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National Disability Employment Awareness Month Spotlight: Alejandra Reinoso

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Bio: Alejandra Reinoso (Disability Caucus Leadership, SECC Representative) is a sixth-year PhD candidate in the Department of Communication Sciences Disorders Northwestern University, where she works in the Child Language Lab, led by Dr. Adriana Weisleder. Her research broadly examines how early language contexts in the home and school environments of Latine dual language learners (DLLs) shape their dual language and biliteracy development. Her dissertation builds on this work by examining the roles of Spanish language skills and the home literacy environment in supporting literacy development among Latine DLLs.

In addition to her research, Alejandra also co-facilitates a community partnership that supports literacy development among Black and Latine families in Chicago. She is passionate about translating this work into evidence-based policies and practices in early childhood education that support multilingual children

including children with language and communication disabilities. She currently serves as one of two founding student/early career representatives for the SRCD Disability Caucus.

Q: Why did you decide to choose developmental science as a course of study or career?

A: As an undergraduate student, my initial goal was to become a therapist, and I knew very little about science or conducting research. It wasn't until my third year of college that I began taking research courses and was fascinated at how we could use data to better understand the human experience. I concurrently interned at the Purchase College Children's Center, where I discovered my love for working with children. I particularly enjoyed being able to observe their growth over time, and how their interactions and experiences shaped their learning. Pursuing a career in developmental science allowed me to combine these experiences, and pursue a career that better aligned with my interests. Working on a senior thesis focusing on theory of mind in Latine dual language learners (DLLs) in Dr. Carolyn Cates' lab further solidified these interests and motivated me to continue pursuing similar work as a graduate student at Northwestern.

Q: Do you have a mentor, or mentors, who have been instrumental to your career and, if so, who and how?

A: Dr. Carolyn Cates, my undergraduate mentor at Purchase College, and Dr. Adriana Weisleder, my graduate mentor at Northwestern University, have both been instrumental to my career. I truly would not be where I am today without their invaluable support, mentorship, and guidance. Beyond their academic mentorship, they have modeled the importance of conducting culturally and linguistically responsive research that centers the needs of children and families. They've shown a deep commitment to developmental science and conducting research that has a meaningful impact on the lives of children and families. Their mentorship and approach to research has influenced both my professional growth and the kind of researcher and mentor that I hope to become as I transition into the next stage of my career upon completion of my Ph.D.

Q: **What advice would you give to a student beginning their Ph.D. studies in developmental science or related?**

A:Though it may sound cliché, my biggest piece related field is to embrace and enjoy the process as much as possible. From my experience, very often we get so focused on meeting deadlines or completing program milestones, that we forget how hard we worked to get to where we are, and, moreover, how rewarding and self-fulfilling the process itself can be. Challenges are at times inevitable, but pursuing a PhD is all about learning new things and gives us the unique opportunity to ask questions and deepen our understanding about topics that we care so deeply about. It is also those same challenges that allow us to grow both personally and professionally. Celebrate all the small wins along the way, stay curious, and make sure to seek support from your village when you need it!

Q: **Why did you join SRCD and how does it facilitate connection among members all year long?**

A: I joined SRCD because in addition to all of the amazing opportunities to network and connect with professionals working in developmental fields in academic and non-academic spaces, SRCD has become my

professional home. It is one of the few spaces where I can see both my interests in research and policy centered and prioritized. I have benefited from SRCD's efforts to facilitate year long connection among members through my involvement in the SRCD Latinx Caucus as a member of the social policy subcommittee, and as a student leader on the SRCD Disability Caucus steering committee. SRCD also provides additional opportunities to attend webinars, information sessions for fellowships, and participation in newer initiatives, like the Child Policy Hub.