Guiding Principles for Supporting Young Dual Language Learners

From Espinosa, 2013

1. All young dual language learners have the capacity to learn two languages and benefit cognitively and socially when they receive instruction that promotes development of their home language as well as English-language development (ELD).

2. High quality preschool programs benefit all children but are not sufficient to close the achievement gap for young DLLs.

3. Strong and meaningful partnerships with DLL families enhance the learning and development of young dual language learners.

4. Respect for the DLL families’ culture, values, and language preferences will benefit young DLLs’ adjustment to preschool.

5. DLLs’ knowledge and strengths in their home language need to be recognized and built upon in the preschool curriculum.

6. The learning and development of young DLLs must be supported and assessed across all domains including ELD.

7. Characteristics of preschool DLLs language development need to be understood by all program staff:

   i. Young dual language learners may take longer to respond to instructional prompts given in English

   ii. Young DLLs will typically progress through several stages of second language acquisition at different rates depending on their
early exposure and usage (see the Preschool Learning Foundations in English Language Development for further information)

iii. Young DLLs will likely employ code-switching (i.e., combining English and home language words in the same utterance), which is a typical feature of dual language development and should be considered a linguistic strength (see the Preschool Learning Foundations in English Language Development for further information)

8. Some features of language development may appear delayed to the untrained eye during the early stages of bilingualism for preschool DLLs (e.g., vocabulary in each language, grammatical knowledge in second language, expressive abilities in second language), but when provided a linguistically enriched and balanced program, young DLLs will become proficient in both languages.

9. The executive function abilities of young DLLs can be enhanced through a balanced language approach.

10. All language development activities and interactions should be interesting and engaging for young DLLs and build upon young children’s intrinsic desire to learn language to communicate and participate in their social and educational settings.