

Multicultural families' home and community language environment

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Abstract

The nature of the home and community language environment (HCLE), that is the linguistic context of a child's home and community has received much attention over the years in terms of its effect on developmental outcomes. However, the HCLE of minoritised groups remains under-represented in the literature meaning that important relations between home and community and developmental outcomes may be missed.

In part one of our ongoing study, we are investigating the nature and effects of the HCLE on school readiness in British-heritage and Chinese-heritage families with children between ages of 3 and 5 living in the UK. Families were asked to complete short questionnaires covering features of the HCLE (parent-child activities such as frequency of reading or playing at home, attending events together, languages used; screen device usage; and number of books at home) and also parental child-rearing values, acculturation status (for the Chinese-heritage families), and parental perception of school readiness.

We have collected data from 68 families (39 Chinese-heritage and 29 British-heritage families) and the preliminary analysis of this dataset reveals the following results. Firstly, more positive parental perceptions of children's school readiness were associated with more frequent interactive and enrichment activities, healthy media use, and more children's books. Additionally, we found a strong association between parental perceptions of children's school readiness and family socio-economic status. Secondly, British-heritage families were more frequently engaged in HCLE activities and had more children's books at home compared to the Chinese-heritage families. Children from the two heritage groups showed similar screen device usage. Furthermore, there is a correlation between child-rearing values and children's HCLE among Chinese-heritage families. Those parents who value independence and autonomy over conformity and obedience in rearing their children tend to engage in more interactive and enrichment activities and have more children's books at home, and their children use screen devices in a healthy manner. Interestingly, we found that Chinese parents' acculturation status has no effect on their children's HCLE. Our preliminary analysis underpins the importance of capturing cultural diversity in our conceptualisation of the home and community learning environment.