Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners
Administrator Brief

THE McKNIGHT FOUNDATION

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Brief from the National Research Summit on the Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners

In the fall of 2014, the Heising-Simons and McKnight Foundations provided support for a National Research Summit on the Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners in Washington, DC. The goal of the two day summit was to engage and extend the established knowledge base accrued by the Center for Early Care and Educational Research Dual Language Learners while simultaneously informing the future potential policy efforts specific to the early care and education (ECE) of dual language learners (DLLs). The Summit focused on new directions in research, policy and practice related to DLLs in ECE settings and included discussion of five commissioned papers: Research Based Models and Best Practices for DLLs across PreK-3; Perspectives on Assessment of DLLs, PreK-3; Human Resource Development; The Critical Role of Leaderships in Programs Designed for DLLs, PreK-3; Policy Advances & Levers Related to DLLs in PreK-3.This brief provides a short summary and synthesis of the policy implications addressed in these papers and the discussion generated at The Summit.

Introduction

Millions of young children are acquiring more than one language in the home, community and early care and education (ECE) settings. The population of young children from immigrant and refugee families in the U.S. rose from 14 percent in 1990 to 25 percent in 2013. Nationally, close to one third of preschoolers ages three to five in Head Start live in homes where a language other than English is spoken. These children, between the ages of 0-5 who are exposed to and use more than one language, are identified as dual language learners (DLL). With the growing number of DLLs in ECE, preschool Directors play a key role in supporting the educational, linguistic and socioemotional outcomes for this diverse population of young leaners.

Supporting Teachers of DLLs

ECE Directors play an important role in supporting teacher competencies for effectively teaching DLLs. Directors allocate resources (time and money) for ongoing professional development and choose the content of in-service education and training (opportunities that take place while teachers are working with children) for teachers. Typically, national accreditation or certification organizations focus on five core areas in the development of effective early educators: (1) knowledge of child development and learning including knowledge of specific content areas, (2) the ability to build positive family and community relationships, (3) the capacity for meaningful observation and assessment of young children, (4) the ability to understand and use positive relationships with children and families, and (5) the ability to conduct themselves as members of a profession. Yet, in order to help DLLs reach similar gains in English as their monolingual English- speaking peers, teaching DLLs requires additional support and pedagogical accommodations beyond what is often thought of as "effective teaching."

Therefore, when ECE environments include DLLs, directors must ensure educator competencies go beyond the five core areas to include:

- knowledge of language development;

- knowledge of the relationship between language and culture;
- skills and abilities to effectively teach DLLs;

- skills and abilities to use assessments in appropriate and meaningful ways for DLLs; and

- knowledge of how to work with linguistically and culturally diverse families.

Furthermore, since a teacher's competency interacts with their personal attributes, ECE Directors must consider a teacher's background characteristics when developing a teacher's competency to work with DLLs. For personal attributes, Directors can consider:

- a teacher's language capability: is the teacher a monolingual English speakers, a bilingual speaker of English and a child's home language, or bi-literate in English and a child's home language;

- a teacher's acculturative status: is the teacher mono-cultural, meaning she comes from a US mainstream perspective, or is she bicultural, meaning she shares socialization experiences from US mainstream culture and another culture; and

- a teacher's years of experience in working with DLLs.

With an emphasis on a teacher's attributes partnered with their competencies specific to the effective teaching of DLLs, Directors can move away from a "one-size fits all" model of in-service education to create professional development opportunities that address and build upon the particular experiences and knowledge of their specific teachers.

Along with in-service opportunities geared towards teachers' knowledge and experiences, many Directors focus on mentoring or coaching opportunities as a method to individualize ongoing teacher development. Although research on the effects of coaching in improving teacher practices holds promise, its use with teachers serving DLLs requires further scrutiny. When using coaching or mentoring to develop teachers' competencies specific to DLLs, Directors must consider:

- What are the qualifications of coaches who assist teachers in understanding DLLs?

  Do they have the necessary competencies specific to DLLs: knowledge of language

  development and the relationship between culture and language and skills to

effectively teach DLLs and use assessment appropriately for DLL.

- What types of experiences do coaches have with biliteracy, bilingualism, and biculturalism? What is their experience working in environments populated by DLLs?

- What are coaches' attitudes and beliefs regarding multiculturalism, bilingualism and DLLs? Are a coach's attitudes and beliefs in sync with the teachers they assist?

Finally, in order to support teachers in developing their competencies for effectively teaching DLLs, Directors themselves should also possess the knowledge, experiences and attitudes described above or be willing to seek them out, alongside of their teachers.

This brief was generated and synthesized by Dina Castro, Ph.D., Eugene Garcia, Ph.D., and Amy Markos, Ph.D. from the commissioned papers commissioned for the National Research Summit on Early Care and Education for Dual Language Learners.

Resources

The following papers commissioned for the National Research Summit on Early Care and Education for Dual Language Learners are available at www.cal.org/dllsummit.

Castro, D. C. (October, 2014). *Research base on best practices for dual language learners in PreK-3rd grade: Instructional strategies and language of instruction approaches.*

Espinosa, L. (October, 2014). *Perspectives on assessment of DLLs development and learning, PreK-3rd grade.*

Frede, E. & Figueras-Daniel, A. (October, 2014). *Policy advances and levers related to DLLs in PreK-3rd grade.*

Lopez, F. (October, 2014). *The critical role of leadership in programs designed for DLLs, PreK-3.*

Zepeda, M. (October, 2014). Human *resource support for those serving young dual language learners.*
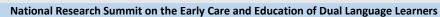
Additional Resources

Garcia, E. E. & Markos, A. (2015). Early childhood education and dual language learners. In W. E. Wright, S. Boun, & O. Garcia (Eds.) *Handbook of Bilingual and Multilingual Education.* Wiley Blackwell.

Scanlan, M., & López, F. (2012). ¡Vamos! How school leaders promote equity and excellence for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Educational Administration Quarterly, 48, 583-625.

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