



## KIT "Keeping In Touch" November 2012



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### Resource Article

More than 50% of children attending preschools speak a language other than English at home (Espinoza, 2008). This remarkable statistic reinforces the need for increased awareness of how best to support the bilingualism of young children with disabilities. Chen, Klein, and Osipova address this challenge in their article "Two is Better Than One! In Defense of Home Language Maintenance and Bilingualism for Young Children With Disabilities" (2012).



As providers support families of young children with developmental delays and disabilities it is critical to understand the value of the family's home language. Helping families and children maintain the primary language spoken in the home facilitates attachment as well as social relationships and interactions within the family context. When professionals encourage families to speak English rather than their home language the child's linguistic competence is compromised and parents' conveyance of warmth, humor, and nurturing through language can be impacted. Another associated challenge is the vulnerability of the home language. When emphasis is placed on English language learning and proficiency, the home language can gradually be lost compromising a child's bilingual development and impacting family social connectedness.

Dual language learning and bilingualism have positive linguistic, cognitive, academic, and social benefits. Researchers have discovered that

bilingual children exhibit greater word-learning tasks, have more advanced executive functioning, greater cognitive flexibility and problem solving skills, increased pattern awareness and creativity, and greater social opportunities (Chen et al., 2012, p. 137). Regarding children with disabilities, Chen et al. reported, based on research by Kohnert and Medina (2009), there is "no current evidence that limiting these children to one language will enhance their language development or that dual language learning will inhibit it" (p. 138). Studies with children with specific disabilities, such as ASD, Down syndrome, and deaf children with cochlear implants had similar results.

Policy papers by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), Division of Early Childhood (DEC), and Head Start reinforce home language maintenance. Yet, there remains some question in practice, as many professionals continue to encourage exposure to only one language, English. "Language is a social phenomenon that is greatly influenced by the child's communicative and linguistic environment" (Chen et al., 2012, p. 141). Early intervention providers should tune into these parent child interactions and use them as responsive communication strategies rather than place undue emphasis on English language learning. Responsive strategies such as interpreting what the child is trying to say, establishing joint attention, encouraging turn taking and two way communication, following the child's lead, using self talk and parallel talk, repeating and emphasizing key words, and scaffolding are effective strategies that can be applied in languages other than English.

An increasing body of evidence supports and reinforces the value of home language

maintenance. Accordingly, early intervention providers should encourage and support families' efforts to maintain their home language.

Chen, D., Klein, M. D., & Osipova, A. V. (2012). Two is better than one! In defense of home language maintenance and bilingualism for young children with disabilities. In R.M. Santos, G. A. Cheatham, & L. Duran (Eds.), *Supporting Young Children who are Dual Language Learners with or at-risk for Disabilities (Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series No. 14)*, (p. 133-147). Missoula, MT: The Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children.

Espinosa, L. M. (2008, January). Challenging common myths about young English language learners. (Policy Brief No. 8). New York: Foundation for Child Development. Accessed October 2012 from: <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/MythsOfTeachingELLsEspinosa.pdf>

### On the WWW



The website this month is the Center for Early Care and Education Research – Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL). This center has developed a number of useful research briefs related to dual language learning including the following.

- Examining the Use of Language and Literacy Assessments with Young Dual Learners.
- Policy and Practice Issues Related to Serving Dual Language Learners: Summary from Listening Sessions
- Evaluating Early Care and Education Practices for Dual Language Learners: A Critical Review of the Research
- Early Care and Education Measures: A Critical Review of the Research Related to Dual Language Learners
- Social-Emotional Development in Dual Language Learners: A Critical Review of the Research

These and related briefs are available online. <http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/document-library>

### What do the Data Say?



**What are essential research findings regarding second language development?**

The answer to this question is published in a Early Childhood Education Brief as part of the Bueno Center for the HELLP Project. Dr. Kathy Escamilla published a succinct synthesis of ten key research findings related to dual language learners. The two page brief is available online at: [http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/ecl/language\\_development/Early%20Childhood%20Education%20Brief.pdf](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/ecl/language_development/Early%20Childhood%20Education%20Brief.pdf)

Included in the brief are the following findings: "The development of a native language does not interfere with the development of a second language." "Research findings consistently show a positive and interdependent relationship between a first and second language." "Language development is social in nature; it is acquired in interactive contexts for meaningful purposes."

### Consultation Corner

Beginning this month through December 2012, we are excited and honored to have Dr. Lillian Durán and Terry Kohlmeier as our consultation corner experts. They will be addressing the topic *Dual Language Learners in Early Intervention*. 

**What can early intervention providers do to support families of children with developmental delays when the child is also learning more than one language?**

A family's culture influences children's daily experiences and their development, therefore decisions related to early intervention should clearly take information about the family culture and home language into consideration. This contribution to the KIT will focus on three important areas of focus that early intervention providers can include as they support families of children with developmental delays as young bilingual and often bicultural learners.

- The importance of maintaining home culture and language(s) of the family and child.
- Effective communication with the families and discussing family goals for their child.

- Culturally and linguistically appropriate intervention by tailoring services to meet a child's individual needs and family culture and language.

### **Why is it so important to consider the culture and the language of the children and families?**

This question is connected to an important quality of all intervention services and specifically to early intervention family-centered services. While early intervention providers are considered experts in their fields, they are not the most important element of early intervention process. The most important element is the child's family. Therefore, knowledge of the family's culture is essential to ensure that learning experiences and intervention are meaningful, relevant and respectful for the children and their families. Providers can use this knowledge to address the strengths, interests and needs of each child and assist the families in making key decisions about their goals and plans to assist their children. Knowing about the social and cultural contexts in which the child lives can provide the strong foundation for family support and involvement in their child's development.

By learning about the goals parents have for their children and family and about the types of behaviors or practices that parents prioritize and implement as they raise their children, providers can more easily match the learning experiences of the intervention to those of the home (Office of Head Start, 2010).

Culture shapes what the family desires. Cultures vary in developmental expectations for children. In some cultures, interdependence is fostered rather than independence. In some, developmental milestones are highly monitored and recorded. Whereas in others development is just thought to unfold with little attention or intentional assistance. In some cultures children are considered communicative partners and adults engage in frequent conversations with their young children. In others adults do not frequently or directly communicate with their child and there is more child-to-child communication in family environments. Children are raised in different

cultural contexts all over the world and recognition of these differences are foundational to providing culturally competent support and services. A family's cultural beliefs and practices are central to their identity and to the development of the self-identity and self-esteem of their children.

In supporting families, providers should support the foundation for high levels of proficiency in BOTH of the child's languages. This may be challenging for the provider who does not speak the family's language. Yet, it is extremely important to encourage families to use their home language (or the language that they are most comfortable with and in which they are the most proficient). This **will** facilitate the child's language development. Parents want to use the language they know best when playing and interacting with their child and, as a number of research studies tell us, supporting a child's native language early on and specifically developing early literacy skills in a child's native language better supports later academic outcomes in English (August & Shanahan, 2006).

Background knowledge plays a key role in children's acquisition of a second language. Familiar objects and concepts that the child has acquired from family and community members in the home language, when used in second language settings, can facilitate learning, as the child focuses on the new vocabulary involved. Background knowledge "helps determine how cognitively demanding a subject is" and can be considered a context for second language acquisition (Freeman & Freeman, 1992, p. 28).

Having awareness of the language socialization patterns of the cultural group or groups that you are work with can assist you in understanding how this might influence the child's language use, performance and their developmental patterns. This can make a difference when it comes to interpreting assessment results and collaboratively identifying intervention strategies with caregivers.

Research also tells us that erasing a child's language and cultural patterns of language use is a great loss for the child (Wong Fillmore, 1996) and

can create a disconnect between child and family. By maintaining the development of children's home language, we concurrently support the advancement of many conceptual skills that are necessary for later academic success and facilitate naturalistic and culturally unique family interactions. Increased improvement and continued learning in the home language can be accomplished while introducing and supporting children's development of English.

A number of **intervention strategies** can support the diverse cultures and languages of families supported through early intervention. Using everyday household objects seems simple, but it is respectful of the family and draws upon their natural resources. Providers must think about and incorporate family practices as interventions. For example, how do families differ in the amount of play and movement that is encouraged? Does the family model practices for children or are they explicitly taught (Barrera, Kramer, & Macpherson 2012)? Remember too, that in some cultures use of food as a teaching material may not be looked upon favorably. Whenever materials (e.g. print, video, audio) are shared with a family, always consider the family's learning style (Barrera et al., 2012).

Keep in mind that it is always important to gain knowledge and understanding of each individual child and family. This will be foundational to respecting the family's culture, establishing a meaningful relationship, determining the family's priorities for intervention, and supporting and encouraging the use of the home language. Relationship building is a foundation for working with all families in early intervention.

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Barrera, I., Kramer, L., Macpherson, T. D. (2012). *Skilled dialogue: Strategies for responding to cultural diversity in early childhood*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Freeman, Y., & Freeman, D. (1992). *Whole language for second language learners*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Office of Head Start, Early Head Start National Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE (2010). *Revisiting and updating the multicultural principles for Head Start programs serving children ages birth to five*. Washington, D.C.: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Wong Fillmore, L. (1991.) *When learning a second language means losing the first*. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 6, 323-346.

## Continuing Education for KIT Readers



The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on *Dual Language Learners in Early Intervention*, readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (August through November 2012) and completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

If you are interested, take the exam online at [www.edis.army.mil](http://www.edis.army.mil) and upon successful completion, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

*Please send your Consultation Corner questions and KIT ideas via email to [ediscspd@amedd.army.mil](mailto:ediscspd@amedd.army.mil)*

