Research-Based Best Practices for Young Dual/English Language Learners: Implications for Policymakers

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Definition of Dual/English Language Learners (ELLs or DLLs)

- “Dual language learners are children learning two or more languages at the same time, as well as those learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language.” (OHS, p.1)

- Includes simultaneous and sequential, successive

The Office of Head Start, State of California, CCSSO, and many research centers have shifted to DLL from ELL for preschool aged children. Most school districts use ELL/EL beginning in kindergarten.
Topics for Today

1. Who are young dual language learners and what do we know about their development and achievement?
2. Which program approaches and instructional practices have evidence for improved achievement?
3. What are the policy implications?
1. Who are young dual language learners and what do we know about their development and achievement?

- Diverse group that is growing—in size and diversity of backgrounds
  - 2009-2010, ELLs = 14% of K-12 enrollment in U.S., 29% in CA
  - 25% of all U.S. children in DL homes
  - 2008, ~31% of Head Start children DLL
  - >140 different languages
  - <15% of Head Start programs serve only EO
Children from Low-income and Dual Language Families Highly Vulnerable to Underachievement

✓ NAEP Scores
✓ State Achievement Data
✓ K Entry Data
National public, ELL

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# Data not available

4th grade NAEP reading 1998-2011
Average NAEP Reading Scores for ELLs 1998-2011

2011: Average score for all 4th grade students, 221
Non ELL, 225

Basic = 208
Proficient = 238

Low poverty, 238
High poverty, 203
Need to understand reasons for achievement gaps in order to design effective educational interventions.
How Much of Achievement is Due to Language Status (DLL) vs Poverty vs Limited Learning Opportunities??
Dual language learners and achievement gap

• Not all DLL children same:
  – ECLS-K data set disaggregated by SES, language (Espinosa et al., 2007)
  – Family SES, language spoken at home, country of origin related to different achievement patterns
  – DLLs from Asian and European home languages perform as well or better than EOs, K-3
  – ALL DLLs: .4 SD < EO in literacy at K entry
    • Spanish DLLs: .8 SD < EO at K entry; .7 < at end of 3rd grade
    • When SES controlled, ach looks similar
“The combination of living in poverty and having limited access to early education increases the vulnerability of young DLLs to negative outcomes.”

Castro, Espinosa, & Paez, (2011)

*Having more than one language during ECE years should not be considered a risk factor!!*
Research on DLLs During Early Childhood

- Recent Area of Concern: NCLB, Demographics, Impact of Preschool, High stakes for literacy
- Dozens of studies---at best
- Measurement Issues
- Debate on Goals & Terms
- Must consider research from multiple disciplines
- Exciting New Infant/Toddler/Preschool Research
- Most reach similar conclusions
Language, Any Language, is the Foundation for Literacy ....... and Literacy in English is Critical for School Success
Conclusions of Best Scientific Studies: (LM Literacy Panel, 2006; Genesee et al., 2006; CREDE Report, 2006; Goldenberg, 2011)

- Using child’s primary language or L1 promotes achievement in English, L2 (.2-.6 standard deviation in test performance)
- During early childhood years continued language development in home language AND English language development is important for school readiness
Infant Brains & Bilingualism: Study Methods
At birth: ALL infants have the innate capacity to learn more than 1 language: human brains are hard-wired to learn language

- Can perceive all phonemes whether or not important in native language; Two linguistic systems develop; By 10-12 months “phonemic pruning” has occurred

- Language Specific Mapping During First Year of Life (NLNC)
The ‘critical period’ for language

Language Score

High

Low

Age of Acquisition of New Language

Native  3-7  8-10  11-15  17-39

- Timing
- Capacity; Separate Linguistic Systems
- Social & Statistical
- Early Language Environment is Critical
What do we know about language/literacy development of young DLLs?

- In what ways are typically developing preschool DLLs the same as...or different from native English speakers?
- How does the child's home language (L1) influence development of English (L2)?
- Is there a typical developmental trajectory for English language development (ELD) during preschool years?....and how can we promote ELD without decreasing L1?
Knowledge Base for Young DLLs: Good Consensus

- Babies have capacity for learning multiple languages from first year: *linguistic geniuses*
- Balanced early bilingualism is possible with sufficient high quality input in both
- Cognitive, social, family, economic advantages to bilingualism
- Home language vulnerable to attrition
- Proficiency in home language linked to English acquisition: some home language knowledge and skills facilitate English learning
Synthesis of emerging knowledge for young DLLs: [http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/](http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/)

1. California’s Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: [http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/di/or/cdd.as](http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/di/or/cdd.as)

   * 6 research reviews by national scholars summarized and synthesized into set of Preschool Program Practice Guidelines, Fall 2013
Topics for Research Overview Papers

1. Neuroscience Research: How Experience with One or Multiple Languages Affects the Developing Brain


3. Program Elements and Teaching Practices for Young Dual Language Learners

4. Strengthening Family Engagement in Early Childhood Programs Serving Families of Dual Language Learners

5. Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners in Preschool

6. Early Intervention and Young Dual Language Learners with Special Needs
* **Brain development**: looks different for bilingual babies: greater neural density in some areas; separate language systems

* Human brain is highly sensitive to sounds and features of language during first few years of life.......decreases dramatically after age 6-7

* Human interaction is critical to learning language during first 18-20 months
Differences, cont.

- **Vocabulary development** looks different: longer lexical retrieval time; smaller vocabularies in each language; conceptual vocabularies when combined in 2 languages comparable;
- **Speech production** somewhat slower;
- **Grammatical development** differed;
- **Vocabulary and grammar** correlated within language but not across languages
- **Cross-language** (L1-L2) influences varied by similarities of 2 languages
Differences... >>> Assessment Challenges

- Preschoolers' **code-switching, language mixing** demonstrates linguistic knowledge of 2 languages and serves several purposes.

- Some **cognitive advantages** for bilinguals:
  - **executive function**: working memory, inhibitory control; suppressing interference; mental flexibility;
  - Alzheimer's protection...
  - Some **social emotional strengths**: pro-social competencies.
Some Conclusions About Language and Outcomes

✓ English immersion and dual language approaches promote short-term growth in English

✓ Dual language programs improved Spanish language development for both DLLs and EOs--with no losses in English

✓ Need: Specific strategies for teachers that promote oral language development in English (ELD) and help DLLs extend and apply L1 knowledge
Dual Language Learners

- Code-related skills in normal range when exposed to high quality Instructional Program: LAUSD (Espinosa & Zepeda, 2009; Louseix, 2011); Texas; MA
- Significant gaps in oral language/comprehension abilities
- EL students can decode words, but don’t have oral language proficiency to understand text
Challenge: How to Support Home Language Development AND Promote English Language Development in ECE Classrooms?

“Practitioners should be aware that children can successfully learn two languages – they do not need to give up their home language in order to learn English if it is the formal language of the ECE setting – but that they will not exactly resemble monolingual children in language development.”

Conboy, 2013
Program Approaches and Classroom Practices that Promote Improved Achievement for DLLs

First--- Good Teaching Practices Help Dual Language Learners (but are not sufficient):

• Use rich language in extended interactions
• Build on children’s background knowledge & interest
• Build deep understandings of vocabulary and language by embedding in meaningful interactions connected to what child knows and opportunities to use across multiple contexts
• Find out what children know about concepts and words in any language and use to bridge into English
• Explicit teaching of some literacy skills
Reading Comprehension

• **Oral Language Skills** That Predict Later Reading Comprehension:
  ✓ Listening Comprehension
  ✓ Expanded Vocabulary Knowledge
  ✓ Grammatical Knowledge
  ✓ Narrative Skills
  ✓ Academic Language
Research-Based Strategies that Promote Reading Comprehension for DLLs (in Espinosa, 2012)

For Ages 3-5

- Oral Language: Listening/Speaking
- Decoding/Word level Skills
- Language of Instruction
- Engaging Families

For Ages 6-8
How to Support Home Language While Promoting English Language Development

• *Set of Strategies that Bridge* between home language (L1) and English:
  – Cognate charts
  – Front-loading vocabulary in home language
  – Each language linked but distinguished (voice, character, color)
  – Labeling in both home language and English
  – *Partnering with Families!!*
Some Instructional Features that Improve Comprehension

- Use books, themes, and resource material with culturally familiar content to promote comprehension and facilitate learning new concepts and skills;
- Use pictorial, real world objects, and concrete experiences to convey the meaning of words and concepts;
- Use visual cues and physical gestures and signals linked to specific content vocabulary to imprint meaning;
- Integrate songs and physical movement throughout academic instruction;
- Provide some explicit teaching (or explanations) of features of English, such as vocabulary and pragmatics;
- Teach children rhymes, poems, and songs, particularly those with repetitive refrains;
- Partner children with higher and lower levels of proficiency in English as supports for each other, and occasionally presenting tasks for those partnerships to complete that do not depend on language proficiency;
- Provide both safe havens
Guiding Principles for Supporting Young Dual Language Learners

- 10 Principles from California Best Practices Project Included in Hand Outs
Policy Implications

1. Support DLLs home language and literacy development while also promoting their English language development (ELD).
2. Review current state early learning standards and expectations to ensure they are appropriate for DLLs.
3. Design, implement, and evaluate instructional strategies that help develop essential academic concepts in DLLs.
Policy Implications...

4. Provide professional development and training to all ECE teachers and staff on specific instructional strategies that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and promote English language development (ELD).

5. Family engagement policies and practices need to be examined through the lens of diversity; Family partnerships that are mutually respectful, engage in two-way communication and incorporate important cultural and family background information are needed.

4/23/2013
Policy Implications, cont. .

6. At every level, local, state, and federal, rigorous quality improvement efforts need to be examined, resourced, and vigorously implemented. Global high quality ECE is the basis of effective education for DLLs—but it is not sufficient to close the achievement gap at kindergarten entry.

7. Support bilingualism for all children whenever possible; dual language programs are an effective approach to improving academic achievement for DLL children while also providing many benefits to native English speakers.