

# Early Care and Education of Dual Language Learners Parent Brief



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

***“No quiero niños en inglés nunca más!” [I do not want children in English ever again!].”***  
***This is what Enrique told his mother crying when she picked him up from his first day at an English only preschool. Enrique did not know any English, his only language until that day had been Spanish. A talkative, happy four year-old turned into a shy, quiet child throughout his elementary school years. Although, he eventually learned to communicate in English, he did not have friends and felt that he did not fit in when interacting with other children.***

Being in an environment in which no one speaks their language and where they perceive, or are explicitly told, that their home language should not be spoken, can be a traumatic experience for young children that can leave a mark on their self-esteem and motivation for learning. Discussions about ECE for young DLLs rarely include the socio-emotional aspects of the experience of learning a second language in a monolingual environment. Moreover, young children who are DLLs are also learning about the values, beliefs and behaviors associated with the language of schooling. They have to learn how to live between two cultures. These are complex processes and children need supportive environments at school and at home to successfully adapt to the new situation.

In this brief we provide information for parents of DLLs to help parents make informed decisions when choosing an ECE program for their children. We discuss the characteristics they should look for in an ECE program to ensure that their children have a high quality ECE experience, one that provides a positive and supportive socio-emotional climate while promoting children’s development and learning.

## What is High Quality Early Education?

Early education should provide all children the opportunity to develop to their potential; to do that ECE needs to offer activities that take into consideration children’s characteristics and cultural experiences. This is important because learning happens when children can participate in activities that are meaningful to them; when activities are related to what children already know. For children who are DLLs, this means that ECE should support development in

children's two languages and develop curriculum that reflects children's cultural experiences. The reason is that children growing up with two languages think and learn using their two languages. They learn things at home, they learn things at the school and they learn things wherever they go in the community. When ECE programs force DLLs to use only one language, the language of schooling, children begin to lose abilities in their first language. As a consequence, without the foundational support from their first language, the process of learning a second language may be more difficult; this may in turn affect children's learning of content knowledge, and they may fall behind.

### Bilingual Development in the Early Years

Some DLLs have families in which everyone speaks a language that is not English, and thus, they begin learning English in an ECE program. Other DLLs learn two languages at the same time from birth or soon after. In both cases, there will be a need to support the development of a DLL's two languages. Recent research has increased our knowledge about how bilingualism influences children's development. We know from research that:



- The development of DLLs is different from monolinguals' development. Their brain functions in a different way because they are learning with their two languages.
- Young children have the capacity to learn more than one language, it does not confuse them or hinder English language development.
- Bilingualism has no inherent negative consequences for children's development. To the contrary, it may benefit young children, cognitively, linguistically, and socially.
- Strong language skills in the first language will facilitate English language development for DLLs.
- Early exposure and use of a language is necessary to develop that language. Thus, if DLLs reduce or stop speaking in their home language they will lose it, and with that the possibility of being bilingual.
- DLL children in bilingual programs typically score higher on tests of English than do DLLs in English-only programs.

### What Does This Mean For Early Education?

- ECE programs need to support DLLs' development in their two languages.
- Parents should look for ECE programs that have bilingual teachers and provide instruction in two languages.



- When dual language or bilingual programs are not available in DLL communities, at least English instruction with first language support should be provided.
- Parents and other family members should provide support in the first language at home (i.e., reading, singing, and talking a lot!!), especially, when their DLL children are not attending a bilingual program.

Remember that to benefit from bilingualism children should not only talk but also learn to read and write in both languages.

- Since these children are learning through two languages, assessments of development and academic performance should be conducted in their two languages.

### Conclusion

There is no reason to believe that children growing up with two languages will fall behind in school or have language delays. What they need is strong support to take advantage of the opportunity to become bilingual. Speaking to children in the home language is not enough for children to become competent bilinguals. Not only do children need to listen, they need to speak and eventually read and write in both languages to become competent bilinguals. Bilingualism will increase children's chances to perform well in school and get better job opportunities in the new global market, while keeping them connected to their family and rooted in their culture.



### Resources for Parents

#### Books

Rodriguez Bellas, M. *Cómo criar niños bilingües. Una guía práctica*. Atria.  
Steiner, N., & Hayes, L. S. (2009). *7 Steps to Raising a Bilingual Child*. AMACOM.

#### Online Resources

Beneficios de criar un niño bilingüe

<http://noticias.univision.com/article/2103550/2014-09-24/educacion/pequenos-y-valiosos/beneficios-de-criar-un-nino-bilingue>

Colorín Colorado

Para familias <http://www.colorincolorado.org/familias/>

Familias bilingües <http://www.colorincolorado.org/recursosweb/bilingues/>

Dual Language Program Questions and Answers: What does research say?

[http://www.boerne-isd.net/uploaded/faculty/vossm/Microsoft\\_Word\\_-\\_Dual\\_Language\\_QA.pdf](http://www.boerne-isd.net/uploaded/faculty/vossm/Microsoft_Word_-_Dual_Language_QA.pdf)

Halgunseth, L. (2010). How children learn a second language.

<http://www.education.com/reference/article/how-children-learn-second-language/>

Los 5 mitos mas comunes de criar niños bilingües.

<http://espanol.babycenter.com/a12500001/los-5-mitos-más-comunes-de-criar-niños-bilingües>

Multilingual parenting

<http://multilingualparenting.com/2014/09/19/12-cosas-padres-criando-ninos-bilingues-necesitan-saber/>

*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](http://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-3<sup>rd</sup> grade.*

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