



# KIT

## “Keeping In Touch”

### October 2012



*A Publication of the Army Educational & Developmental Intervention Services CSPD*

#### Resource Article

This month, the resource article is a Zero To Three publication written by Dr. Fred Genesee of McGill University. Acknowledging the mix of questions and beliefs about dual language learners, Dr. Genesee addresses several frequently asked questions and offers intervention suggestions.



The first question addressed was “Is it a good idea to raise young children bilingually?” (p.17). As we highlighted in the September edition of the KIT, there are notable advantages to being bi- or multi-lingual. Beyond facilitating the parent child relationship and home language understanding, being bi- or multi-lingual is associated with cognitive advantages. As bi- and multi-lingual children grow into adults they also have the advantage of being able to apply for jobs that require skills in a language other than English.

“Is it normal for children to learn two languages at the same time?” (p. 18) was the second question raised. Considering the diversity of the United States, more and more children are learning two languages. Learning two languages simultaneously may be associated with a small delay in language use early on, but this generally resolves and has no lasting effect. An associated question discussed was “Will infants and toddlers become confused if they are exposed to two languages?” (p. 18). In response to this question, Dr. Genesee found no research base to support the notion that dual language learning confuses

children. Rather, children are capable of using their languages separately.

“Should dual language learners be discouraged from mixing languages in the same sentence?” (p. 19). Researchers have examined this question and found that children mix languages when they do not know the word in the language they are speaking at the time. As such, this code mixing is regarded as a useful strategy rather than an indicator of children being confused or impaired.

The next question addressed was “What about children who speak a minority language at home?” (p. 19). With regard to this group, it is strongly encouraged that these children begin to learn the majority language, English, early so that they can be successful in school. However, learning English does not mean putting the other language on hold.

“Should children with language impairment try to learn two languages during the early years?” (p. 20). The author acknowledges the common belief that children with a language impairment should only learn one language. Yet, there is little research to support this and children with language impairments can and do become bilingual. He further states, “at present, there is no scientific evidence to suggest that children with a language impairment should be limited to only one language on the grounds that this will facilitate their language learning and avoid language difficulties” (p. 20).

“What do parents and child care personnel need to do to create an effective dual learning environment?” (p. 20). Children need language rich experiences in both languages to be bilingual.

Therefore, providing children natural and contextually meaningful opportunities to hear and use their different languages is important.

Genesee, F. (2008). Early dual language learning. *Zero To Three*, September, 17-23. Accessed October 2012 from [http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/29-1\\_Genesee.pdf?docID=9841](http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/29-1_Genesee.pdf?docID=9841)

## On the WWW



The web resource this month is the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Institute. The mission of CLAS is to “identify, evaluate, and promote effective and appropriate early intervention practices and preschool practices that are sensitive and respectful to children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.”

At the website, there is a comprehensive searchable database of useful resources. The database is searchable by subject, age, language, and format. For example, you can search for printed material on child assessment for Korean children birth to three years of age.

The direct link to the searchable database is: <http://ecap-webserver.crc.uiuc.edu/cgi-bin/clas/search1.asp>

## What do the Data Say?



**What is the correct terminology, ELL, DLL, ESL, ...?**

Interestingly there is a diversity of terms used to describe children who have a primary language other than English. The different terms describe the children and their language background. On a broad scale bilingual is used to define children who are skilled in two languages. Beyond the term bilingual there are other descriptors that focus on defining the role of learning English. These terms include English as a Second Language (ESL), English Language

Learners (ELL), children who speak a language other than English (LOTE), limited English proficient (LEP), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and English as an additional language (EAL).

Dual language learners (DLL) is a new addition and is defined by the Office of Head Start (2009) as “children who are DLLs are learning a second language (English) while continuing to acquire their first (or home) language.” In the field of early childhood DLL is preferred in part because of the emphasis on developmental context of language learning. As children get older terms such as ELL or ESL are favored.

## 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 are effective strategies for screening and assessing very young (0-3) dual language learners?**

As we learn more about the complexities of dual language acquisition and study the research on conducting appropriate and valid assessments of young dual language learners, we are gathering some answers to the big questions: “How should we screen and assess culturally and linguistically diverse children? What tools should we use? How do we decide what language to test in and how do we take culture into consideration?”

Research evidence suggests that there is considerable variability in bilingual language development given the wide range in the amount of exposure a child has had to both languages. Second language acquisition is influenced by a range of characteristics, both within the child and external to the child; including such factors as, a child’s temperament, the level of exposure to a second language, the age of introduction of the

second language, and parental education and socio-economic status (Barrueco, Lopez, Ong, & Lozano, 2012).

The evaluation process to determine whether a child is in need of special services can be an overwhelming process for families and children. Without appropriate support, it can be especially frightening for families and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Some current practices for evaluating young dual language learners are not effective and may lead to inaccurate diagnosis. Practitioners often struggle with distinguishing second language acquisition patterns from development and language delays.

Let's now consider a process that can help discriminate typical bilingual language acquisition from language delay and that can help practitioners understand the influence of culture on development. There are five important steps to consider when assessing very young dual language learners.

**Step 1: Establish a multi-disciplinary evaluation team.** When convening the team you will want to include an interpreter or cultural liaison. Often both interpreters and cultural liaisons have unique roles, which may not be one and the same. When working with interpreters and cultural liaisons, it is important to provide them training in early childhood practices related to the basic understanding of family-centered practices, program eligibility criteria, screening and assessment, and developmental milestones.

**Step 2. Get to know the child's family.** Making a home visit to establish a relationship with the family and learn more about the family's culture and language use. It is an incredibly important first step in evaluating a very young child. Often, if the practitioner or examiner does not speak the language of the family, it is important to seek a "cultural liaison," someone who reflects the culture and language of the family. This individual can assist with sharing and gathering information during the entire early intervention process. It can take more than one home visits to establish the trust that is needed. As a relationship is

established then it is recommended to complete a home language background questionnaire. This includes inquiring about the home culture, family background, languages spoken by family members and languages spoken with the child, etc.

Parents play a primary role in the evaluation of their child, as they know their child best. This is particularly true when the practitioners do not share the same culture or language with the family. It is critical to learn about the family's background and cultural child rearing practices that have influenced that child's development. Issues such as how independent the young child is in feeding, dressing and moving about the house can all affect standardized assessments that were primarily normed on middle class Anglo-European families in the U.S.

**Step 3. Determine child's level of proficiency in each language.** Understanding the child's exposure to both languages helps the evaluator determine how much and what kind of testing to conduct in each language. This can be done by parent/guardian report, through the use the Family Language and Background Questionnaire, which includes questions about the child's home language background, the family's level of education and their familiarity with the school systems in their host country or in the U.S. One language proficiency measure for children 0-3 years of age that is available in Spanish, and 46 other languages, is the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories (CDI). It is a tool that parents complete, with the help of the practitioners. It provides information about the child's expressive and receptive vocabulary in the home language and English. For more information, see the website below: [www.sci.sdsu.edu/cdi/adaptations\\_ol.htm](http://www.sci.sdsu.edu/cdi/adaptations_ol.htm).

**Step 4: Conducting the evaluation with the family in the child's natural setting.** The evaluator will want to take language samples and note the child's development in all learning areas. An interpreter may be needed to gather language samples in the child's native language. The team must also decide the best measures to use and the necessary data to collect in order to

provide a holistic view of the child's development across settings and with primary care providers. In the process of evaluation, it is important to ask yourself, "How might the family's culture and background experiences influence the child's development differently than the population on which the test was normed?" "What, if any, accommodations or adjustments are needed?"

**Step 5: Use all of the data available in eligibility determination.** After the evaluation, the team meets to review all available data to make an eligibility decision. It is important to consider several aspects when preparing culturally and linguistically diverse families for eligibility determination. What is the best way to prepare the families for the meeting? What are realistic expectations for their participation? How can the importance of their participation be effectively articulated?

When an interpreter is involved it is helpful to prepare for the evaluation meeting by reviewing the meeting procedures with the interpreter. The team can make a list of commonly used terms and share them with the interpreter prior to the meeting to make sure that they understand how they will explain these terms for accuracy. As you prepare for the meeting think about how the family will know what to do? What supports are available to the family? A cultural liaison can be helpful here too.

In summary, assessing young dual language learners in meaningful ways is vitally important. This involves knowing the child's family background, culture and language in order to best distinguish typical bilingual language development from language delay. It requires a comprehensive evaluation approach including collection of observational data, parent report, and appropriate measures. Since bilingual children have skills distributed across both languages is it considered best practices to collect data in both of the child's languages. Just how much testing and what kind of data is gathered is determined by the child's level of proficiency in each language. As research in this area progresses, we can anticipate advances in assessment procedures for young dual language learners.

Barrueco, S., Lopez, M., Ong, C., & Lozano, P. (2012). *Assessing Spanish-English Bilingual Preschoolers: A Guide to Best Approaches and Measures*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

## 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.

*Thank you for your continued interest in the KIT.  
Please share your KIT questions/ideas via email to*

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