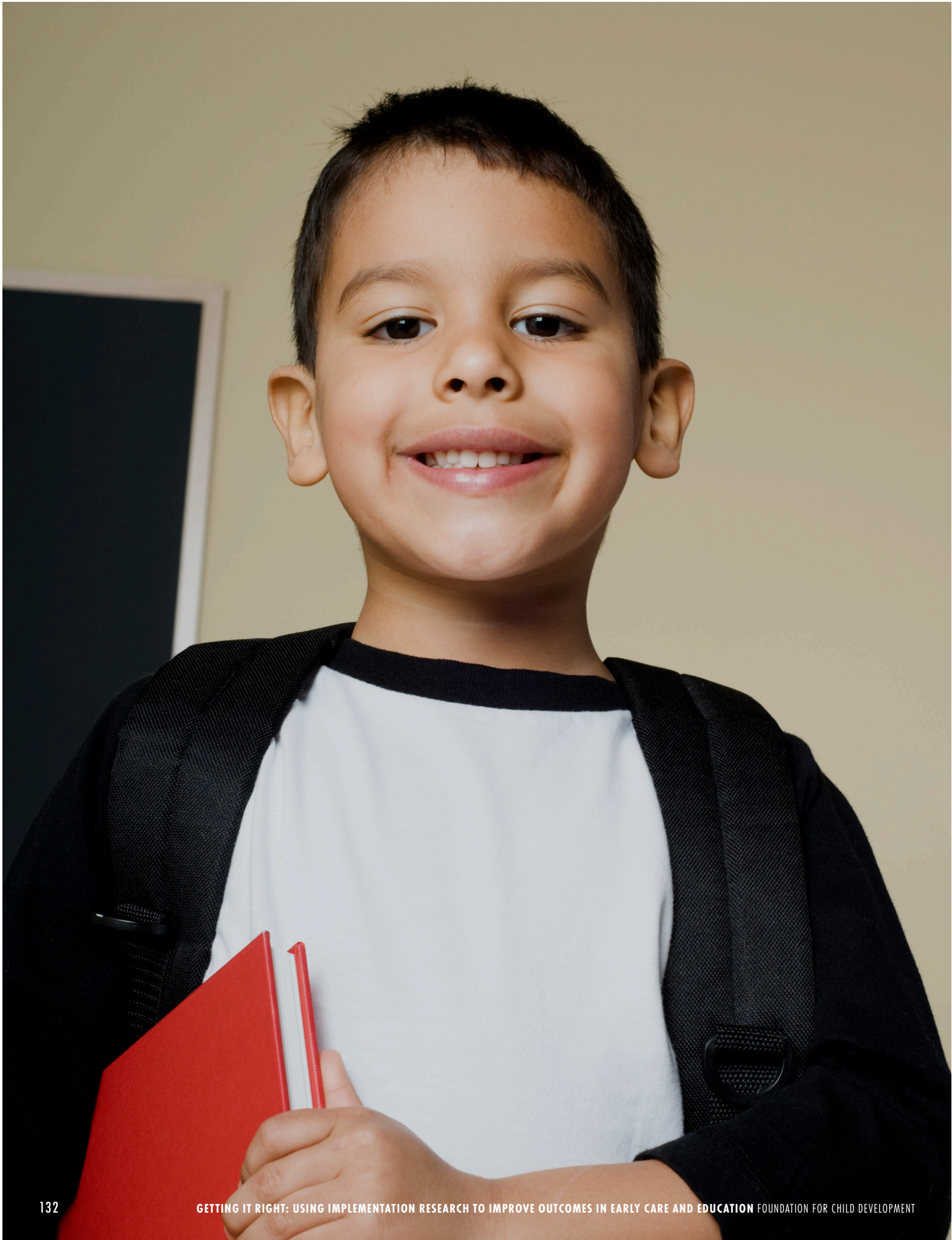# ADDRESSING EQUITY IN THE ECE CLASSROOM: EQUAL ACCESS AND HIGH QUALITY FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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The early childhood education (ECE) profession has a long-standing commitment to the principle of equity and to antidiscriminatory practices, as the recent position statement from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2019) makes clear. This position statement, combined with supporting curriculum and assessment materials, promotes equal access to high-quality early education and affirms the value of all children and families for their unique talents and cultural and linguistic strengths. One particular group of diverse children, dual language learners (DLLs)—meaning children who are aged 0-5 and speak a language other than English in the home—face a number of challenges that contribute to decreased educational attainment and have implications for ECE educational equity (Castro, Espinosa, & Páez, 2011).

Research shows that all young children can learn more than one language during the ECE years and that doing so carries significant linguistic, academic, social, and cognitive advantages (NASEM, 2017). Yet many dual language learners evidence achievement gaps in comparison to native English speakers (EOs), suggesting that ECE educators need to adopt new strategies for actualizing the academic and intellectual potential of DLLs. To design effective educational approaches for DLLs, we must first understand what typical development and school readiness looks like for these children, what factors contribute to their growth and learning, and what teaching practices and classroom conditions best support their achievement. In this chapter, I propose that we shift the conceptual frame for understanding and improving instructional practices for DLLs by essentially broadening critical pedagogical knowledge and how to apply it.

To provide equitable early education to linguistically diverse children, ECE teachers must consistently implement a set of instructional adaptations across multiple settings. One core necessity here is to recognize that these children are learning content or conceptual knowledge at the same time that they are also learning the language in which that content or concept is expressed. Thus instructional approaches that focus on monolingual English speakers need to be adapted and enhanced (Castro, Espinosa, & Páez, 2011; NASEM, 2017) to build on what children already know in their first language while they are also adding English. This chapter outlines the research on the benefits of early bilingualism and presents specific strategies that all ECE teachers can implement that will support DLLs' acquisition of English while also maintaining their home language. I first summarize the research on early bilingualism and then outline instructional adaptations based on current scientific evidence on how to support improved outcomes for DLLs.

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Why do we need high-quality ECE for DLLs? One of the driving forces behind publicly funded ECE programs, such as Head Start and state prekindergarten programs, has been compensatory education. These programs have been largely designed to provide early learning experiences that promote "school readiness" for children from low-income homes, many of whom are minorities and do not speak English in the home. In fact, Head Start's stated mission is to promote "the school readiness of young children from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development" (Office of Head Start, 2015). Almost 30% of U.S. 4-year olds are served by state prekindergarten programs (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, Clarke Brown, & Horowitz, 2015), most of which have income eligibility requirements and are focused on increasing vulnerable preschoolers' access to high-quality ECE. Based on both historical and current empirical research that has demonstrated that children who attend a year or two of high-quality ECE have better oral language, literacy, and mathematics scores at kindergarten entry than their peers who do not have such experiences (Yoshikawa et al., 2015), government at all levels has been seeking to expand access to and improve the quality of early education (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2017). These efforts have primarily targeted children from low-income families, with the ultimate goal of reducing the achievement gap at kindergarten entry and improving long-term school success.

Researchers have stressed that high quality is important to achieve improved academic skills that are both discernable at the end of prekindergarten and sustained into the elementary school years. As Dale Farran notes in this volume, a central element of high-quality education during the early years is frequent, warm, responsive, engaging interactions between adults and children that include multiple turn-taking. Ensuring these kinds of interactions for children who are not native English speakers and whose English language skills are not well developed is difficult in ECE settings. Researchers and practitioners are asking a range of questions to address these challenges. What language should be used during these individual and group interactions? At what age should young children be exposed to a second language? How much of each language should be used throughout the preschool day? What qualifications should ECE staff have to best meet the needs of children who understand very little English? What strategies can monolingual English-speaking teachers use when working with children who do not speak or understand English? Do state and local learning standards apply equitably to all language speakers? What are reasonable expectations for language growth? And, finally, how can ECE staff assess progress when children have limited English skills?

The growth of DLLs in the child population has meant that many ECE settings, such as Head Start and state prekindergarten programs, now serve large numbers of families and children who primarily speak languages other than English. Demographics demonstrate the increasing linguistic diversity of our children and families. Although many states do not collect data on their preschool DLLs (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2018), the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that nearly one-third of all children ages birth to 8 are growing up with exposure to more than one language in the home (Park, Zong, & Batalova, 2018). The Office of Head Start (2017) reports that more than 30% of preschool children in their programs are considered DLLs, and in the state of California, 60% of

children ages 0 to 5 are so identified (First Five California, 2017). More than 130 different languages have been identified in the Head Start child population; more than 80% of all Head Start classrooms serve DLLs, who in many cases speak multiple languages. Unfortunately, ECE teachers who speak more than one language remain in short supply, making up only about 15% of the workforce (Park, McHugh, Zong, & Batalova, 2015).

The substantial and persistent achievement gap between DLLs and native English speakers is of concern to researchers, educators, and policymakers across the U.S. In many studies, DLLs show language gaps during infancy, although language is almost always assessed only in English in these studies and DLLs have had fewer opportunities to learn English (Fuller, Bein, Kim, & Rabe-Hesketh, 2015). They perform significantly below their English-only peers at kindergarten entry and have much lower reading and math scores at third grade. Many are classified as long-term English learners (ELs) during upper grades and have little access to the general curriculum and a higher probability of dropping out of school (NASEM, 2017; Olsen, 2010).

To effectively provide educational equity and high-quality ECE for DLLs, we must define and put into practice effective program language models, specific instructional practices that scaffold language interactions for DLLs, instruments and methods for ongoing assessment, and ECE teacher qualifications. Fortunately, scientific knowledge about how a young child learns a second language and what constitutes best practice in ECE for DLLs has expanded greatly during the past decade (NASEM, 2017). Yet many questions about specific approaches and instructional practices remain.

REJECTING THE DEFICIT APPROACH TO DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Historically, most research examining the growth, progress, and achievement of DLLs has focused on differences between DLLs and non-DLLs, judging DLLs' performance using norms designed for English-only populations without considerations for the unique linguistic and developmental trajectories of children whose first language is not English (Center for Early Care and Education Research—Dual Language Learners, 2011). This approach has often led to a "deficit perspective" that views DLLs as having less potential and fewer academic abilities than their monolingual English peers because of their lack of English proficiency. In fact, policymakers have sometimes referred to "the extra burden" of having to learn two languages during the early years. The deficit perspective, however, often negatively affects teachers' views of DLLs' potential, and it is, moreover, contradicted by current research.

The scientific consensus is that children who become fully proficient in both their home language and English are likely to reap benefits in cognitive, social, academic, and professional outcomes and to be protected from brain decline at older ages (NASEM, 2017). This suggests we should view the development of DLLs through the powerful advantages of having more than one language. The assets associated with bilingualism and biliteracy have been well documented and should be recognized and supported.

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All who work with children who speak a language other than English in the home must recognize that DLLs' development differs in significant ways from that of their native English-speaking peers due to the unique context and societal circumstances of their upbringing. For example, although more than 90% of DLLs are born in the United States (NASEM, 2017), often one or both of their parents were born elsewhere. Many of these families have recently immigrated to the United States and may be unfamiliar with social and cultural norms or school expectations. Some of them have experienced trauma associated with migrating to the United States, which can have negative cognitive and social consequences for child development (Yoshikawa, 2011). And by definition, the families of DLLs speak a language other than English in the home, a characteristic that can lead to social isolation and, in some cases, can create mixed feelings or even a sense of shame for the children (Halgunseth, Jia, & Barbarin, 2013). Culture-specific parenting goals, values, and practices that vary across ethnic groups can contribute to inaccurate perceptions of DLLs' early social, language, and literacy potential. For instance, among Latino families, culturally specific parenting concepts such as *familismo* (family), *respeto* (respect), and being *bien educado* (well educated) (Halgunseth et al., 2013) emphasize the importance of harmonious relationships with others, respect for adult authority, prioritizing the needs of the family, and conducting oneself in a manner that does not bring shame on the family or community. Other values that children are exposed to early in life may include a focus on group or collective well-being rather than individualism, individualism being an attribute stressing independence and self-reliance that is commonly emphasized in American schools (Small, 2002). These contrasting early socialization practices can lead to patterns of behavior that are inconsistent with ECE program goals, such as being reluctant to stand out as the only child who knows the answer, and they can give teachers' a misleading impression of DLLs knowledge level.

Family members' beliefs about exposure to English and continued use of the home language also affect their children's language learning and academic success (Billings, 2009). Some may view the home language as critical for maintaining ties to the family's cultural heritage and connections with family members in their countries of origin. Conversely, newly arrived immigrant families may prize the rapid acquisition of English over maintenance of their heritage language and encourage their children to speak only English. Thus, beliefs and goals about cultural and language maintenance can play a key role in how much exposure and opportunity children have to use their two languages.

The family contexts and early learning environments of DLLs vary widely, and thus they should not be considered a homogeneous group or only in comparison to their English-only peers. Sociocultural and demographic variables such as language spoken in the home, age at first exposure to English, family socioeconomic status, and country of origin can all influence children's proficiency and early literacy skills in both the home language and English

(NASEM, 2017). To understand each DLL's language status and educational needs, ECE teachers need in-depth knowledge of their family circumstances, values, and culture. Specifically, ECE personnel must expand their thinking beyond simple comparisons between DLLs and English-only children and not use norms or learning trajectories based on English-only learners. All ECE program leaders need to design tools and methods to collect important information about DLLs' background (e.g., the age of acquisition of each language, the extent and nature of exposure to each language, and key family characteristics) as well as family histories that go beyond the typical home language survey.

Finally, the amount and quality of DLLs' exposure to and usage of their two languages are also important features of early development that impact later school success. Multiple studies have shown that preschoolers' and school-age children's exposure to the home language supports their development of that language (Hammer et al., 2012). Use of the child's first language in the home or in school does not appear to affect the rate or level of English acquisition. However, emphasizing English in the ECE setting does appear to undermine DLLs' continued development of the home language. This is likely due to the higher value given to English proficiency at school and in the broader social context. Given research findings about the impact of exposure to their two languages at home and in school, we should devote attention to the amount and quality of exposure DLLs experience in each language.

What follows is a discussion of some recent findings and conclusions about dual language development during the early years and specific classroom practices that have empirical evidence of efficacy for linguistically diverse children. Hopefully, if we clearly and explicitly communicate how young children acquire and benefit from exposure to more than one language and describe in detail which practices have shown pedological promise, we can produce more equitable and higher-quality ECE for DLLs.

CURRENT RESEARCH ON EARLY BILINGUAL DEVELOPMENT

As knowledge concerning DLLs' language development has grown, it has increasingly been used as a foundation to support and guide ECE practice. Several strands of research from multiple disciplines have illuminated the process of early bilingualism. First, research on early brain development has shown that infants can learn two languages simultaneously and that the early years are the optimal time to become bilingual (Ramirez & Kuhl, 2017). Evidence from cognitive neuroscience shows that the bilingual brain is more active neurologically than the monolingual brain due to the need to process two languages (Bialystok, 2017). This increased early processing demand is associated with greater control of focused attention and self-regulatory behavior (Conboy, 2013), skills that are associated with enhanced executive function in DLLs. Second, research from psycholinguistics has shown that although DLLs follow a general language trajectory similar to that of monolingual children, their development will demonstrate unique characteristics as a function of learning two languages. These characteristics include language mixing, smaller vocabularies in each language (Bedore, Peña, García, & Cortez, 2005), and differences in the emergence of certain linguistic benchmarks (NASEM, 2017).

A 2017 report by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), *Fostering the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English*, offers a research synthesis on the development and achievement of DLLs from birth to age 21. This consensus study has yielded a comprehensive view on language development, school practices, and educational policies that impact DLLs' growth and school success. It reports four major interrelated conclusions that are central to improving the educational outcomes for DLLs. First, all children are capable of learning more than one language from the earliest months of life and benefit from early exposure to multiple languages. Second, high levels of proficiency in both the home language and English are linked to the best academic and social outcomes. Third, the earlier a child is exposed to a second language, the greater their chances for full bilingualism.

Summary of Findings of NASEM (2017) Report for DLLs 0-5.

The major findings about DLLs ages birth to five from the NASEM (2017) report include the following:

- *All young children, if given adequate exposure to two languages, can acquire full competence in both languages;*

- *Early bilingualism confers benefits such as improved academic outcomes in school as well as enhancement of certain cognitive skills such as executive functioning;*

- *Early exposure to a second language—before three years of age—is related to better language skills in second language, English;*

- *The language development of DLLs often differs from that of monolingual children: they may take longer to learn some aspects of language that differ between the two languages and their level of proficiency reflects variations of amount and quality of language input;*

- *The cognitive, cultural, and economic benefits of bilingualism are tied to high levels of competence including listening, speaking, reading, and writing in both languages, e.g., balanced bilingualism at kindergarten entry predicts best long-term outcomes;*

- *DLLs should be supported in maintaining their home language in preschool and early school years while they are learning English in order to achieve full proficiency in both languages;*

- *DLLs language development is enhanced when adults provide frequent, responsive, varied language interactions that include a rich array of diverse words and sentence types. For most DLL families this means they should continue to use their home language in everyday interactions, storytelling, songs, and book readings;*

- *There is wide variation in the language competency among DLLs that is due to multiple social and cultural factors such as parents' immigration status and number of years in U.S., family Socio-Economic Status (SES), status of home language in the community, resources and amount of support and for both languages.*

Source: NASEM (2017). *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Fourth, home language loss is currently the norm for DLLs, particularly once they enter English-speaking ECE settings, which undermine the possibility of full bilingualism and may place the child at risk for unhealthy family relations, including estrangement from their cultural heritage. (See text box for a summary of the NASEM findings for DLLs.)

The NASEM report findings are contributing to an emerging consensus on the elements of effective practices for DLLs. An underlying principle for the effective education of DLLs is early and systematic exposure to English as well as intentional support for home language maintenance and development. Early balanced and intentional exposure to both languages supports early bilingualism, which is important for kindergarten entry and later academic success. Research has identified certain home environment and ECE program features and instructional practices that promote school readiness and help reduce the achievement gap between DLLs and their English-only peers at kindergarten entry.

> **ECE teachers must adopt strategies that recognize, value, and integrate the use of DLLs' home languages into classroom practices.**

Home language preservation should be considered a priority for all ECE programs. When very young DLL children are exposed to English, they often start to show a preference for speaking English and a reluctance to continue speaking their home language (Wong-Filmore, 2001; Oller & Eilers, 2002). ECE professionals and program administrators should know that there are developmental risks associated with the loss of a child's first language. As English constitutes the primary language that DLLs hear outside the home, and it is often the preferred language in community contexts, it is very easy for DLLs to lose their desire and ability to understand and speak their home language, especially once they are exposed to English in an ECE setting that uses English as the language of instruction. Therefore, ECE teachers must adopt strategies that recognize, value, and integrate the use of DLLs' home languages into classroom practices.

Ensuring exposure to English during the preschool years is also key. Although some preschool DLLs may be fluent in both languages, others will be proficient in the home language but know very little English, have some English conversational language abilities but few academic language skills, or have minimal proficiency in both languages (Páez & Rinaldi, 2006; Place & Hoff, 2011). Recently, several studies have shown that lower levels of English proficiency at kindergarten entry are related to later school difficulties, specifically in English reading (Galindo, 2010; Halle, Hair, Wandner, McNamara, & Chien, 2012). These studies underscore that systematic exposure to English during the preschool years is also important to DLLs' future school performance. Recent research on the amount of time it takes DLLs to become reclassified as fully proficient in English has also found that early proficiency in both the home language and English at kindergarten entry is critical to the process of becoming academically proficient in a second language and may reduce the amount of time it takes to become reclassified (Thompson, 2015; Ansari & Winsler, 2016). Further, Barbara Conboy's (2013) and others' research has led to a consensus that earlier exposure to two or more languages with frequent enriched language interactions leads to the cognitive advantages associated with bilingualism, as the specific languages a child is learning as well as the amount of experience with each language influences how the brain processes each language.

These bilingual benefits have been found across cultural and socioeconomic groups as well as across different language combinations. However, these cognitive advantages depend on the extent to which the child is bilingual (Gordon, 2016). Children who are more balanced in their bilingualism show larger advantages than children who are more dominant in one language. The fact that preschool DLLs enter programs with some proficiency in their home language and are at an ideal age to learn and benefit from learning a second language, that is, English, provides a compelling rationale for designing programs that support both languages.

To summarize, scientific findings confirm that preschoolers have the capacity and, indeed, are neurologically prepared to learn more than one language—and they gain cognitively from managing the linguistic processing required to become bilingual. However, learning a second language should not come at the expense of continued home language development. The research highlights the importance of sufficient exposure to both languages to reap the benefits of bilingualism.

It is important for educators to recognize that there are differences between DLLs and monolinguals. Preschool DLLs seem to show a different pattern of strengths and needs than monolinguals. They are at risk for low levels of oral language development if they don't receive frequent high-quality enriched language learning opportunities in both languages. Their basic mathematical understandings may differ from those of English speakers if their first language uses different language constructs for expressing math concepts such as counting, plurals, grouping, and so forth. They may also excel in certain executive function skills such as cognitive control, and they often demonstrate social-emotional strengths (NASEM, 2017).

In some areas of development, preschool bilinguals show either no differences or slight developmental gaps when compared to monolingual children. For instance, Sandhofer and Uchikoshi (2013) point out that studies have consistently found that bilingual children take longer to recall words from memory. They have slower word retrieval times in picture naming tasks and lower scores on verbal fluency tasks. These findings underscore the need for teachers to understand the challenges a young DLL experiences when processing language, particularly the nondominant language, and the need to allow sufficient time for the child to come up with a response. It is important to give all children sufficient time to respond, but it is critical for young DLLs who are processing language requests in two languages.

In addition, many studies have found that bilingual preschoolers tend to have smaller vocabularies in each language when compared to English-speaking and Spanish-speaking monolinguals. However, a DLL's vocabulary is distributed across two languages; when both languages are considered, their vocabulary size is often comparable to that of monolinguals. As Conboy (2013) has pointed out, "Bilingual lexical learning leads to initially smaller vocabularies in *each separate language* than for monolingual learners of those same languages, but that *total vocabulary sizes* (the sum of what children know in both their languages) in bilingual toddlers are similar to those of monolingual toddlers" (p. 25).

Because vocabulary size is a key goal in preschool and very important to future reading comprehension, this variation in dual language learning is critical for preschool teachers to understand. The difference in DLLs' vocabulary development most often does not indicate language delays or possible learning problems but is a typical feature of early bilingualism. If a preschool child does not know the English word for book, the child may nonetheless understand the concept of a book but know it by a different word such as *libro*.

To sum up, multiple factors are known to affect DLLs' vocabulary growth including similarities between the two languages being learned, the language of schooling, age of acquisition of each language, the child's family socioeconomic status, and the quality and quantity of their exposure to each language. Further, DLLs typically develop vocabulary knowledge in different contexts such as home or school for each of their languages, and the rate of vocabulary development may not be the same for each language (NASEM, 2017; Espinosa, 2015).

Oral language skills, including vocabulary skills, listening comprehension, grammatical knowledge, and expressive vocabulary, have been found to be especially important for DLLs' future reading abilities. Recent research with young Spanish-speaking children from low socioeconomic backgrounds has found that these young DLLs might be at risk for delays in their early literacy development due to their weaker oral language abilities (Espinosa & Zepeda, 2016; Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2011). This research with dual language learners demonstrates the need to promote oral language development by providing rich and engaging language environments in both languages while at the same time focusing on building early literacy skills. In light of this research, it is essential for preschool programs to recognize the critical importance of oral language and vocabulary development for young DLLs.

Knowledge of linguistically appropriate assessment practices for DLLs is particularly crucial. Valid and comprehensive assessment of young DLLs' development and achievement is essential yet often challenging for ECE professionals (Espinosa & García 2012). Individualized instruction enhances young children's learning opportunities and promotes the important developmental and achievement outcomes necessary for school success. Individualized instruction, however, requires comprehensive, ongoing assessments that are fair, valid, and linguistically, culturally, and developmentally appropriate. Such assessments show educators what DLLs already know and what needs to be taught.

For DLLs, the language in which an assessment is given will determine how well they score as well as the educational services they receive. Because DLLs acquire their knowledge of the world around them through two languages, their language skills will be distributed across both. Therefore, to get an accurate picture of DLLs' language abilities requires assessment in each of their languages. A DLL child may know some words and concepts in one language and others in the second language. Depending on children's experiences and learning opportunities, they most likely will not perform as well as monolingual speakers of either language. This pattern is a typical and usually temporary phase of emergent bilingualism (Paradis, Genesee, & Crago 2011).

DLLs who are assessed only in the weaker language, such as English—as is often the case with early language and kindergarten readiness assessments—will often score significantly lower in language, literacy, math, and basic concepts tasks than their English-only peers (Espinosa & García, 2012). However, their scores may be typical for children who are in the early stages of second language acquisition and may not represent any language delays or be a cause for concern. Therefore, conclusions about DLL children's developmental progress or need for special services must be based on knowledge about their abilities in both languages as well as on what should be expected of preschool DLLs and how they differ from monolinguals.

Both formal and informal methods are required to ensure appropriate assessments of DLLs (Espinosa, 2015). Initial assessment should include a formal family interview or questionnaire about what languages spoken in the home and by which family members. Other formal child assessments such as the preLAS (Duncan & De Avila, 1985)—a measure of language proficiency—can be administered to individual children to give ECE personnel more specific information about a child's receptive and expressive language abilities. In addition to formal assessment, ECE teachers can use ongoing informal observational assessment—both structured and unstructured—to monitor a child's progress and plan appropriate learning activities.

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES FOR DLLS

> *Unless you believe "in your bones" that having a second language in addition to English is a gift, and not a disadvantage, and diversity is a resource, not a problem to be solved, you are likely to respond to DLL children in ways that discourage the continued use of the home language, especially if you are not fluent in the child's home language.*
>
> —Espinosa & Magruder, 2015, p.80

The following instructional strategies and recommendations referenced in the NASEM report (2017) are backed by empirical evidence that shows they promote important academic outcomes for DLLs. It should be noted that particular educational approaches will differ based on a program's language model and its goals and objectives for first and second language development—that is, full dual language models versus primarily English language development with support for home language maintenance.

▶ **Getting to know the children you are teaching**

Before teachers can specifically address instructional goals and strategies for DLLs, they must first get to know the children. They need to gather formal and informal information on their students' backgrounds and their early language learning experiences as well as abilities, including how much exposure they have to both the home

language and English and how much they use each. During face-to-face interviews with parents, teachers can learn about family values, language preferences, cultural traditions, and the ability to partner actively with teachers in the classroom.

▶ Instructional supports

Although common features of high-quality early education described throughout this volume are beneficial for all children, DLLs require additional instructional support. The NASEM report (2017) outlines a number of instructional strategies and enhancements that have been linked to improved achievement for DLLs in early education settings. Because use of the home language while a child acquires English is associated with higher rates of English proficiency (Méndez, Crais, Castro, & Kainz, 2015), ECE staff who use the home language across content areas will help DLLs develop their conceptual knowledge and promote continued development of the home language while they are acquiring English. In addition, if DLLs receive opportunities to develop listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills in both their languages, over time they will demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement in elementary school (Valentino & Reardon, 2015). An ECE program can adopt any of several language models, ranging from full two-way immersion programs to primarily English-language instruction with systematic support for the home language. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail all of the language models possible in ECE settings, but the underlying principle is that DLLs need systematic, intentional exposure to English while also having opportunities to see, hear, speak, and write in their first or home language. If no staff members speak a child's home language, family members or other fluent speakers of the child's language can be recruited to volunteer in the classroom to tell stories, help create print and labeling that can be posted throughout the classroom, identify culturally relevant materials, and possibly even teach all the children a few words of the family's language. Much research has documented the power of honoring and valuing children's home languages in the classroom (NASEM, 2017). DLLs also need instructional adaptations that explicitly bridge what they already know in their home language and what they need to learn in English such as cognate charts, language labeling, and explicit comparisons between the two languages.

One feature of high-quality classrooms that serve DLLs, whether dual language classrooms or primarily English with support for home language, is the monitoring of the amount of time in each language. Supporting DLLs' overall language development requires sufficient time and frequent language interactions in both languages, but ECE teachers often adopt an informal approach that unintentionally results in the dominance of one language over the other. Therefore, continuous monitoring of when, how much, and by whom each language is used is vitally important.

Giving DLLs the definitions of specific vocabulary words in both their home language and English and exposing them to print in a variety of contexts (e.g., storybook reading, daily schedules, and labels on objects) will also assist their

comprehension and oral language skills. Repetition of vocabulary through multiple readings of familiar storybooks and across different activities will help expand their understanding of word meaning. ECE teachers can also help children comprehend and retain new academic vocabulary by targeting three to four words per day, using pictures and visual cues that convey meaning, embedding targeted academic vocabulary in familiar chants and songs, and using physical gestures linked to particular words. These approaches are good practice for all young children, but they are especially helpful for children who do not understand English and cannot be expected to rely solely on oral language input.

Oral language development, which includes a focus on phonological awareness, vocabulary development, listening comprehension, speaking, and narrative skills, is another tool that helps DLLs. Because strong oral language skills are associated with future literacy skills such as narrative production and reading comprehension, young children need ample opportunities in listening and speaking. We now know that most young DLLs learn the code-related skills important to early literacy, such as letter sounds and knowledge of the alphabet, but have a much harder time developing oral language abilities, like extended English vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, that they need to understand complex text (NASEM, 2017). Therefore, daily instruction must provide targeted and responsive opportunities for young DLLs to listen to, comprehend, and review the vocabulary and to practice the skills integral to oral language development.

Language development should not be isolated and restricted to a topic or time of the day but rather embedded in daily interactions and activities. Contingent, responsive interactions that contain increasing levels of grammatical and word complexity with speakers proficient in the second language and adults who help expand a child's language skills during verbal interactions will support English language development. For example, if a child gives a one-word response in the home language to a question posed in English, the teacher should give the child sufficient time to complete the thought in either language, acknowledge the response positively, and provide a response in English that matches the child's level of comprehension. Most experts in early bilingualism recommend that although teachers should stay in one language during a given activity with preschool DLLs rather than switching between languages, they should also ensure that there are enough activities in each language to promote the program's language goals.

Small group activities are also valuable. Like all young children, DLLs need individual attention. However, because DLLs are learning a new language and must process language inputs through two linguistic systems, they benefit from additional time to practice and build both comprehension and production of language. More time spent in small group activities like dialogic reading or vocabulary instruction will allow teachers to individualize interactions with DLLs, informally assess their level of understanding, and probe their language needs. DLLs are often reluctant to participate actively in large group activities, particularly when their English language skills are not well developed. Recent research also demonstrates that DLLs' peers play an important role in their language development (Sawyer et

al., 2018). Most DLLs are highly motivated and eager to interact socially with peers, which gives them opportunities to practice their emerging language skills without adult pressure. Teachers should structure ECE environments and daily schedules with time for both informal (e.g., dramatic play) and formal (e.g., structured partner learning activities) peer interactions throughout the day.

Last, ECE classrooms should reflect the children and families enrolled. Evidence suggests that creating a supportive environment that reflects DLL children's language and culture will help them feel accepted and welcome, thus promoting positive learning. Displaying pictures and artifacts that represent each family, their home culture, and their family history provides a welcoming and familiar atmosphere. Culturally responsive classrooms have teachers who acknowledge the presence of culturally and linguistically diverse students and create environments in which DLLs feel comfortable, accepted, safe, and intellectually engaged. In such programs, teachers recognize the strengths and needs of their students, convey positive attitudes toward bilingualism, and implement instructional strategies such as those described here that promote early bilingualism and academic achievement. In these ways, teachers create a climate that recognizes the unique characteristics of each child while also setting challenging but achievable goals.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ECE PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH DLLS

If DLLs are to have equitable educational opportunities, an essential element is the qualifications and competencies of the ECE professionals that provide the services. The Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council's report *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* (Institute of Medicine & National Research Council, 2015) identifies "professionals with regular (daily or near-daily), direct responsibilities for the care and education of young children" as *educators* (p. 27). The quality of these educators has a direct and significant impact on DLLs' overall development, including their language proficiencies (NASEM, 2017). This section briefly summarizes the recommendations for ECE educators who work with young DLLs.

Currently few states require ECE teachers who work with young DLLs to have specialized training or coursework focused on meeting the needs of such children and their families (Espinosa & Calderon, 2015). The NASEM (2017) report concludes, "The educator workforce, including early care and education providers, educational administrators, and teachers, is inadequately prepared during preservice training to promote desired educational outcomes for dual language learners" (p. 462). For educators working with DLLs, the report recommends a common course of core content that includes the following elements (NASEM, 2017):

- an understanding of language development and the relationship between first and second language development;
- an understanding of the influences of sociocultural factors on language learning;

- knowledge of and ability to implement effective practices for promoting the successful education of DLLs/English learners, including early intervention strategies for DLLs/English learners with disabilities;

- an understanding of assessment instruments and procedures and of how to interpret and apply assessment results for DLLs/English learners;

- development of skills for establishing respectful partnerships with families of DLLs/English learners; and,

- development of skills to advocate on behalf of DLLs/English learners.

In addition, Zepeda (2015), in a paper commissioned for the NASEM report, reviews the research and identifies the following important competencies for people who work with infant, toddler, and preschool DLLs:

- understanding the relationship between early brain development and language development;

- recognizing that switching between languages is a normal part of early bilingualism and not a sign of confusion;

- understanding how to support oral language development in the first and second language;

- recognizing that children's first language is the medium through which they learn about the values and beliefs of their culture.

> **To provide equitable educational services to DLLs, we need an expanded perspective that recognizes their strengths and potential for cognitive, linguistic, and social advantages, not one that views DLLs' development as "deficient" because of their limited English skills or one that is based on expectations for monolingual English-only children.**

Though there is widespread agreement among bilingual scholars that it takes specialized knowledge and competencies to work effectively with DLLs, very few states address this issue in their ECE teacher preparation programs. Moreover, ECE professional development efforts often fall short, and licensing or credentialing programs rarely include much content focused on second language learning (Espinosa & Zepeda, in press). Generally, at every level of ECE professional preparation and training, expertise on effective pedagogy for DLLs is limited. To provide equitable educational services to DLLs, we need an expanded perspective that recognizes their strengths and potential for cognitive, linguistic, and social advantages, not one that views DLLs' development as "deficient" because of their limited English skills or one that is based on expectations for monolingual English-only children. The challenges to including this expanded perspective and DLL-specific knowledge into the complex system of ECE preservice and professional development, although significant, must be addressed through diversification of higher education faculty and ECE workforce development.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Substantial research has been done on the capacity of all children to successfully become bilingual, the factors that influence early bilingualism, and the attendant cognitive, linguistic, and social advantages, and there is also an emerging scholarship on effective practices for DLLs. Yet there are still many gaps in our knowledge. The following research topics are derived from the preceding literature review and discussion:

Instruction

- Which instructional strategies are most effective with different populations of DLLs from a range of linguistic backgrounds, that is, when the languages represented are highly diverse and dissimilar to English, when the proportion of DLLs ranges from few to mostly DLLs, and when DLLs run the gamut with respect to prior English exposure and proficiency?

- How do different language models—e.g., 90-10, 80-10, or 50-50—impact the acquisition of English during the ECE years?

- At what age should young DLLs attending ECE programs be exposed to English, and what is the ideal amount of early exposure?

- What characteristics of teacher-child interactions support improved school readiness?

- How do differential language proficiencies at school entry affect the learning trajectories of DLLs over the course of K-12 education?

- What are the most effective accommodations for early balanced bilingualism and academic success and what and educational enhancements promote it?

Assessment

- What are the best assessment tools and procedures to accurately capture the strengths and needs of children who speak more than one language? What combination of formal and informal assessments is needed for developmental screening, measuring progress, and accountability?

- How can we develop a profile of normative development for DLLs from a wide range of linguistic and sociocultural backgrounds that guides educational decisions such as whether a child has a developmental disability, is ready for school, or is making sufficient progress?

Implementation Research

- What are the most effective ECE teacher preparation and professional development models for teachers serving DLLs?

- What are the core elements and necessary supports for effective implementation of dual language program models, for example, 50-50, 90-10, and 80-20?

- What are the necessary conditions in communities, programs, staff, and schools for successful implementation of a preschool bilingual program?

- What are the barriers to implementing a preschool bilingual language model?

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