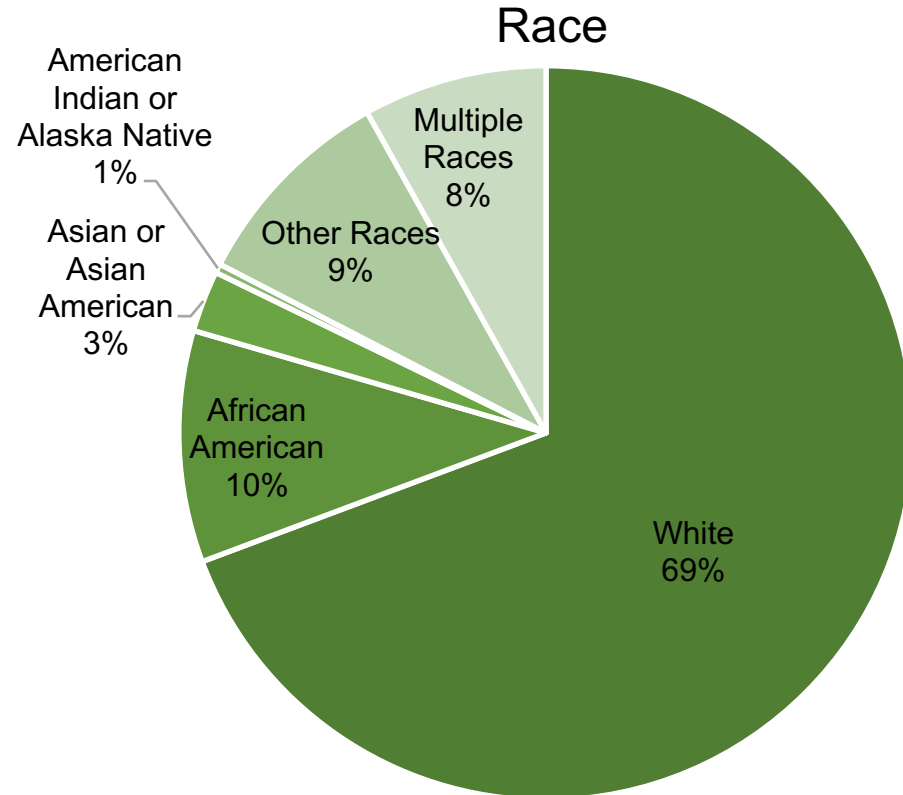


# Participants

- **840 children** -Preschool → Grade 3
- **25% ( $n = 212$ )** of the children were classified as **multilingual**
  - Resided in households where languages other than English were regularly spoken.
- Languages in our sample included: Spanish (127), Somali (23), and Arabic (15).
  - Burmese, French, Cambodian, German, Hakha Chin, Khmer, Korean, Russian, Lao, Punjabi, Swahili, etc.



# Child Characteristics





# Teachers

- **82** classroom teachers, **95% white & female**, none reported being fluent in a language other than English
- 90% had Bachelor's or Master's degree
- 57.5% reported teaching for 10 or more years

# Measures

- **Student-Teacher Relationship Scale-Short Form (STRS; Pianta, 2001)**

Closeness –7 items	Conflict – 8 items
Fall: $\alpha = .87$	Fall: $\alpha = .91$
“I share an affectionate, warm relationship with this child”	“This child and I always seem to be struggling with each other.”
“If upset, this child will seek comfort from me.”	“This child is sneaky or manipulative with me.”

- **Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement Picture Vocabulary subtest (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001).**



# Analytic Approach

- Multilevel modeling
- Controlled for: child gender and grade
- To examine whether language skills account for the differences in closeness and conflict for multilingual and monolingual children we conducted additional analyses controlling for vocabulary skills in the fall.

(Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McCormick & O'Connor, 2015)

# Results

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Teacher-Child Relationships and Vocabulary Skills*

Variable	Full Sample <i>M (SD)</i>	Monolingual English speakers <sup>a</sup> <i>M (SD)</i>	Multilingual children <sup>b</sup> <i>M (SD)</i>
Fall Teacher-Child relationship ( <i>N</i> = 662)			
Closeness	3.13 (0.69)	<b>3.16 (0.66)</b>	<b>2.97 (0.81)</b>
Conflict	0.64 (0.81)	0.64 (0.82)	0.63 (0.77)
Fall Vocabulary skills ( <i>N</i> = 616)	17.40 (4.29)	<b>18.12 (3.84)</b>	<b>14.28 (4.77)</b>
Spring Teacher-Child relationship ( <i>N</i> = 832)			
Closeness	3.26 (0.69)	<b>3.27 (0.69)</b>	<b>3.22 (0.71)</b>
Conflict	0.72 (0.90)	0.75 (0.94)	0.65 (0.78)
Spring Vocabulary skills ( <i>N</i> = 802)	17.77 (4.46)	<b>18.88 (3.78)</b>	<b>14.38 (4.70)</b>

<sup>a</sup>Does not reside in home where languages other than English are regularly spoken.

<sup>b</sup>Resides in home where languages other than English are regularly spoken.

Table 2. Results of Multilevel-Effects Models to Predict Conflict and Closeness in Fall and Spring from Language Background

Predictor	Fall Conflict		Spring Conflict		Fall Closeness		Spring Closeness	
	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.79	< .001	0.90	< .001	3.03	< .001	3.26	<.001
Language background (speaks multiple languages = 1)	0.03	.71	-0.11	.12	<b>-0.19</b>	<b>.005</b>	<b>-0.12</b>	<b>.03</b>
Gender (female = 1)	<b>-0.27</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>-0.27</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Grade level (preschool = 0, elementary school = 1)	-0.02	.88	-0.02	.88	0.02	.87	-0.14	.16

Note: Coefficients in bold were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

# Results

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Table 3. Results of Multilevel-Effects Models to Predict Conflict and Closeness in Fall and Spring from Language Background and Language Skills

Predictor	Fall Conflict		Spring Conflict		Fall Closeness		Spring Closeness	
	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>	Estimate	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.94	< .001	1.09	< .001	2.57	< .001	2.78	< .001
Language background (speaks multiple languages = 1)	-0.01	.94	-0.15	.06	-0.08	.26	-0.03	.66
Language skills <sup>a</sup>	-0.01	.28	-0.01	.13	<b>0.03</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>
Gender (female = 1)	<b>-0.27</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>-0.27</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>&lt; .001</b>
Grade level (preschool = 0, elementary school = 1)	0.04	.77	0.05	.67	-0.15	.22	<b>-0.30</b>	<b>.00</b>

Note: Coefficients in bold were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>a</sup>Language skills were measured using the Picture Vocabulary subtest of the Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement. For models predicting fall scores, fall language skills were included as a predictor. Spring language skills were included as a predictor in the spring models.



# Discussion

- There are **not statistically significant differences in conflict** based on children's language background
- **Teachers perceived less closeness with multilingual students** compared to monolingual students across the school year
- Once children's language skills were accounted for, **differences in teacher-child closeness by language background were no longer significant**
- **Teachers' struggles** to form and maintain close relationships with their multilingual students **may be largely attributed to children's limited use of English skills**





# Limitations & Future Directions

**Examine students' report of their perceptions of relationships with teachers**

**Explore differences between, English Language Learners, Bilingual and Multilingual children**

Consider if teacher reports of language skills versus tested language skills may be different

Investigate more closely how these relationships may change across time



# Thank You

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