

## **Responsive Relationships: Supporting Diverse Learning communities in Certificate and Associate-degree Preparation for Early Childhood Professionals**

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### **Abstract**

The training and education that caregivers receive is an important factor associated with the quality of childcare that they provide. Research also shows that high-quality care supports positive development in young children. A large number of caregivers seeking to prepare themselves in the field of early childhood development in the United States, however, lack English proficiency and are thus unable to earn these credentials. Achieving a level of academic English necessary to succeed in these courses takes between three and seven years, for adults as well as children. The Department of Early Childhood Education (ECE) at the Community College of Denver (CCD) proposed teaching one ECE fundamentals class in Spanish for Spanish-speaking caregivers given that the State of Colorado requires all caregivers to have taken this course in order to seek and maintain employment in child care centers.

This paper demonstrates, through an original survey, that the academic performance of Spanish speaking caregivers improved substantially in key areas of professional knowledge related to working with young children and their families in early care and education settings.

### **Introduction**

From 2002 to 2013, the number of Latino students at California United States community college district, hereafter referred to as the District, increased from 14.8% to over 30% of the total student population. Given county demographic projections, the college's Office of Institutional Research (OIR) estimated that Latinos would become the majority student population by 2020 Greaney, 2013([as cited in Eberly John E., 2015](#)).

Community College of Denver has a long-standing history of being one of the most diverse colleges in Colorado. Currently, more than 30 percent of our student population is Latina, more than 50 percent self-identify as underrepresented, and our international students represent more than 63 nations. Additionally, more than 60 percent are the first person in their family to attend college.

The Early Childhood Education program at Community College of Denver values it's relationship with the community, and is responsive to the growing need to prepare a diverse workforce to serve young children and families. One of the program's full-time faculty members is a bilingual Spanish speaker who has established a strong rapport with the Spanish speaking community of early childhood providers in Denver. When the community approached her with interest in pursuing college coursework, she and her colleagues felt it was vital to support Spanish speaking providers as valuable members of the early childhood community. The ECE program is committed to access, equity and student success.

Currently, more than 60% of Colorado's early childhood center directors report a top challenge to be finding qualified staff. By expanding access to the fundamentals course to the Spanish-speaking community of Colorado, we have not only prepared hundreds of caregivers, but also found that early childhood educators who speak more than one language and are culturally knowledgeable are an invaluable resource for children. ([EC Workforce 2020 Plan](#)).

There is widespread agreement throughout the P-20 education pipeline that the more educators reflect the demographics of their students, the stronger the impact on children's optimal development. Serving a growing and changing population and reflecting the diversity of that population requires an intentional focus on building a highly-qualified, effective, and diverse early childhood workforce for Colorado (EC Workforce 2020 Plan).

In the state of Colorado, Introduction to Early Childhood Education, or ECE 101, is one avenue for meeting professional development and education requirements necessary for employment in high quality early learning centers. The Early Childhood Education program faculty proposed teaching one ECE fundamentals class in Spanish for the Spanish-speaking caregivers who lack English proficiency but are currently working with children.

It is essential that early childhood educators have the competencies needed to develop strong relationships with young children, to provide experiences that are supportive of their development and learning, and to equitably serve children from diverse backgrounds. ([NAEYC, 2009](#)).

### **Methodology**

Thirty-five students took the survey before and after the course. The survey assessed their level of English, their technological proficiency, knowledge about Colorado licensing and regulations, level of confidence as a college student, among other factors.

The survey has 11 questions with a scale from 1 to 5, 1 is the lowest and 5 is the maximum. The students have to choose the number that best reflects their knowledge or experience.

To measure the differences of the survey results before and after we used repeated measure ANOVA. This is the appropriate test to ascertain if the difference of the averages of the responses before and after the course is statistically significant.

### **Results**

The graph showed the results between the answers from the students before the course and after the course. The difference in the averages before (3.064 average and 0.119 SEM) and after (4.5 average and 0.8 SEM.) the course was highly significant. The repeated ANOVA gave an  $F(1,109)=163.7$ ; with a  $P < 0.0001$ . See appendix Graph #1

### **Conclusion**

This paper demonstrates, through an original survey, that the academic performance of Spanish speaking caregivers improved substantially in key areas of professional knowledge related to working with young children and their families in early care and education settings. The Early Childhood Education program at Community College of Denver is engaged in assessment of student learning with a focused lens on the Spanish speaking population. In collaboration with Institutional Research, the program is currently working to gather data on how many students continue on to complete additional coursework toward advanced certificates and degrees. Students who wish to continue have several options for building their English language proficiency, such as the Foundational Skills Institute, where students can take courses in English as a Second Language.

## References

Eberly John E. (2015). *Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education*. Walden University February 2015.

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NAEYC (2009). *A position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*. *The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009)*.

