Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners
Teachers 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 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.

Changes in Early Childhood Education

Ms. Morrison has been a PreK and kindergarten teacher for over twenty years. A few years ago the demographic composition of children in her classroom began to change. Now about half of the children in her classroom come from families that speak a language other than English, either exclusively or in addition to English. Most of the time these youngsters begin the school year with limited or no abilities in English and their level of ability in their first language varies. Ms. Morrison is not bilingual and is pleased to see that the dual language learners (DLLs) in her class are learning English quickly, but at the same time, she is concerned because they seem to not understand when she talks about subject area content; on average, DLLs' learning is slower than that of the other kids in her class, although, some of them are doing well. Ms. Morrison feels frustrated because she is using the strategies that have always worked well with other children and wishes she could do more to support the DLLs in her classroom. This scenario represents a situation that occurs often across the United States: DLLs attend early care and education (ECE) programs where their teachers are not bilingual and there is no support for them in their home language. However, we know that even a monolingual English-speaking teacher like Ms. Morrison, prepared with the knowledge about how growing up bilingually influences children's development and which strategies will work to support DLLs and how to implement them, can help facilitate DLLs development and learning.

There is an increased awareness in the field of early childhood about the need to address the growing cultural and linguistic diversity among children and families being served in ECE programs. Current federal and state level policies are in place that require ECE programs to be accountable for the implementation of high quality early childhood practices that promote positive outcomes for all children, including DLLs (see the Policy Maker Brief and Policy Thinker Brief for a discussion of ECE-DLL policies). As important as policy is, the most challenging step is to make changes to classroom practices in response to the policy regulations. Even though there is still a need for further research, the current knowledge base allows us to identify some elements of high quality early education for DLLs, and those are related to program characteristics, teachers' knowledge and skills, curriculum and instruction, and partnerships with families. In this brief, we will focus on what teachers need to know about principles to teach DLLs and effective classroom practices to support these children.

Language and culture are interrelated, therefore, DLLs' experiences are not only about communicating and learning in two languages, but also about dealing with two cultures that may or may not hold the same values and expectations. The particular characteristics and experiences of DLLs require that teachers use

of teaching approaches and strategies that may differ from those used to support monolingual children. For instance, research has found that when compared to monolinguals, DLLs can present different patterns and rates of development in certain domains. These differences often depend on a DLL's age of acquisition of the second language and their levels of exposure to that language. Importantly, these differences are part of a DLL's typical development. Thus, it is critical that ECE programs implement appropriate teaching strategies with DLLs, so that DLLs can fully benefit from participation in ECE programs.

Effective teachers of DLLs need to be knowledgeable about:

- The development of DLLs' first and second language, including all aspects of language development;
- The role of bilingualism across developmental domains;
- The relation between language and culture and its linkage to DLLs' developmental domains;
- How to promote positive teacher-child interactions and peer interactions with bilingual children;
- How to implement effective instructional practices to promote development and learning in two languages;
- How to implement appropriate assessment strategies with DLLs and how to use DLLs' developmental assessments to inform instructional planning ; and
- How to build partnerships with families of DLLs. Family members will be the best partners to learn about DLLs' experiences at home, the community they belong to, and to better understand DLLs' context of development.

There are some premises that can guide teachers' work with DLLs:

- A pedagogical approach for DLLs should be based on children's strengths and not on what they are lacking.
- Avoid comparing DLLs with how monolingual children develop and perform academically.
- Children's bilingualism is a characteristic that can serve as a protective factor in promoting DLLs' development and school success.
- Practices with DLLs need to be intentional and systematic. Lesson plans need to include explicit activities targeting DLLs and effective practices for DLLs should be embedded throughout the curriculum.

Resources

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.

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
Castro, D. C., Ayankoya, B., & Kasprzak, C. (2010). *The New Voices ~ Nuevas Voces Guide to Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Early Childhood*. Baltimore: Brooks Publishing, Inc.

Espinosa, L. M. (2010). *Getting it Right for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds, Applying Research to Improve Practice*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Gillanders, C., Castro, D. C., & Franco, X. (2014). Learning words for life: Promoting vocabulary in dual language learners. *The Reading Teacher, 68* (3), 213-221.

Gillanders, C. & Castro, D. C. (2011). Storybook reading for young dual language learners. *Young Children*. January, 91-95.

López, A., Zepeda, M. & Medina, O. (2012). *Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC) Report*. Los Angeles, CA: Alliance for a Better Community.

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