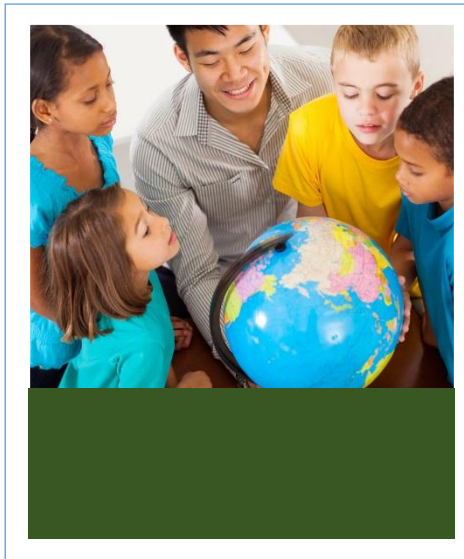
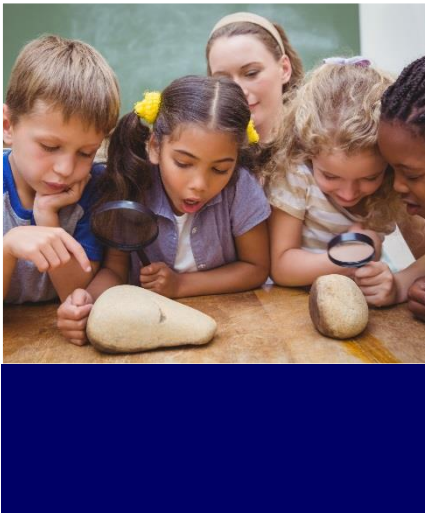


Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners

Policy Thinkers Brief



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 Leadership 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

Policy recommendations at all levels are often directed to those individuals (elected or appointed) or entities (legislative bodies, boards, courts, etc.) with the legal responsibility to formulate policies in line with their designated responsibilities—the policy makers. However, individual constituents and other socially embedded entities (associations, think tanks, foundations, etc.) have become important as “policy thinkers” who selectively inform and attempt to exert their influence on policy makers. The following addresses issues of DLL development and learning that may be considered by policy thinkers as they inform and influence policy makers.

National Governments

As the United States and other countries with large numbers of DLLs advance educational policy for students in an ever-diversified population, Wiley, Lee and Rumberger (2010) remind us that many nation-states deal with issues of children entering ECE settings, as well as K-12 public schools, not speaking the language of school. In 1948, the United Nations spoke directly to the rights of a minority group to its language by indicating that prohibitions on the use of the language of a group in daily discourse, in schools or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group fall within the agreed upon constraints regarding linguistic genocide. Later, in 1994, the United Nations Human Rights Committee spoke again to this international issue, providing the most far-reaching human rights articulation of an international body addressing linguistic rights.

Here we offer three related recommendations. **First, we recommend that national governments underwrite tests of programs designed to produce large increases in the number of culturally knowledgeable, bilingual preschool and early elementary teachers.** The most fundamental element to the provision of rich language environments and high-quality programs for



DLLs across the early care through third grade (0 to 8 years old) is high-quality caregivers/teachers who are bilingual and knowledgeable regarding the cultural and linguistic circumstances of bilingual families and children. Indeed, research shows that the transfer of academic skills between languages is heightened and early achievement outcomes increased for young bilingual and emergent bilingual students when teachers use students' home languages in the classroom. The most successful teachers are:

- bilingual or multilingual in the languages spoken by their students;
- understand learning patterns associated with bilingual/second language acquisition;
- have a mastery of appropriate instructional strategies (i.e., cooperative learning, sheltered instruction, differentiated instruction, and strategic teaching); and
- have strong organizational and communication skills.

Second, we recommend that national governments fund and experiment with teacher preparation programs to recruit more early childhood bilingual teachers who are trained in bilingual acquisition to work as language specialists. The responsibility of “language specialists” is to help classroom teachers in preschools with substantial numbers of DLLs to be responsive to students’ linguistic and academic needs. Language specialists serve as consultants to teachers and aides in the classroom to help DLLs learn and achieve, recognizing and leveraging existent strengths. Having a language specialist in school can also help monolingual teachers make essential links with parents and families. Ongoing relationships with parents are an invaluable resource to connect educational practices between the home and school, thereby increasing student engagement and learning. **Third, we recommend that national governments continue to explore and expand dual language bilingual programs (in the United States through Head Start, Early Head Start, and other grant programs).** Young DLLs should have access to high-quality bilingual programs that teach English and home language skills through content. Integrating English-speakers and non- English speakers in the same classroom fosters linguistic and ethnic equity among children.

State Governments

In most cases the sort of work needed from state governments in the United States necessitates meaningful collaborations with school districts and other community-based organizations. First, we recommend state governments collaborate with local



communities to offer high-quality educational experiences with a variety of schedule options. DLLs aged 3 and 4 years should be given access to free, state-funded preschool. Evidence suggests that high-quality prekindergarten programs improve school readiness for DLL children and decrease achievement differences between racial/ethnic groups at kindergarten entry. As mentioned, these programs should have high-quality bilingual and culturally competent teachers and staff to effectively engage students and to develop sustainable relationships with family members. State governments should work alongside immigrant integration organizations and other community institutions to provide information to parents on these programs and encourage meaningful collaborations between the home and school.

Second, we recommend state governments provide pay and benefits to qualified preschool teachers that are equal to those of elementary and secondary school teachers. This would provide the economic incentive to recruit and maintain a well- educated, reasonably stable group of preschool professionals.

Local Governments

Local governments (including school districts and other community organizations) should serve as liaisons between families and state governments. To this end, we offer two recommendations. First, we recommend that local governments collaborate with state governments and/or their national government to provide information to parents. In the United States this would include prekindergarten, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs focusing on increasing enrollment of DLLs. In other countries, universal and targeted early childhood and family interventions may be available. Continuing to increase early childhood enrollment remains important considering available evidence demonstrating improvements in school readiness for DLLs and decreases in achievement differences at school entry.

Beyond Government

The improvement of education for DLLs cannot occur without the involvement of non-governmental actors, such as private foundations, community-based organizations, and education researchers. We recommend private foundations fund long-term efforts to design, test, and evaluate language and academic development strategies for DLLs in early learning settings from all SES groups (particularly across levels of parent education and immigrant status). This would include systematic, value-added studies to explore, develop, and determine the efficacy and scalability of instructional and curricular approaches. In order to maximize the

chances of determining if the strategies are able to contribute to improvements in school readiness at scale, funding for ten or more years of support for promising approaches should be made available. Additionally, private foundations should seriously consider creating two or three new foundations specialized in funding these areas, thereby ensuring that sustained investments in strategy development are made in the long term.

In the United States, children of Mexican origins represent the largest group of DLLs nationwide. An approach of growing interest aimed at developing improved educational practices and student-learning opportunities during the early years of schooling (and across the early care-12 spectrum) is through bi-national collaborations between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the United States and Mexico. To date, the Foreign Affairs Office of the Mexican government has launched a number of programs (including teacher exchange, online courses, community plazas, the “transfer document,” among others) to enhance educational opportunities for Mexicans living in the United States. A preliminary study of these programs found they have a great deal of potential to serve Mexican American children and families (not to mention the expansion of binational cooperation in education), but are constrained by low visibility, inadequate funding, poor integration with U.S. institutions (particularly the schools), and limited research and evaluation. Ongoing study of programs like these is an example of the sort of innovation needed to enhance early educational opportunities for young bilingual children throughout the world.



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.

Castro, D. C., Garcia, E. E. & Markos, A. (2013). *Dual language learners: Research informing policy*. Available at <http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/document-library>

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

In the Spring of 2014, the Heising-Simons and McKnight Foundations each awarded \$30,000 towards a National Research Summit on the Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners. 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 (CECER-DLL), while simultaneously informing the future potential efforts by the Heising-Simons and McKnight Foundations specific to the early care and education of dual language learners.