Benefits of Bilingualism/Multilingualism

by Linda M. Espinosa

A dramatic population shift has occurred throughout our early childhood and K-12 programs. Young children who speak a language other than English in the home and are acquiring English during the preschool years (dual language learners, DLLs)[1], are the fastest growing child population in the United States.[2] Many of these children are exposed to more than one language in the home and can be considered emergent multilinguals. The rate of growth of DLLs in the Early Care and Education (ECE) systems as well as the public schools continues to exceed projections with 10 states experiencing more than 200% growth from 1990-2010.[3] Fortunately, our scientific understanding of both the process of second language acquisition and the consequences of becoming bilingual during this critical period of development have also grown dramatically.

Young dual language learners represent multiple language groups, diverse cultural backgrounds, a wide range of family circumstances, and many different countries of origin. This group of children and families is very diverse. However, they share a common trait; they all are learning at least two or more distinct linguistic systems during a period of rapid cognitive, conceptual, and language development. Mastering the fundamentals of one language system during the preschool years is a major developmental accomplishment — progressing in two or more is monumental — but achievable and beneficial!

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What Do We Know about Multilingualism and Young Children?

Most young children throughout the world successfully learn more than one language beginning in their earliest years. Recent research from developmental cognitive neuroscientists and psycholinguists on the processes and consequences of learning two languages underscores the extensive capacity of the human brain to learn multiple languages during the early childhood years; during the first months of life babies are able to sort the sounds of each language into separate categories and by the preschool years, bilinguals can interpret contextual cues to know when it is appropriate to use which language with whom. Many cognitive neuroscientists have concluded that the human brain is primed to learn language from birth and is actually hearing and processing the unique characteristics of different languages beginning in the last trimester of pregnancy.

There is wide scientific consensus that bilingual infants develop two separate but connected linguistic systems during the first year of life. We now know that infants have the innate capacity to learn two or more languages from

1. The office of Head Start and most states define DLLs as*: dual language learners are young 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.*
2. United States Census Bureau, (2010). www.census.gov/Press-Release/ www/ releases/ archives/ population/012496.html.
3. National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (NCCLR). Dual language learners in state early learning guidelines and standards. (2012). Available online at http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/center/state-guidelines/dll_guidelines.html

birth and that if the early multiple language exposure is sufficient in quantity and quality, young children can successfully become fully proficient in multiple languages. Some language researchers have described young children as *linguistic geniuses* who are more capable language learners than adults.

We now know that infants have the innate capacity to learn two or more languages from birth and that if the early multiple language exposure is sufficient in quantity and quality, young children can successfully become fully proficient in multiple languages.

Benefits of Multilingualism

Current scientific research suggests that the development of two languages from a child's earliest language exposure has specific impacts on a variety of cognitive abilities that are discernible as early as seven months of age. These enhanced cognitive and linguistic abilities are persistent throughout childhood and may even offer some protection from symptoms of Alzheimer's in adulthood. In addition, advanced social-emotional skills, such as executive function abilities (e.g., working memory, inhibitory control, attention to relevant vs. irrelevant task cues), as well as improved language skills, have been linked to early bilingualism. These social-emotional skills have been portrayed as the biological foundation for school readiness, providing the platform upon which children's capacities to learn educational content is based. Studies have found a bilingual advantage when comparing monolinguals and bilinguals on tasks:

- requiring selective attention, cognitive flexibility, and certain literacy skills, such as decoding when the two languages have similar writing systems. Notably, these advantages have been found across all socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups.
- involving infants' ability to perceive and respond to a switch in learning conditions, which indicates very young bilinguals' advanced ability to inhibit previous learning when the task demands change. This is an aspect of increased cognitive flexibility.
- relating to bilinguals' enhanced attention during speech processing, which allows them to detect and process specific features of each language spoken.
- relating to executive function skills.
- selectively attending to competing options and the ability to suppress interfering information.

These bilingual benefits have been found across cultural and socio-economic groups, as well as across different language combinations. However, these cognitive advantages have been tied to the extent the child is bilingual; those who are more balanced in their bilingualism show larger advantages than children who are more strongly dominant in one language. Thus, it is important for early childhood educators to be very intentional about the amount of exposure and frequency of experiences in each language.

We also now know that learning more than one language during the early childhood years does not delay the acquisition of English or impede academic achievement in English when all languages are supported.

Young children can successfully learn two languages, and do not need to give up their home language in order to learn English if it is the formal language of the preschool setting. Practitioners can enhance the language learning of dual language learners by providing rich learning opportunities in each language. For example, they may support the home language at the same time as the school language through family involvement, bilingual materials, and activities and interactions in the home language with teachers, staff, and peers who speak that language.[4]

There are additional benefits to knowing two (or more) languages and encouraging children to maintain and develop their home language(s) as they learn English during the preschool years. Children who know more than one language have personal, social, cognitive, and economic advantages throughout their lives. Young dual language learners who do not continue to develop and maintain proficiency in their home language may lose their ability to communicate with parents and family members. Dual language learners who are proficient in their home language are able "to establish a strong cultural identity, to develop and sustain strong ties with their immediate and extended families, and thrive in a global multilingual world."[5]

4. Conboy, B. (2013). *Neuroscience research: How experience with one or more languages affects the developing brain*. Commissioned research paper by the California Department of Education.
5. Espinosa, L. M. (2006, Fall). Young English language learners in the *U.S. PAT (Parents as Teachers) News*.

Thus, the most current research on children who learn more than one language during the early childhood years has also shown that young children are capable of *adding* a second or third language and that this multilingual ability confers long-term cognitive, cultural, and economic advantages. The early childhood years are critical years for developing mastery of the sounds, structure, and functions of language and thus an ideal time to expose children to the benefits of two or more languages. Current research has clearly indicated that young dual language learners should be given opportunities to develop high levels of proficiency in both of their languages because the advantages are significant and lasting.

Differences Between Dual Language Learners and Monolinguals

There are important differences in the language development of young DLLs that may look like delays to the untrained eye. From the first weeks of life, young multilingual children develop more widely dispersed and evenly distributed neural pathways across both brain hemispheres. The unique linguistic challenges faced by young DLLs leads to different sets of skills than those of monolinguals. The cognitive demands of processing input in two or more languages may lead to slower word retrieval in each language, but enhanced abilities in other areas as described above. While it may take DLLs longer to respond to language tasks that require word retrieval, and they may not know as many words in each language, the additional cognitive challenges of switching between languages is also associated with advantages in some areas of development. In short, all language experiences influence cognitive and linguistic learning processes and since DLLs are developing unique neural connections and pathways, their brain development and learning will look different from monolingual children.

While language *differences* have been reported in studies of young DLLs, these differences should not be interpreted as language delays due to learning in more than one language. Most often, these differences are evident only in certain areas of language development (e.g., vocabulary and rapid word retrieval), but other areas (e.g., phonological awareness and decoding skills), bilinguals and monolinguals most often are comparable. It is also important to note that learning expectations or state standards developed for monolingual English speakers may not be appropriate for DLLs.

Finally, there are important socio-cultural differences, both between DLLs and non-DLLs and within the DLL population, that affect the development of important language and literacy skills. For example, young DLLs are much more likely than native English speakers to have parents without a high school education, to live in low-income families, and to be raised in cultural contexts that do not reflect mainstream norms in the United States. The language and early literacy development of DLLs also follows unique trajectories toward full English proficiency with significant implications for instructional planning. These background and developmental characteristics of young DLLs need to be understood when making instructional decisions and judgments about individual children's progress.

In summary, recent research on the development of young children who are growing up with more than one language has concluded:

- All young children are capable of successfully learning more than one language. The human brain starts to identify and process the sounds of language during the third trimester of pregnancy.
- Bilingualism/multilingualism confers many cognitive and social advantages for children and adults. These advantages are strongest when children demonstrated a balanced bilingualism and were roughly equally proficient in both languages. To date, comparable studies on the impacts of three or more languages have not been published.
- Learning more than one language during the early childhood years does not delay the acquisition of English or impede academic achievement in English when both languages are supported.
- Systematic, deliberate exposure to English during early childhood, combined with ongoing opportunities for DLLs to learn important concepts in the home language, results in high achievement in both the home language and English by the end of third grade and beyond.
- At all levels (local, state, and federal), educators need to review their early learning standards, assessment tools, and expectations to ensure they are appropriate for DLLs.
- As a field, early childhood educators need to familiarize themselves with the developmental features of dual language development, as well as the important educational supports necessary to the growth, development, and achievement of a large and growing group of children.

Effective Teachers for Dual-Language Learners

by Marlene Zepeda

During morning circle time, Alonso was quite excited and wanted to share an outing he had taken with his family over the weekend. Alonso's home language is Spanish, and he kept repeating certain phrases in Spanish at such a rapid pace that Ms. Sheila could not understand him. Ms. Sheila asked her assistant, who is fluent in Spanish and English, to help interpret. Alonso then described the wedding of his Aunt Lucinda. He went into great detail about who was there, what they had to eat, and the special clothes that everyone had to wear. Ms. Sheila then asked the assistant to help Alonzo make a book with pictures of the wedding. During small-group time, she wrote the words in Spanish as Alonso dictated the events of the wedding. They made a cover page identifying Alonzo as the author, made up a title, "Aunt Lucinda's Wedding," then numbered the pages and bound them together. The next day Alonzo proudly read the book to the class, very carefully turning each page after showing everyone the pictures and narrating the sequence of events. (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 209)

This vignette shows how two teachers can work together to meet the needs of a child whose first language is not English. Ms. Sheila, who is a United States monolingual/monocultural English speaker, knows that she must seek assistance in helping Alonzo feel not only comfortable in the classroom, but also helping him learn that he is capable of producing a book that is meaningful to him. By asking her assistant, who speaks and writes Spanish, to work with Alonzo, Ms. Sheila is communicating to her teaching partner that, as an assistant, she possesses special expertise in working with a Dual Language Learner. Ms. Sheila is also communicating to Alonzo and other children that the use of Alonzo's primary language is just as valuable as producing a book in English. Although Ms. Sheila cannot speak Spanish, she recognizes the importance of using a child's primary language to help him not only feel comfortable, but also to enhance his language and literacy. Ms. Sheila knows that children who are allowed to use and develop in their primary language will be able to transfer such skills as print and sound awareness to the learning of English.

More and more, teachers of young children are being challenged by the increasing presence of children who enter formal early childhood settings with little or limited knowledge of English. Today, one in eight residents of the U.S. are foreign born. These individuals primarily come from Latin America and Asia and largely reside in the western and southern regions of the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). According to a recent U.S. Census Bureau report, 28% of children age zero to four live in households where English is not the primary language (as cited in Kominski, Shin, & Marotz, 2008).

Children whose first language is not English are commonly referred to as "English Language Learners." However, that term does not accurately describe the language development of children exposed to multiple languages. A more correct term put forth by the Office of Head Start is "Dual Language Learner." A Dual Language Learner is described as a child who is learning two or more languages simultaneously or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language (Office of Head Start, 2009). For children, there are several pathways in dual language learning. For example, the child may only hear and speak his primary language until his first exposure to English in the early childhood setting. Another path is where the child is exposed to both his primary language and English at the same time. This is often the case when the young child

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has older, school-age siblings who are speaking English with him. Thus, each Dual Language Learner may arrive with variations in his knowledge of English when he begins preschool.

> More and more, teachers of young children are being challenged by the increasing presence of children who enter formal early childhood settings with little or limited knowledge of English.

Effective teachers of Dual Language Learners, like Ms. Sheila, understand that children whose primary language is not English and who come from a culturally diverse home require special accommodations in the early childhood setting. These accommodations not only extend to the use of the child's primary language, but to making sure the child feels safe and secure in a setting where expectations of the U.S. English-speaking culture may be different from the Dual Language Learner's family. Ms. Sheila knows that what works for monolingual/monocultural English-speaking children may not necessarily work for a Dual Language Learner. Ms. Sheila also knows there is only so much she can do for a child whose language and culture is unfamiliar; therefore, she must enlist the assistance of others to help her.

So, how does a monolingual/monocultural teacher become effective with young Dual Language Learners? What are the dispositions and pedagogical practices that they should demonstrate to enhance the teacher-child relationship and promote learning? What resources can a monolingual/monocultural teacher draw on to help these learners?

Dispositions

An essential element of teaching effectiveness centers on a teacher's belief and attitude towards children and families whose primary language is not English and whose cultural orientation may be different from her own. These beliefs and attitudes, often thought of as *dispositions,* influence the socio-emotional climate that the teacher provides. The socio-emotional climate, in turn, provides the context in which learning takes place. When a teacher sees differences in language and culture as something to be valued and a source of enrichment benefiting all children in their care, they are more likely to arrange responsive environments, be open to understanding and celebrating other cultures, and advocate for the best interest of young Dual Language Learners (Alliance for Better Communities, 2012).

What personal attributes do effective teachers of young Dual Language Learners possess? Teachers who are responsive to language and culture are:

- willing to learn about the development of Dual Language Learners in all of its complexity.
- conscious of the broader social realities confronting young Dual Language Learners and their families and make a commitment to supporting and nurturing them.

- tolerant of ambiguity and exhibit resilience in the face of conflicting messages they may receive about appropriate teaching practice. Here are some examples.

  In many states, children enter kindergartens where English is the only language permitted in the classroom. As a consequence, many preschool practitioners feel pressure to minimize the use of the primary language in favor of teaching as much English as possible.

  Another contradiction that teachers of young Dual Language Learners encounter are parental desires for English-only exposure in early childhood. Many parents of Dual Language Learners may request that only English be used with their children because the parents feel that they can adequately teach their child their primary language or because they do not want their child labeled as a Dual Language Learner for fear of inferior treatment.

Effective teachers of young Dual Language Learners will encounter many inconsistencies in how best to approach teaching young Dual Language Learners and they must be prepared to accept this reality and work with parents, staff, and administrators for solutions.

Teacher Knowledge

One area of competency needed by effective teachers of young Dual Language Learners, whether the goal is to preserve the primary language while developing English or the acquisition of English as soon as possible, is knowledge of language development in general and knowledge of second language acquisition in particular. For example:

- To what degree does the teacher understand the milestones and processes underlying first language development, such as the timing of productive speech, and to what degree is she knowledgeable of stages of second language development (e.g., quiet period, telegraphic/formulaic speech).

- How well can a teacher match his instructional strategy to the stage of the child's second language development?

> As early childhood educators, it is our ethical responsibility to address the needs of the children in our care, regardless of where they come from or what language they speak.

For instance, Ms. Sheila recognized that although Alonzo knew a few words in English, he was better able to express himself in his primary language and so she structured an activity geared to his particular stage of English language development.

Another important competency that effective teachers of young Dual Language Learners display is an appreciation of how culture influences how a child uses language. For example, in some cultures, young children do not initiate conversations and only speak when they are given permission to talk. For teachers who are unfamiliar with this expectation, the reticence of the child may be perceived as passivity or a lack of initiative.

Finally, an effective teacher of young Dual Language Learners is cognizant of the importance of a warm and welcoming climate for young children who do not understand either the language used by teachers or by other children or the expectations for behaviors that may be different from what occurs in their home. In this confusing and challenging environment, it is the teacher who sets the tone of acceptance through both non-verbal (e.g., smiles, hugs) and verbal communication that is friendly in tone. Effective teachers of young Dual Language Learners reach out to families to learn more about the children and their family life:

- If translators are needed for communication with families, teachers will seek them out to make sure that they are able to make contact and learn about families.

- Family members can often be helpful in developing resources in the young child's primary language. For example, they can tape record a reading of a favorite book and the teacher can place it in the listening center.

- Parents can come to the early childhood setting and share a special talent or skill. When parents see that teachers are making an extra effort to

  include their child's language and culture, they may be more supportive of the early education program. When a child sees a teacher reaching out to her family (e.g., making a home visit), her sense of self is enhanced

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because she is receiving individual attention from a special person — the teacher.

All of these connections are the foundation for the development of a positive relationship with both the child and the family that will motivate the child in the early childhood setting.

Resources

There are a number of resources available that teachers and program administrators can utilize to address the needs of young Dual Language Learners. The state of California's Child Development Division has developed helpful publications that can be easily accessed via the Internet or purchased for a nominal amount. Included is the *Preschool English Learners Guide* (2009) with a companion video entitled *A World Full of Languages, the California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 1* (2008) and the *California Preschool Curricular Frameworks, Volume 1* (2010), both of which contain separate chapters on Dual Language Learners. In addition, California has published a set of early childhood educator competencies that contain separate sections on Dual Language Learners and culture, diversity and equity.

More recently, the Alliance for Better Communities has made available a set of teacher competencies that separates out teaching skills by particular teacher background characteristics such as monolingual/monocultural, bilingual/bicultural, and bilingual/biliterate and a teacher's level of experience, such as beginning, developing, or advanced (Alliance for Better Communities, 2012). It is the assumption of this report that teachers who do not speak a child's language or are not familiar with a child's culture have the capacity to become effective teachers of young Dual Language Learners.

As early childhood educators, it is our ethical responsibility to address the needs of the children in our care, regardless of where they come from or what language they speak. Our nation is becoming more linguistically and culturally diverse. This reality means that if we are to optimize the development of all young children attention must be paid to the rapidly expanding population of young Dual Language Learners.

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Capitalizing on the Strengths and Contributions of Multilingual Families

by Iliana Reyes

Young children learn from their everyday social experiences and interactions with their parents, siblings, community members, and the media. Studies with young children have shown that early language experiences are crucial for supporting literacy development. These experiences, with language input from parents and other primary caregivers, are predictive of literacy development in kindergarten (August & Shanahan, 2006; Snow & Tabors, 1993). Other factors, such as phonological awareness and vocabulary development, contribute and correlate positively with literacy development. However, additional factors, such as family literacy practices with infants and toddlers, at home, before children begin formal schooling, must be explored to further our understanding of their early literacy development and their families' funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2013). Early childhood educators in particular could benefit from understanding the practices related to multilingual development and literacy that are used by immigrant parents and children who are learning English as a second or third language. In order to provide continuous support for the educational progress of immigrant children, we must try to bridge the cultures between home and school (Dantas & Manyak, 2010).

What happens to literacy development when a child is exposed to two languages when they are young? In some cases, children learn to read two languages simultaneously, but this appears to be more the exception than the rule (Baker, 2007). More commonly, young bilingual children learn to read first in one language and then in a second one. This is the case for many immigrant children in the United States who speak a native language different from English that is not honored or valued in the classroom (Reyes & Moll, 2008; Volk & Long, 2005). In order to reach some basic understanding of the impact of bilingualism and multilingualism on the literacy acquisition process of these diverse children, we must learn from their experiences, not only during formal instruction in the classroom, but also from their experiences at home.

Learning from Parents, Families, and Children about Their Literacy Practices and Funds of Knowledge

Previous research studies have explored the development of emergent literacy in preschool children whose first language is other than English, and the literacy practices of their parents at home (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004; Reyes & Esteban-Guitart, 2013). Findings suggest that Spanish-English bilingual children develop a variety of emergent literacy abilities in their two languages across different tasks (e.g., producing narratives, reading school materials, writing cards) in cooperation with adults in their family. These activities contribute to language learning and socialization in the community where they are growing up bilingual. Adults and children who live in the same community draw upon a range of linguistic and cultural resources to meet various challenges in their day-to-day activities (Reyes & Moll, 2008).

Early childhood educators can capitalize on families' multilingual and multiliteracy strengths by understanding that parents' ideologies and practices influence children's developing language and literacy in two languages. Contrary to the deficit perspective, in which parents are assumed to be disinterested in their children's education, they in fact express very positive views about the importance of education and helping their children's development of literacy (Potowski & Rothman, 2011; Valdés, 1996). As it pertains to schooling practices, parents believe that their children receive academic support in their native language, believing for instance that because

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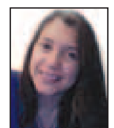

the teacher is bilingual, children receive additional assistance in their mother tongue to ensure that they excel in school. In addition, parents of emergent bilingual children must navigate the system and learn from teachers and staff about the programs and services offered to their children. In this exchange, teachers and early childhood educators must also learn about parents' and families' past experiences and funds of knowledge at home that they can benefit from acknowledging and integrating as part of the classroom literacy practices.

Through interactions with families, educators learn that parents support their children's early bilingual language and literacy development with various practices and resources.

Through interactions with families, educators learn that parents support their children's early bilingual language and literacy development with various practices and resources. Children are involved in different literacy events with their parents through daily routines such as writing notes, cards, and letters. These literacy events support bilingualism and biliteracy development, and support and strengthen contact and family ties across distance and space. For example, Katia, a preschool bilingual girl, writes letters to her grandma to stay in touch and let her know how she is doing in school in Arizona. She tells me about these writing literacy exchanges at home and with relatives:

Iliana: *¿En qué idioma escribes en casa?*
(In what language do you write at home?)

Katia: *Con mi hermano escribo en inglés.*
(Yes, with my brother I write in English.)
pero a mi abuelita en español.
(but to my grandma in Spanish.)

Katia has learned English as the primary language at school, and at home she continues to develop Spanish with her mother, father, and when writing to her grandmother. Katia's mother explained to us, "*me gusta que ella [Katia] pueda comunicarse con su abuela que vive allá en México*" (I like for her to be able to communicate with her grandmother who still lives there in México). This literacy practice supports Katia's bilingualism and biliteracy in her day-to-day activities.

In another literacy event, Angel, a five-year-old boy, shares his Christmas card with his mom and sister. (All names are pseudonyms and translations to English are indicated in parenthesis.)

Angel: *Esta es la carta que le escribí a Santa Claus.*
(This is the letter that I wrote to Santa.)

Mom: *¿Y qué le escribiste?*
(What did you write?)

Angel: *Pues ya sabes lo que tú me ayudaste y Wendy.*
(What you helped me write and Wendy.)

Wendy: *Si que quiere un perrito y...*
(He asked for a puppy and...)

Mom to Angel: *A ver leéme qué mas le pediste*
(Read it and tell me what else you asked Santa for.)

Angel: *Un puppy y la película de Sponge Bob*
(A puppy and the Sponge Bob movie.)

Most of these literacy events involve the use of the child's native language at both the oral and written level, but English often plays a predominant role in printed material at school. The language used by parents and siblings in literacy practices at home supports the child's emergent language and biliteracy development. Parents also involve their children in community activities (e.g., local festivals, religious ceremonies) to help maintain their native language. These literacy funds of knowledge are at the core of these children's learning experiences and valuable knowledge to tap into as we get to know them and their families.

In sum, families of emergent bilinguals report participating in a variety of literacy activities, as well as in language socialization practices with respect to their cultural backgrounds and strategies to foster literacy and biliteracy development with their children. The home language is a source of support and not a source of interference in their children's learning of English. Children need and use their native language to construct and represent meaning, as well as to access prior knowledge to consolidate and facilitate the acquisition of English literacy and new knowledge in their second language (Soltero-González & Reyes, 2012).

In order to implement the most effective educational strategies to support bilingual children's academic literacy devel-

opment in both English and their native language, we must understand the literacy practices that parents already use at home to encourage their children's literacy development. Educators might not recognize literacy practices in working-class immigrant families because they often do not match those used by the average white middle-class family (e.g., night time story). As *responsive* educators and teachers, we should support these young children to build on their bilingual and biliterate experiences to maintain their native language, as well as to develop their literacy in English (Vásquez, 2003). Therefore, learning from the perspective of immigrant parents, who often have few economic resources but a wealth of social capital, funds of knowledge, and literacy practices unrecognized outside their homes, can inform educators in the field on how to best support what children and their families want and need in order to co-construct together optimal learning environments.

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Assessing Young Dual-Language Learners

by Ida Rose Florez

Early educators play a leading role in young children's learning and development. To lead and teach well, they need a solid understanding of each child's development and learning needs. But assessing young children who are learning more than one language can pose challenges, especially when teachers do not speak the child's home language. With increasing numbers of language-diverse children in early care and education settings, teachers need skills and knowledge that allow them to assess all children in all of the languages they speak.

Young children take a variety of language development paths. Many children learn two or more languages from birth. Others learn the home language first and the dominant language (English in the United States) when they enter non-parental care and education settings. For some children exposure to languages fluctuates as family or caregivers move in and out of their lives. In this article all children learning more than one language are referred to as dual language learners (DLLs).

Principles for Assessing Young DLLs

Valid assessment of young DLLs begins with the same principles for assessing all young children. Assessing young children requires teachers, caregivers, and other professionals to collect information from a variety of sources, on multiple occasions, using a variety of methods and materials. A single assessment 'session' cannot adequately assess a young child's capabilities.

For young DLLs, assessment should accurately reflect their competencies across both languages and in environments and within relationships that use both the home language and English. This principle applies to assessment of all developmental domains. Key to valid assessment of DLLs is avoiding the assumption that children's functioning in English, or in environments where only English is spoken, represents all they know and can do. Young DLLs often demonstrate skills and competencies at home that they do not exhibit elsewhere. Even if a child appears fluent in English, if another language is spoken at home, valid assessment requires collecting assessment information across *both* settings and languages.

Like the assessment of all young children, partnering with parents or other family members is one of the best ways to collect information. Parents know a lot about their children. In addition to providing pregnancy, birth, developmental, and medical histories, parents can share the child's 'language story.' Knowing the story of a child's language development helps teachers understand the child's progression through the periods of dual-language development (see sidebar). Understanding children's unique developmental experiences helps teachers make accurate decisions about supporting children's learning and development, and about when, and if, a child should be evaluated for delays or disabilities.

Types of Assessments

Assessment of individual children serves one of three broad purposes:

1. To help teachers and family members support children's learning.
2. To screen children to ensure they are on course developmentally.
3. To evaluate children for delays or disabilities.

Teachers focus primarily on the first purpose, which is called *formative assessment*. Formative assessments are information-gathering practices teachers embed in their everyday interactions with children. They are inseparable from children's learning experiences and are the best

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approach for improving children's learning and development, regardless of language status.

Formative assessments of young DLLs require teachers to intentionally plan how to capture developmental information across all domains, including development in both languages. Often teachers need to strengthen their observational skills, to learn to assess children's development through a variety of non-verbal means. The sidebar on the following page provides five practical ways to develop skills for conducting formative assessments of young DLLs.

The two other types of child assessment — screening for appropriate developmental progress and evaluation for delays or disabilities — require formal assessment instruments. Screening and evaluation of young DLL children requires great care. If educators and caregivers do not recognize the developmental patterns of dual-language acquisition, a child may end up diagnosed with a disability, even if the child is developing as expected. At the same time, it is critical to ensure young DLLs who *are* experiencing a delay or other disability are appropriately referred for evaluation.

Decisions to refer children for developmental screening should begin with information from formative assessments, and should be made in close consultation with family members. Most often, a rich portfolio of formative assessment information creates a clear developmental picture, indicating if a referral is warranted. If the decision remains unclear, parents and teachers should create a plan for gathering more information and set a time frame to revisit the decision. Two to three months usually provides an adequate window to reconsider a referral. During that time it is often helpful for the parent to consult with the child's doctor and for the teacher to have the child observed by a bilingual school psychologist or speech therapist, or other developmental professional. If a parent requests screening or evaluation, their request should be honored without delay.

As with all young children, formal assessment instruments used with DLLs must be valid for that purpose. Screening instruments compare a child's growth and development to typically-developing children to determine if the assessed child is progressing as expected. Because the typical language development of DLLs differs from children learning a single language, comparing a young DLL to typically-developing monolingual children would not yield valid results. Currently, there are very few assessments that allow comparisons of referred children to typically-developing DLLs. Teachers and parents should ask assessors whether screening or evaluation results are from instruments devel-

Language Development Story

Teachers of young DLLS can learn important information about a child's language development by asking parents or family members to tell the child's language development story.

1. What language(s) and dialect(s) does the child speak?

2. What is the language status of the main characters in the child's life: family members, neighbors, and the child's community?

3. How often does the child hear each language?

4. In what language does the action occur? What activities does the child engage in, in each language (such as watching television, talking with Nana on the phone, attending religious services, listing to stories or book reading)?

5. What developmental milestones has the child accomplished (first words, phrases, complete sentences) and when, in both languages?

6. How does the child use language to interact with the main characters in her story? Does she code-switch (intermingle both languages)? Does he appear to understand in one language, but regularly answers in the other? Does she switch language depending on what the listener speaks and understands?

7. How developed are the child's 'acting' skills? How does she use gesture and non-verbal communication to express herself?

8. What is the story's setting? How do cultural patterns guide the child's language use? How are questions used? What are the cultural expectations for how children use language? Are they to listen? Is it acceptable for them to speak directly to adults? How does the culture use props or non-verbal language to communicate?

Adapted from Preschool English learners: Principles and practices to promote language, literacy, and learning. *California Department of Education (2009).*

Developing Dual-Language Assessment Skills

Many teachers struggle to assess children who do not speak the teachers' language. At first it can be daunting to assess children through non-verbal means or through others who speak the child's language (such as teacher-assistants, parents, and the child's peers). Here are five practical ways to develop DLL assessment skills:

1. Watch videos of young children engaged in learning experiences with the sound off and take anecdotal records of developmental indicators. Observe an individual child or groups of children interacting.
   a. How does the child use gestures (such as pointing, nodding, reaching, or holding up fingers to indicate quantity)?
   b. Does the child initiate play?
   c. Does he pick up objects with a developmentally-appropriate grasp?
   d. Where does the child focus attention?
   e. Does she shift attention between people or objects appropriately?
   f. How does the child handle books?

   It is also helpful to watch a video in which children and adults all speak an unfamiliar language. Observe the rhythm and pace of reciprocal verbal exchanges, and how facial and non-verbal communications support meaningful communication. Note how the child responds to peers and adults.

2. View a video where children speak English and at least one other language. Watch the video with a colleague who speaks both languages. Take detailed observational notes. Afterwards, compare notes and discuss differences and similarities of observations.

3. Examine child-created drawings or photographs of child-created block constructions.
   a. Does the child draw shapes?
   b. Does the child group objects by size, or shape, or function?
   c. If possible, watch a child create a drawing or construction, and describe the child's process.
      - Did the child draw from left to right?
      - Use props or models?
      - Share blocks or crayons?
      - Ask other children to share?
      - Persist when blocks were difficult to balance?
      - Ask for help?

   All these actions (and many more) are observable without understanding the child's language.

4. Practice partnering with other adults who speak the child's language to collect information about the child's functioning. Observe the child interacting with the bilingual adult. Afterwards, debrief and ask the bilingual adult to clarify what you observed.

5. Ask a bilingual adult to interpret a conversation between you and the child. When teachers' interactions with children are supported by an interpreting adult, engage the child with facial expressions and non-verbal cues in the same way one would if speaking to a child in a shared language. Speak directly to the child, make appropriate eye contact, smile, and make sure to be at the child's eye level. When the child responds, continue to engage directly, even if the child looks at the adult who is interpreting.

oped for use with the assessed child's age and language group. Ethically, all assessors are obligated to discuss the limits of the assessments they use with teachers and parents.

Sometimes, as a means of learning more about the child's development and when an appropriate instrument does not exist, assessors will administer items from an instrument that was not developed for use with a particular age or language group. Under these circumstances, a score should not be generated or reported, especially if the assessment was administered only in English. As with assessment of all young children, results of formal assessments of DLLs need to be interpreted within the context of assessment information gathered from the child's family and educational setting.

Assessing young DLL children follows the same principles as assessing all young children. Although assessing children who speak a language other than English can be daunting for teachers, developing formative assessment skills that rely on a broad range of observational techniques helps teachers become better observers of all young children. Teachers and caregivers can also be advocates for the appropriate assessment of young DLLs, ensuring that formal assessments are used appropriately and contribute to the healthy growth and development of the children they serve.

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Periods of Dual Language Development

Children entering non-parental care and education settings with limited or no exposure to English typically move through four periods of Dual Language Development (Tabor and Snow, 2001). Not all children experience all four periods and children frequently fluctuate between periods.

- **Home language use.** Initially, children attempt to use their home language to communicate with others even if they do not understand the home language. This strategy is often effective with peers, especially in play. All young children are language learners and rely on a variety of nonverbal cues to understand each other. Play usually provides a rich enough context that children can understand each other with limited language proficiency.

- **Observational and listening period.** During this period children pay keen attention to the language of their new environment and the nonverbal cues that support its meaning. Just as infants intently focus on the pattern and meaning of language, young DLLs engage in intense listening and watching as they learn to decode the new language.

- **Telegraphic and formulaic speech.** Once young children gain enough understanding of the second language, they begin using a word or short phrase to represent more complex meaning. Just as a toddler may say, "Up" to mean "I want you to pick me up," young DLLs begin to experiment with the new language by 'telegraphing' their meaning with a word or two. They may also imitate others or repeat commonly used phrases such as greetings.

- **Fluent second language use.** As children's second language vocabulary increases, they also begin to use correct English grammatical structures and begin to sound more like native speakers. Research indicates children take five to seven years to develop fluent academic second language skills (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

De los ojos a los elefantes — poco a poco: Developing a Spanish Program in a Reggio-inspired Context

by Liddy Wendell

Stevie looked up at the ceiling as he often does when he is concentrating. After a pause, while his friends waited expectantly for him to say his name, his gaze returned to the circle of fellow three and four year olds. With a glint in his eye he answered, "¡Me llamo ojo!" *My name is Eyeball! The class burst into laughter at such a silly declaration and Stevie settled back into his seat, satisfied.*

My reaction to Stevie's statement was not just amusement, but amazement. Not only had Stevie successfully expressed humor in another language, but he had also done so using a word that I had not directly taught him: ojo.

I was hired in 2009 at Hilltop Children's Center to start a Spanish language program that reflected the learning children experience in their classrooms. Hilltop uses a Reggio-inspired approach in its work with children; namely, child-centered, with the foundation of emergent curriculum, the environment as teacher, and parents as partners. My challenge has been to develop a program that supports children's language acquisition in Spanish while mirroring Hilltop's commitment to anti-bias work and reflective teaching practices. My background in the Spanish language, my commitment to the Reggio philosophy, and my connection to the Hilltop community gave me a strong foundation with which to form this program.

I was asked recently how Hilltop has achieved some of the work it is known for. The best answer I can come up with is: little by little, or as we say in Spanish, *poco a poco*. As Hilltop continues to grow and develop in reflective response to both our own community and the larger national and global community, we challenge ourselves with the question: What is our responsibility to the children in our care? As a recent report from the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007) states, "If education policies were guided by what we know about the development of the brain, second-language learning would be a preschool priority."

The 'little by little' approach is how we are incorporating Spanish education into our school. At this point, we have built the structural parameters of the classes to honor and support the work already happening in classrooms, by allowing enough time for children to experience Spanish in a context relevant to them. Each class is 45-minutes long in a room separate from the children's regular classroom with a mix of 5-7 children from different classrooms and one teacher. As we continue to investigate the role of Spanish at Hilltop, we work to further incorporate it into a Reggio-inspired model.

Our work is child-centered. A little shy and at times reticent to talk, Amelie lights up whenever elephants are mentioned. In fact, the first word she repeated in Spanish class was *"elefante,"* after politely refusing to say any of the other words and phrases I offered her. Soon, she would say, *"Quiero un elefante,"* (I want an elephant) or *"Tengo un elefante,"* (I have an elephant). Thanks to the *"elefante,"* Amelie's comfort level in Spanish increased to the point where she began to use non-elephant related vocabulary, such as *Me llamo Amelie* (My name is Amelie) or *¿Cómo estás?* (How are you?).

As a language teacher, one of the most important ways to ensure that learning is child-centered is to make it contextual. Instead of arriving in class with a list of vocabulary that I want the children to memorize, I bring provocations in the form of songs, books, games, and open-ended materials and offer them the words they seek within each of those opportunities. Because each child responds differently to the various invitations, it is my responsibility to engage as many strategies as I can within the class period.

The consistent structure of the class, constantly infused with Spanish, demonstrates the rich diversity of strategies for language learning, while offering opportunities for repetition:

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- Each class begins with a meeting, in which we sing greeting songs (structured to teach standard conversation patterns) and read a book.
- Next, the children are invited to explore the provocations set up in the classroom. Throughout this open-ended play, I speak Spanish: narrating the play I see, translating the English I hear, and asking questions relevant to the children's play.
- Just like all the teachers at Hilltop, I also document what I observe with written notes, videos, and photographs.
- Finally, the class closes with a short gathering, which might include a game or finger play, and opportunities to practice saying goodbye.

The foundation of our learning is emergent curriculum. *"¿Qué quieres hacer?"* I asked Ethan. What do you want to do? "Slugs!" he answered with a wide smile. *"¿Babosas?"* I asked. *"Babosas,"* he repeated, as he and the other children began to move their bodies like slugs. Accordingly, I incorporated slugs into the song I was playing on the guitar. When I had entered the class that day, I didn't yet know that one of the vocabulary words I would be teaching the children would be 'slug.' However, the word emerged out of their play, and because it was relevant to their immediate stories, they picked it up quickly.

Although in some ways there is a more outcome-oriented learning intention in Spanish class than in the other classrooms at Hilltop, the children's interaction with Spanish is open-ended. This classroom culture invites children to explore language — just as they are encouraged to explore other ideas and materials — in ways that most resonate with each individual:

- Some children are fearless in tackling new sounds, repeating most everything they hear; others prefer to wait, listen, and truly absorb vocabulary before attempting to use the words themselves.
- Some children spontaneously incorporate Spanish into their speech; others feel more comfortable using provided structures (e.g., songs, games, finger plays, etc.), while other children prefer to translate what they hear into English.

Regardless of which learning strategies are most relevant for the individual child, the integration of diverse avenues for the exploration and application of language allows every child the opportunity to grow and embrace at her or his own pace.

The environment serves as the second teacher. *"¿Jugamos?"* I asked the class. Shall we play? *"¡Jugamos!"* The children answered with enthusiasm. Observing as they dispersed into the room, I waited to see what play and resulting language would emerge from the provocations that day. Maria immediately gravitated toward the stools lined up against the wall, stopping on her way to fill up a basket with small colorful blocks. "It's *comida* for the *ranas*," she told me (food for the frogs).

Not only was Maria experimenting with the concept that Spanish is the same kind of tool as English by incorporating it into her speech, but she was also using the environment of the classroom to prompt her language exploration.

The Spanish class space is set up to reflect the environments in the regular classrooms. There is a rug to gather on as well as different sections to the room, distinguished by strategically-placed fabric — either hung or arranged on the ground — stools, and a table tall enough for the children to play under. By creating separate spaces throughout the room, children can choose to play alone or in small groups, depending on where the materials and their imagination take them. Each section houses an open-ended provocation that varies from week to week: at least one is sensory-based (water, bark, sand, etc.); and the others might include blocks and small animal figurines or stones, shells, and bowls.

The more engaging the environment, the more opportunities the children have to explore Spanish as it relates to their play. In addition, this self-directed play environment gives me the opportunity to interact with and observe the children one-on-one and to strengthen their Spanish within the context of their individual games. In this way, children begin to understand that Spanish is just like English, and that English is one of many languages. They learn vocabulary relevant to them in context, and have opportunities to spontaneously express what they are learning.

Parents are partners in the education of their children. "That song's from Panama!" Gideon exclaimed, as we started singing the traditional classic *De colores*. A few weeks later, his father, who had been in the Peace Corps in Panama, came into class to read a story and sing songs with us — including *De colores*. While Gideon was thrilled to have his father in class, sharing a song that was special to his family, I was just as excited for the children to have the opportunity to hear Spanish coming from another source. Parent partnership in Spanish class, whether by joining us in the opening or closing meeting, playing with us, sharing a book or song, or reading, reviewing, and commenting on the documentation I send home, is a rich part of children's experience.

Documentation is essential to the work we do at Hilltop. We consider teachers to be researchers who constantly observe, take notes and photographs, and collect children's work in order to analyze, assess, and plan. The documents that we

create are ways to communicate with parents and children, as well as tools of curriculum development. Documentation is compiled in a journal for each child that will go with them when they leave Hilltop.

Documentation is similarly important to the Spanish program, and I take daily notes based on children's interaction with the language, while photographing and videotaping their play. Every week, I send out a *Weekly Update* to parents (as do all the classrooms), which includes a summary of the books we read and the play and vocabulary that emerged in the classroom, and photos and videos from class. This update is shared with faculty, as well as parents, so that we can keep in touch about what is emerging in each of our classrooms.

This documentation is a way to communicate with parents about what we are doing in Spanish and to offer parents some tools that can be used at home if they so choose. Some parents pass it along to other family members, others post it on their fridge and use the vocabulary with their child, and still others seek out the books we read to share with their children at home. In addition, once or twice a year, I compile individual updates for each child, which gives a more defined picture of how he or she has grown as a Spanish-language learner throughout the year.

A partnership with parents helps children make connections between home and school, introduces a diversity of experience, culture, and language to Spanish class, and offers me a depth of knowledge about each child.

We are committed to anti-bias work. In one of his first days in class, frustrated that he couldn't understand what I was saying, Eddie asked in his booming voice, "Liddy, why don't you just speak American?" Not only did Eddie's statement prompt further questions, such as what is 'American?' and what languages do people speak in the United States?, but it also served to reinforce the critical role this program plays in Hilltop's anti-bias work. Already, in a few short months, Eddie has moved beyond his reaction against hearing a language foreign to him to deriving joy from speaking the Spanish words he knows.

At Hilltop, learning new languages and cultures can serve as a reflective lens on one's own native language and cultural assumptions. In addition, having the visible presence of more than one language in our center supports children who speak multiple languages. Because of the diversity of the Spanish language and of Spanish-speaking cultures, we have ample opportunities in class to observe and discuss multiple perspectives. I acquired the bulk of my Spanish in Spain, so my linguistic and cultural knowledge is rooted there. However, children have learned different pronunciations and vocabulary in their families or in other settings and bring that diversity of knowledge to our classroom.

In addition, we have community volunteers and interns who share their linguistic and cultural knowledge with us as well. In this way, the Spanish Program at Hilltop supports multiple perspectives and invites diverse linguistic and cultural elements into the classroom. As a result, the children's exploration of representing and re-representing their learning occurring in their classrooms is reflected in the process of learning Spanish.

We continue to grow through reflective teaching practices. Through reflective practice, the role that the Spanish Program plays in our community continues to emerge. In developing the program, we took a number of factors into consideration, including parent choice, financial support, and regular classroom integrity. As a result, we settled on the pull-out class structure as best accommodating all those needs. While the implementation of Reggio practices is more challenging in a class context limited by time and shifting groups, this model best supports the varying needs of our larger community.

The Spanish Program at Hilltop is still young and I am excited to continue my efforts to increase parent and classroom partnership, focus on a more profound representation of the Spanish-language community, and incorporate more media of artistic representation into the class. Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the first such schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, wrote about the "hundred languages of children," referring to the myriad of tools of expression that support the exploration of a concept. Just as a child might use sculpture, ink, paint, and movement to represent 'tall,' she might use movement, song, or drawing to understand words and ideas in Spanish. Indeed, our program reflects the emergent model we employ. As such, the Spanish Program at Hilltop continues to emerge through Reggio-inspired concepts, always with children as its preschool.

Hilltop's faculty and families speak over 15 different languages. The more we integrate multiple languages into our school, the better we honor, serve, and represent our community. What was initially a request from parents for an 'extra-curricular activity' has transformed into a program that truly reflects Hilltop's values, while helping us move forward as a school: *poco a poco.*

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El resumen semanal — The Weekly Review
Hilltop Spanish Program, April 4-7, 2011

***Resumen* (Summary)**, Liddy Wendell, Teacher

Greeted by beautiful flowers on the community studio table, I decided to offer painting for the children. It was really fun to see how they drew and painted their individual pictures, while also adding to their friends' work. Each child noticed something different about the flowers. Kyle carefully counted the number of stems in the vase, Harper focused on the petals, and Ainsley experimented with a myriad of colors. Their paintings are currently hanging on the wall in the community studio. This project gave us the opportunity to practice *"¿Me das . . . ?"* or "Would you give me . . . ?"

There was also quite a bit of reading, as children continued to explore the books in Spanish. Elizah was looking at the dictionary, practicing her ideas of Spanish words and sounds. Dylan, Nicholas, and Maggie chose their own books to read and then shared them with each other. Alistair and Cara looked through previous *Weekly Reviews*, seeking out pictures of themselves and of their friends.

We read *La Tortillería, The Tortilla Factory,* which chronicles how tortillas are made (on a large scale), from growing the corn on the farm to eating it in the kitchen. We used our bodies to act out the illustrations on each page; working the earth, sowing seeds, moving like plants in the wind, kneading dough, putting the 'perfect discs' into the oven, packaging them, driving them to kitchens, and finally filling them with yummy beans and eating them with our *'dientes blancos'* or white teeth.

Please enjoy a selection of quotes from the week!

Harper: *Dame el boli.* (Give me the pen.) • Anna: *¿Me lo das?* (Will you give it to me?) • Elsie: *Voy al baño.* (I'm going to the bathroom.) • Bridget: *Masa.* (dough) • Kyle: Why are you always *tengo frío*? (cold) • Connor: *Ojos, la nariz, and the boca.* (Eyes, the nose, mouth.) • Maggie: *Me gusta español.* (I like Spanish.) • Cara: *I want agua* (water). • Zev: *Está triste.* (He's sad.) • Madeleine: What's *está cansada?* (she's tired) • Henry: *Va así.* (It goes like that.) • Liddy: *¿Qué tenemos para jugar?* (We have to play?) • Anna Derya: What do we have to play with? *Casas.* (houses) • Luca: *Zapatos.* (shoes) • Paul: *Rompecabezas.* (puzzle) • Caitlin: *Me llamo Caitlin.* (My name is Caitlin.) • Esther: *¿Me das agua?* (Will you give me water?) • Levi: I'm going to have a lot of gold *tesoro* (treasure). • Joaquín: *Está triste.* (He's sad.) • Vehd: *Sube al barco.* (Get on the boat.) • Nicholas (naming the colors in his painting): *Verde, amarillo, verde, rojo.* (Green, yellow, green, red.) • Sebastian: *Estoy en tu sitio.* (I'm in your spot.) • Alayna: I brought my *zapatos* (shoes). • Sarah: *Cocina.* (kitchen) • Alistair: *Vi a Sam.* (I saw Sam.) • Jack (Rainbow): *Jugamos.* (Let's play.) • Jack (Mountain): "It goes in the back of the *camión*" (truck). • Katie: *Necesitamos cinta.* (We need tape.) • Elizah: I want *libros* (books). • Nicholas: *¿Me das agua?* (Will you give me water?) • Dylan: *Quiero pintar.* (I want to paint.) • Sebastien: I want *cuatro* (four). • Federico: *Estoy en tu sitio.* (I'm in your spot.) • Sarah: *¿Dónde está Alayna?* (Where is Alayna?) • Max: *Hombre asco.* (Gross, man.) • Connor: *He acabado.* (I'm done.) • Miles: *Quiero jugar buhos.* (I want to play owls.) • Sophie: *Me gustan tortillas.* (I like tortillas.) • Sydney (Sunlight): *He ido a gimnasia.* (I've gone to gymnastics.) • Sam: *Miramos a la derecha.* (Let's look to the right.) • Mira: *Baila.* (dance) • Gabe: *Tengo un hermano.* (I have a brother.) • Sylvia: First I'm going to get *agua*, then I'm going to play with you! (water). • Duzan: *Jirafa.* (giraffe) • Bryce: *Un pez.* (a fish) • Isabelle: *Hay una niña.* (There's a girl). • Danika: *Soy la madre.* (I'm the mother.) • Caleb: *Quiero agua.* (I want water.) • Brayden: *Está muy seguro.* (It's very safe.) • Sydney (River): *¿Quieres algo encima?* (Do you want something on top?)