



Early Care And Education Programs

A large and growing share of the children under age 5 in the United States have a first language that is not English, and many of these children are served by early care and education (ECE) programs. Most ECE teachers and staff will work with dual language learners (DLLs) during their careers. As a workforce, they should be prepared to use effective practices that promote development, learning, and achievement of DLLs.¹

Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures (2017), a report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. The report offers recommendations to help support the academic success of DLLs.



Promoting Dual-Language Development in Young Children

ECE teachers are faced with the challenge of helping young children develop English skills, while simultaneously promoting maintenance of their home language. When dual-language learners are exposed to English during the preschool years, they often show a preference for English and reluctance to continue speaking their first language. Losing proficiency in the home language means losing the ability to connect with families, as well as cultural values. Evidence suggests that proficiency in both the home language and English is critical for becoming educationally successful in the K-12 grades. Not all teachers can teach in all languages, but all teachers can learn specific strategies that support the maintenance of all languages. Instructional strategies for monolingual teachers that support DLLs' English language development and L1 maintenance include²:

- ▶ Teachers meet with parents early in the school year to learn about the child and family, especially early language experiences.
- ▶ Recruit parents, family members, and community members to volunteer in the classroom to provide opportunities for DLLs to hear, see, speak, read, and practice their L1.
- ▶ Create visuals that represent the languages, cultures, and family practices of children in the classroom
- ▶ Make time for frequent individual and small-group language learning experiences.
- ▶ Provide books and materials that give an authentic representation of the cultures and L1s of DLLs and their families. Have students, parents, and volunteers help read and explain them.

¹ The term “dual language learner” (DLL) is used to refer to children birth to age 5 in their homes, communities, or early care and education (ECE) programs.

² Summarized from Espinosa and Magruder (2015).



- ▶ Introduce key vocabulary words in the child's L1, with help from parents or community volunteers.
- ▶ Preread stories in the child's L1, with help from parents or volunteers.
- ▶ Explicitly use cognates in the L1 and English to make connections between the two languages.
- ▶ Use pictorial, real-world objects and concrete experiences to convey the meaning of words and concepts.
- ▶ Use visual cues, gestures, and signals to link content vocabulary to convey meaning.
- ▶ Routinely assess each child's language and conceptual knowledge and skills.

ECE teachers should recognize that DLLs need additional supports to comprehend the meaning of lessons because they are simultaneously learning a new language as well as cognitive and conceptual content in that language. It is important for all ECE staff to be proficient in English and use varied vocabulary and correct grammar when implementing strategies described above in English. Although these specific evidence-based practices need further research, the weight of the evidence points to the need for all preschool teachers to integrate and extend DLLs' knowledge in their L1 and apply it to the challenge of learning English while they are also learning new age-appropriate content.



Conclusions

Similar to all young children, DLLs require comprehensive care and education that includes warm, nurturing, and responsive relationships, as well as rich, diverse, and responsive language interactions. DLLs also require both high-quality exposure to English and commitment to supporting continued development of the home language for two major reasons: (1) Strong language skills in the child's first language have been shown to facilitate English development; and (2) Exposure to both languages in an educational setting has been shown to support growth in English vocabulary and literacy skills as much as English-only instruction does.

Recruiting diverse ECE staff members who may share a linguistic and/or cultural background with DLLs' families is more likely to result in families enrolling their young children in available high-quality ECE programs. In addition, it is important for ECE staff to understand each DLLs' sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds to individualize instruction and services.

This brief is based on the report *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*, a PDF of which can be downloaded free of charge at <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24677>.