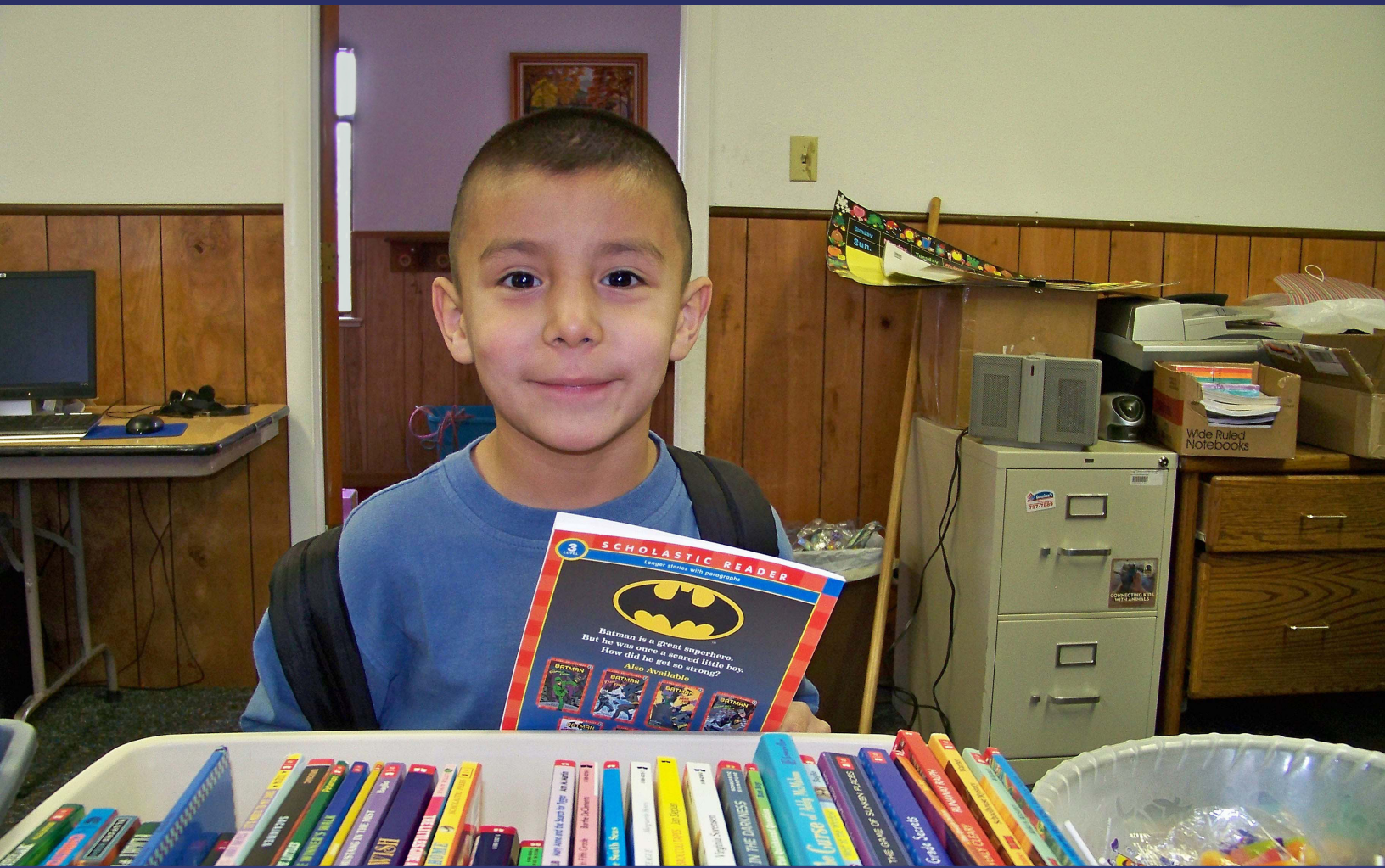


# EARLY EDUCATION FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

*PROMOTING SCHOOL READINESS AND EARLY SCHOOL SUCCESS*



YOUNG CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND POLICY CHOICES

LINDA M. ESPINOSA

# **EARLY EDUCATION FOR DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

## **Promoting School Readiness and Early School Success**

Linda M. Espinosa

November 2013

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To access other papers produced for the symposium, please visit:  
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## Executive Summary

Children of immigrants experience unique cultural, linguistic, and parenting contexts that influence their development and kindergarten readiness. Young Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are significantly less likely to attend high-quality early childhood education programs than their peers who speak only English. Yet enrollment in such programs can yield significant benefits for their kindergarten readiness and later achievement.

This report contributes to the effort to identify the specific features of early childhood education programs that most effectively support DLLs. It offers a profile of DLLs, who are identified as children learning more than one language at the same time. Most (but not all) DLLs are children of immigrants, and parental language proficiency is one of the many factors that influences their developmental and academic outcomes.

A detailed look at the patterns of achievement among this group highlights the varied outcomes across children from different national origins and socioeconomic groups. For example, DLLs from Spanish-speaking households enter kindergarten with substantially lower literacy skills than those of children from English-speaking households, and the gap between the two groups improves only slightly by the end of third grade. In particular, at every testing period and by all achievement indices, children from Mexican immigrant families score significantly below national norms.

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*Young Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are significantly less likely to attend high-quality early childhood education programs than their peers who speak only English.*

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Given these achievement patterns, the report evaluates the research on early care and education approaches that have been shown to support higher levels of language and literacy development and achievement for young DLLs. The instructional features of high-quality programs that have been shown to improve school readiness among this population include responsive language interactions in English as well as the students' home languages, opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills and vocabulary, frequent assessment, and parental engagement. The report emphasizes that these goals are common-sense and attainable, arguing that while all teachers cannot teach in all languages, they can support all languages by learning strategies to systematically introduce English during the preschool years while simultaneously promoting home language maintenance.





## I. Introduction

Monolingual English-speaking preschoolers in the United States typically experience some form of care outside the home.<sup>1</sup> For these children, participation in high-quality early childhood education (ECE) has important consequences. It is associated with improved school readiness, particularly in the academic areas of language, literacy, and mathematics.<sup>2</sup> High-quality ECE is also likely to reduce the risk of grade retention and increase levels of school achievement, school completion, and adult functioning, particularly for children from economically disadvantaged homes.

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### *High-quality ECE programs hold enormous potential to improve the kindergarten readiness of Dual Language Learners.*

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Recent studies have found statistically significant differences in school readiness between English-speaking students who had attended preschool programs and those who had not.<sup>3</sup> Those who attended high-quality preschool programs scored significantly higher in early language, literacy, and mathematics assessments at kindergarten entry. In addition, a meta-analysis of 123 studies found that children who attended a preschool program prior to kindergarten experienced significant cognitive gains at kindergarten entry.<sup>4</sup>

It should be no surprise then that high-quality ECE programs hold enormous potential to improve the kindergarten readiness of Dual Language Learners (DLLs) — young children who are learning more than one language in home and ECE settings and who are often the children of immigrants. Young DLLs, however, are less likely than their monolingual English-speaking peers to attend high-quality ECE programs.

There are challenges to developing and implementing successful ECE programs for DLLs, including a limited pool of bilingual educators, ECE classrooms where many languages are spoken, and a lack of tools for assessing progress among DLL students.

One particular challenge for researchers and policymakers is that outcomes vary across immigrant groups. Although most immigrants arrive in the United States seeking opportunity and a better life for their children, the reality is that economic and educational progress among immigrant groups is uneven.

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1 Donald J. Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton, and Suzanne E. Macartney, “A Demographic Portrait of Young English Language Learners” in *Young English Language Learners: Current Research and Emerging Directions for Practice and Policy*, eds. Eugene E. Garcia and Ellen C. Frede (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2010).

2 William Gormley, Ted Gayer, Deborah Phillips, and Brittany Dawson, “The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development,” *Developmental Psychology* 41 no. 6 (2004): 872-84; Lynn A. Karoly and Gabriella C. Gonzalez, “Early Care and Education for Children in Immigrant Families,” *The Future of Children* 21, no. 1 (2011): 71-101; Ellen S. Peisner-Feinberget al., “The Relation of Preschool Child-Care Quality to Children’s Cognitive and Social Developmental Trajectories through Second Grade,” *Child Development* 72, no. 5 (2001): 1534-53.

3 Russell Rumberger and Loan Tran, “State Language Policies, School Language Practices, and the English Learner Achievement Gap” in *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies*, eds. Patricia Gandara and Megan Hopkins (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010); Deborah Lowe Vandell, “Early Child Care: The Known and the Unknown,” *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2004): 387-414. These studies compared monolingual English-speaking students who attended non-Head Start preschool settings with those who did not, and showed effect sizes of 0.2 to 0.4 of preschool attendance on school readiness scores.

4 Gregory Camilli, Sadako Vargas, Sharon Ryan, and W. Steven Barnett, “Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Early Education Interventions on Cognitive and Social Development,” *Teachers College Record* 112 no. 3 (2010): 579-620.



Some groups experience school and economic success while others face downward social and economic mobility.<sup>5</sup>

When compared to native-born families, children in immigrant families show some “paradoxical” developmental advantages such as lower infant mortality rates and better socioemotional outcomes. They also display some linguistic and cognitive disadvantages at school entry, such as limited English proficiency and general knowledge skills.<sup>6</sup>

Children of immigrants experience unique cultural, linguistic, and parenting contexts that influence their development and kindergarten readiness.<sup>7</sup> Their developmental and academic outcomes have been shown to vary as a function of ethnic heritage and country of origin: immigrant children from Asian countries, for example, typically outperform children of Mexican heritage on language and cognitive measures during early childhood in the United States. These findings have been related to both the family capital available for child-rearing but also to family interactions and educational practices in the home.<sup>8</sup>

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*Children of immigrants experience unique cultural, linguistic,  
and parenting contexts that influence their development and  
kindergarten readiness.*

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It is important for educators and policymakers to better understand the factors of the immigrant experience that affect developmental outcomes for children as well as the social and policy levers that can contribute to improved school readiness and achievement for young children from immigrant families.

This report contributes to the effort to identify the specific features of ECE programs that most effectively support DLLs. First, it offers a profile of DLLs, and outlines some factors that may affect their developmental and academic outcomes. Next, it takes a deeper look at the patterns of achievement among this group, highlighting the varied outcomes across national origin and socioeconomic groups. The following section reviews the research on early care and education approaches that have been shown to support higher levels of language and literacy development and achievement for DLLs. Finally, the report identifies the main elements of a high-quality early childhood education program, and shows how these features can be integrated into programs for young DLLs. It also discusses barriers to implementing effective approaches. The concluding section makes several recommendations on policy and practice for ECE programs that prepare DLLs for successful entry to school.

- 5 Randy Capps et al., *The Health and Well-Being of Young Children of Immigrants* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2004), [www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311139\\_Childrenimmigrants.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311139_Childrenimmigrants.pdf); Karina Fortuny, Donald J. Hernandez, and Ajay Chaudry, *Young Children of Immigrants: The Leading Edge of America's Future* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2010), [www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412203-young-children.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412203-young-children.pdf); Lingxin Hao and Melissa Bonstead-Bruns, “Parent-Child Difference in Educational Expectations and Academic Achievement of Immigrant and Native Students,” *Sociology of Education* 71 (1998): 175-98; Adam Winsler et al., “Early developmental skills of diverse dual language learners: The roles of home language use, cultural heritage, maternal immigration, and sociodemographics in the ECLS-B,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, under review.
- 6 Robert Crosnoe and Ruth Lopez-Turley, “The K-12 Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Youth,” *Future of Children* 21 (2011): 129-52; Donald J. Hernandez and Wendy D. Cervantes, *Children in Immigrant Families: Ensuring Opportunity for Every Child in America* (New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2011); Winsler et al., “Early developmental skills of diverse dual language learners.”
- 7 Krista M. Perreira, Mimi V. Chapman, and Gabriela L. Stein, “Becoming an American Parent: Overcoming Challenges and Finding Strength in a New Immigrant Latino Community,” *Journal of Family Issues* 27 (2006): 1383-1414; Winsler et al., “Early developmental skills of diverse dual language learners.”
- 8 Fortuny, Hernandez, and Chaudry, *Young Children of Immigrants: The Leading Edge of America's Future*; Wen-Jui Han, RaeHyuck Lee, and Jane Waldfogel, “School Readiness Among Children of Immigrants in the US: Evidence from a Large National Birth Cohort Study,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 34 no. 4 (2012): 771-82; Sunyoung Jung, Bruce Fuller, and Claudia Galindo, “Family Functioning and Early Learning Practices in Immigrant Homes,” *Child Development* 83 no. 5 (2012): 1510-26.



## II. A Profile of Dual Language Learners

Children in immigrant families — that is, children under age 18 with at least one foreign-born parent — account for almost one-quarter of all children in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Most of these children are US citizens (88 percent), live with at least one English-fluent parent (57 percent), and speak English fluently themselves (82 percent of those ages 5-17, according to parental reports).<sup>10</sup> At the same time, according to the US Census Bureau, in 2010 about 25 percent of all children in the United States were growing up in homes where a language other than English was used.

### A. Definition

Scholars and educators use a variety of terms to refer to adults and older children who are learning English in addition to a home language, yet these terms generally imply that fluency in the home language has already been established.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the term Dual Language Learners refers to very young children (birth to age 5) who are learning more than one language. This term has been adopted by the federal Office of Head Start, the State of California, and many research institutions such as the Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL). According to the Office of Head Start, “Dual language learners are children learning two or more languages at the same time, as well as those learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language.”<sup>12</sup>

It is important to point out that not all children of immigrants are DLLs and not all DLLs are children of immigrants. For example, children with English-speaking immigrant parents (e.g., from Europe, Africa, or the Caribbean) are seldom DLLs. Conversely, Puerto Ricans living in the United States are not considered immigrants, but many Puerto Rican parents have limited English skills, and their children may be DLLs.

### B. The Role of Parental Language Proficiency

Children’s language proficiencies are highly dependent on the language preferences of their families, as well as on language practices in the home, community, and ECE settings they experience. Recent findings from a secondary analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), for example, have indicated that immigrant families vary greatly in their language preferences based on heritage country.<sup>13</sup> In this study, mothers from Puerto Rico were the most likely to be proficient in English and use English exclusively in the home while Cuban-born mothers were the most likely to use only Spanish in the home — although they were almost as likely to be English proficient as their Puerto Rican peers.

Wider trends among children of immigrants shed light on the profile of DLLs. In 2007-09, 43 percent were growing up in homes with parents who do not speak English fluently and, for children ages 5-17, close to one in five were still acquiring proficiency in English.<sup>14</sup>

9 Emma Britz and Jeanne Batalova, “Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States,” *Migration Information Source*, January 2013, [www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=931#7](http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?ID=931#7).

10 Fluency or proficiency in this instance is defined as speaking English at least “very well.” Hernandez and Cervantes, *Children in Immigrant Families: Ensuring Opportunity for Every Child in America*.

11 Some of these terms include English Language Learners (ELLs), Limited English Proficient (LEP), English Learners (ELs), Non-English Speaking (NES), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Bilinguals. Linda M. Espinosa and Eugene García, “Developmental Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners with a Focus on Kindergarten Entry Assessments: Implications for State Policies” (Working Paper No. 1, Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners [CECER-DLL], Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, the University of North Carolina, November 2012), [http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/sites/cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/documents/CECER-DLL\\_WP%231\\_Nov12.pdf](http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/sites/cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/documents/CECER-DLL_WP%231_Nov12.pdf).

12 Head Start, “Dual Language Learning: What Does it Take?” <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/eecd/dual%20language%20learners%20and%20their%20families/learning%20in%20two%20languages/duallanguagelea.htm>.

13 Winsler et al., “Early developmental skills of diverse dual language learners.”

14 Hernandez and Cervantes, *Children in Immigrant Families: Ensuring Opportunity for Every Child in America*.





### C. The Role of Socioeconomic Status and Other Factors

From a research perspective, it is difficult to untangle the influences of poverty, immigration status, parental education, and language abilities, but recent studies have found that immigrant families with higher parental education and family income are the most likely to use only English in the home.<sup>15</sup> Growing up with two or more languages clearly influences the development of language, social, and cognitive skills; as does the experience of family immigration and resettlement. It is not uncommon for children of immigrants to grow up in poor families (21 percent), with parents who lack a high school diploma (26 percent).<sup>16</sup> In addition, some children live with parents who lack legal immigration status, and growing up with unauthorized immigrant parents has been shown to present unique developmental risks for children.<sup>17</sup> Yet the majority of immigrants' children are US citizens with the same rights as all other native-born children; many will also most likely live their entire lives in the United States.

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*Young DLLs in immigrant families showed more positive cognitive outcomes when some amount of the heritage language was being used in the home.*

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It is also important not to overlook the cognitive and socioemotional benefits of dual language learning for young children. One study found that after controlling for country of origin, family income, and education, young DLLs in immigrant families showed more positive cognitive outcomes when some amount of the heritage language was being used in the home.<sup>18</sup> The authors, whose research was based on ECLS-B data, concluded that use of the heritage language at home may function as a protective factor for children of immigrant families. This is not surprising since for young DLLs, understanding and using their first or home language in various family and non-family contexts opens up a myriad of potentially rich language experiences.<sup>19</sup> Preservation of DLLs' first language has also been linked to the development of a healthy ethnic identity in early childhood<sup>20</sup> and may promote stronger positive relationships with parents and other family members.<sup>21</sup> However, for children with US-born parents, more English usage in the home was related to better cognitive outcomes. The authors suggest that the families' migration history and degree of acculturation help explain these findings.

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15 Ibid.

16 Karina Fortuny, *Children of Immigrants: 2008 State Trends Update* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2010), [www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412212-children-of-immigrants.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412212-children-of-immigrants.pdf).

17 Hirokazu Yoshikawa and Jenya Kholoptseva, *Unauthorized Immigrant Parents and Their Children's Development: A Summary of the Evidence* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013), [www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/COI-Yoshikawa.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/COI-Yoshikawa.pdf).

18 Winsler et al. "Early developmental skills of diverse dual language learners."

19 Lily Wong-Fillmore, "When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 6 (1991): 323-46.

20 Ellen Bialystok, *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

21 Vivian Tseng and Andrew J. Fuligni, "Parent-Adolescent Language Use and Relationships Among Immigrant Families with East Asian, Filipino, and Latin American Backgrounds," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62, no. 2 (2000): 465-76; Lily Wong Fillmore, "Loss of family languages: Should educators be concerned?" *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 4 (2000): 203-10.



### III. Achievement Patterns among Dual Language Learners

When they enter kindergarten, the English literacy skills of all DLL students are about one-half standard deviations below the average of those for children who come from monolingual, English-speaking homes. This achievement disparity is somewhat reduced by the end of third grade, to about one-third of a standard deviation below average.<sup>22</sup>

There is considerable variation, however, in the levels of kindergarten readiness among children of immigrants and also among DLLs. Several factors may account for this variation, including parents' country of origin, languages spoken in the home, English proficiency, and socioeconomic status. These same factors make comparisons among DLL groups quite complex, with no simple explanations for why some groups of DLL children are better prepared for school and more likely to achieve academic success.

For example, DLL students from Spanish-speaking households enter kindergarten with literacy skills almost 0.8 of a standard deviation below the average for children from English-speaking households, and their literacy skills are still 0.7 of a standard deviation below average at the end of third grade.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, children from Mexican-immigrant families who live in poverty and have limited English proficiency at kindergarten entry, on average, read at very low levels at the end of fifth grade and have poor school completion rates.<sup>24</sup> In fact, at every testing period and by all achievement indices, children from Mexican immigrant families score significantly below national norms.<sup>25</sup> One possible explanation for these outcomes is that Spanish-dominant children tend to live in families with the highest concentrations of poverty and lowest levels of parental education of all language minority groups.<sup>26</sup>

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*At every testing period and by all achievement indices, children from Mexican immigrant families score significantly below national norms.*

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A separate analysis of the achievement patterns of different language groups based on the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten-Cohort (ECLS-K) found that children from households in which an Asian language was spoken began kindergarten slightly behind their English-speaking peers.<sup>27</sup> However, by third grade, these children were outperforming their English-speaking peers in both math and reading. In the same study, children from households that both had the highest socioeconomic status levels and spoke a European language (besides English) achieved the highest scores in all subjects at all testing points.

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22 Russell W. Rumberger and Loan Tran, "Preschool Participation and the Cognitive and Social Development of Language Minority Students" (CSE Technical Report 674, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, University of California, Los Angeles; and Linguistic Minority Research Institute, University of California, Santa Barbara, February 2006), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED492888.pdf>.

23 Ibid. In this study using the ECLS-K data, Spanish-speaking DLLs started kindergarten with language/literacy scores in the bottom 20-25 percent of all children and were still in the lowest quartile at the end of third grade.

24 Scott L. Miller and Garcia Eugene, *A Reading-Focused Early Childhood Research and Strategy Development Agenda for African Americans and Hispanics at All Social Class Levels Who Are English Speakers or English Language Learners* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, Office of the Vice President for Education Partnerships, 2008).

25 Linda Espinosa and Michael L. López, "Assessment Considerations for Young English Language Learners across Different Levels of Accountability" (report prepared for The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force and First 5 LA, 2007), [www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-k\\_education/Assessment%20for%20Young%20ELLs-Pew%208-11-07-Final.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-k_education/Assessment%20for%20Young%20ELLs-Pew%208-11-07-Final.pdf).

26 Linda Espinosa, "English-Language Learners as they Enter School" in *School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*, eds. Robert Pianta, Martha Cox, and Kyle Snow (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 2007).

27 Espinosa and López, "Assessment Considerations for Young English Language Learners."



In addition to explanations such as parents' English proficiency or socioeconomic status, scholars who study the divergent patterns in educational achievement among the children of immigrants have often focused on generational status,<sup>28</sup> social-personal capital available to the children,<sup>29</sup> factors affecting assimilation and acculturation,<sup>30</sup> and community and educational influences.<sup>31</sup> While there is a growing literature on which of these factors foster academic achievement, some of the findings and recommendations are contradictory, and there is no coherent, explanatory theory supported by empirical research. For example, some scholars conclude that high-quality early education benefits Hispanic children more than their white US-born peers.<sup>32</sup> Others conclude that attending Head Start, a federally funded early education program, has minimal benefits for children from Spanish-speaking homes.<sup>33</sup> Still others have suggested that while early intervention may produce cognitive gains for children from Mexican immigrant families, it may put other developmental strengths, such as socioemotional well-being, at risk.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, the Head Start Impact study — a large-scale evaluation — suggested that while Spanish-speaking preschoolers improve their English proficiency during the Head Start year, they never catch up to their native-English speaking peers, and their native-Spanish proficiency declines.<sup>35</sup> This finding suggests that some of the “immigrant advantage” in children’s socioemotional development may be jeopardized as families assimilate into American language and culture. This phenomenon has led some scholars to suggest that becoming American may include some developmental risk for certain groups of immigrants.<sup>36</sup>

While there is no clear consensus, most scholars do agree that high-quality early learning opportunities will positively affect the school readiness of young DLLs.<sup>37</sup> Early education policy certainly cannot address all of the factors that contribute to disparities in school readiness and educational success for this group of children; progress can be made, however, by identifying the most effective features of early care and education programs, designing policies that support these features, and increasing access to these programs for DLL children of immigrants.

- 28 Grace Kao and Marta Tienda, “Optimism and Achievement: The Educational Performance of Immigrant Youth,” *Social Science Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (1995): 1-19; Suetling Pong, “Immigrant Children’s School Performance” (paper prepared for the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA, August 15-19, 2003).
- 29 Lingxin Hao and Melissa Bonstead-Bruns, “Parent-Child Difference in Educational Expectations and Academic Achievement of Immigrant and Native Students,” *Sociology of Education* 71 (1998): 175-98.
- 30 Alejandro Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities,” *International Migration Review* 31 no. 4 (1997): 799-825; Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and Carola Suárez-Orozco, “Globalization, Immigration, and Schooling” in *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education*, ed. James A. Banks (New York: Routledge, 2009); Min Zhou, “Growing up American: The Challenge Confronting Immigrant Children and Children of Immigrants,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 63-95.
- 31 Peter D. Brandon, “The Child Care Arrangements of Preschool Children in Immigrant Families in the United States” (working paper series, Foundation for Child Development, April 2002), <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/ChildCareArrangementsOfImmigrantFamiliesNew.pdf>; Robert Crosnoe, “Early Childcare and the School Readiness of Children from Mexican Immigrant Families,” *International Migration Review* 41 no. 1 (2007): 152-81; Hannah Matthews and Danielle Ewen, *Reaching All Children? Understanding Early Care and Education Participation among Immigrant Families* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2006), [www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0267.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0267.pdf).
- 32 William Gormley, “The Effects of Oklahoma’s Pre-K Program on Hispanic Students,” *Social Science Quarterly* 89 no. 4 (2008): 916-36.
- 33 Rumberger and Tran, “Preschool Participation and the Cognitive and Social Development of Language Minority Students.”
- 34 Crosnoe, “Early Childcare and the School Readiness of Children from Mexican Immigrant Families.”
- 35 US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families, *Head Start Impact Study. Final Report* (Washington, DC: HHS, 2010), [www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/executive\\_summary\\_final.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/executive_summary_final.pdf).
- 36 Cynthia García Coll and Amy Kerivan Marks, *Immigrant stories: Ethnicity and academics in middle childhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 37 Linda M. Espinosa, “Language and Literacy for Bilingual and Monolingual Children” in *Children of 2020: Creating a Better Tomorrow*, eds. Valora Washington and JD Andrews (Washington, DC: Council of Professional Recognition and National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2010), <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Takanishi%20-%20A%20Paradigm%20Shift.pdf>; Gregory Camilli, Sadako Vargas, Sharon Ryan, and W. Steven Barnett, “Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Early Education Interventions on Cognitive and Social Development,” *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 3 (2010): 579-620; W. Steven Barnett, *Preschool Education and its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications* (Boulder, CO and Tempe, AZ: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit, 2008), <http://nieer.org/resources/research/PreschoolLastingEffects.pdf>.



## IV. Benefits of Early Care and Education Programs

Decades of research have shown that early learning experiences during the first years of life can have significant and enduring consequences for later academic achievement and life success,<sup>38</sup> and these effects are even stronger for low-income children than middle-class children.<sup>39</sup>

Participation in high-quality early childhood education and center-based (rather than home-based) preschool has been shown to improve school readiness, particularly in the academic areas of language, literacy, and mathematics.<sup>40</sup> High-quality early care and education programs are those that employ qualified teachers; provide extensive professional support for teachers; have low teacher-child ratios; and provide meaningful, extended, and enriched language interactions for children, including individualized adult-child conversations and opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills and vocabulary.<sup>41</sup> Such early learning experiences have also been shown — in both small and experimental, as well as larger and observational studies — to have long-term positive impacts on academic achievement in high school and beyond.<sup>42</sup> And they are associated with reduced grade retention, school completion, and higher levels of adult functioning with impressive cost-benefit returns.<sup>43</sup>

For children growing up in homes where English is not the primary language — especially those growing up in poverty — the quality, type, and amount of nonparental care can make significant contributions to their kindergarten readiness.<sup>44</sup> Some researchers have found, for example, that enrollment in high-quality prekindergarten programs can help boost the English language development of young Hispanic DLLs.<sup>45</sup>

- 38 Barnett, *Preschool Education and its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications*; Center on the Developing Child, “Building the Brain’s ‘Air Traffic Control’ System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function” (working paper no. 11, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, February 2011), [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports\\_and\\_working\\_papers/working\\_papers/wp11/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp11/); Robert C. Pianta, W. Steven Barnett, Margaret Burchinal, and Kathy R. Thornburg, “The Effects of Preschool Education: What We Know, How Public Policy Is or Is Not Aligned With the Evidence Base, and What We Need to Know,” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 10, no. 2 (2009): 49-88; Lawrence Schweinhart, Jeanne Montie, Zongping Xiang, W. Steven Barnett, Clive R. Belfield, and Milagros Nores, *Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40* (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press, 2005).
- 39 Katherine A. Magnuson, Christopher Ruhm, and Jane Waldfogel, “The Persistence of Preschool Effects: Do Subsequent Classroom Experiences Matter?,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2007): 18-38.
- 40 W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Laura E. Hawkinson, and Kenneth B. Robin, *The State of Preschool 2006* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006): 9, <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/2006yearbook.pdf>; Katherine Magnuson and Jane Waldfogel, *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress: Inequality and the Black-White Test Score Gap* (New York: Russell Sage, 2008).
- 41 W. Steven Barnett et al., “Two-way and Monolingual English Immersion in Preschool Education: An Experimental Comparison,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2007): 277-93; Gregory Camilli, Sadako Vargas, Sharon Ryan, and W. Steven Barnett, “Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Early Education Interventions on Cognitive and Social Development,” *Teachers College Record* 112, no. 3 (2010): 579-620; David K. Dickinson, and Susan B. Neuman, eds. *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*, Vol. 2 (New York: Guilford, 2006); David K. Dickinson and Michelle V. Porche, “Relation Between Language Experiences in Preschool Classrooms and Children’s Kindergarten and Fourth-Grade Language and Reading Abilities,” *Child Development* 82, no. 3 (2011): 870-86; Linda M. Espinosa, *High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003), <http://nieer.org/resources/factsheets/1.pdf>.
- 42 Frances A. Campbell et al., “Adult Outcomes as a Function of an Early Childhood Educational Program: An Abecedarian Project Follow-Up,” *Developmental Psychology* 48, no. 4 (2012): 1033-43; Barnett, *Preschool Education and its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications*.
- 43 James J. Heckman et al., “A New Cost-Benefit and Rate of Return Analysis for the Perry Preschool Program: A Summary” (working paper no. 16180, National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2010), [www.nber.org/papers/w16180](http://www.nber.org/papers/w16180).
- 44 Gormley, “The Effects of Oklahoma’s Pre-K Program on Hispanic Students;” William Gormley, Ted Gayer, Deborah Phillips, and Brittany Dawson, “The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development,” *Developmental Psychology* 41 no. 6 (2004): 872-84.
- 45 W. Steven Barnett et al., “Two-way and Monolingual English Immersion in Preschool Education: An Experimental Comparison,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2007): 277-93; Gormley, “The Effects of Oklahoma’s Pre-K Program on Hispanic Students;” Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson, “The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development;” Carol Hammer, “Dual-Language Learners’ Early Language Development and Academic Outcomes” (paper prepared for the Workshop on the Role of Language in School Learning: Implications for Closing the Achievement Gap, Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park, CA, October 15-16, 2009); Adam Winsler, Rafael M. Diaz, Linda Espinosa, and James L. Rodríguez, “When Learning a Second Language Does Not Mean Losing the First: Bilingual Language Development in Low-Income, Spanish-Speaking Children Attending Bilingual Preschool,” *Child Development* 70, no. 2 (1999): 349-62.





When high-quality preschool programs systematically expose DLL children to English, their English proficiency and language scores at kindergarten entry improve.

Furthermore, growing evidence suggests that supporting the child's home language while teaching English promotes continued development in the home language as well as higher levels of achievement in English in the long run.<sup>46</sup> Multiple studies have shown that when young DLLs have high-quality language interactions in both their home language and English, they can successfully become bilingual, which carries significant advantages in cognitive, social-emotional and linguistic areas of development. These studies have also shown that the preschool years may be an ideal time to learn two languages.<sup>47</sup>

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### *Different types of early care have been shown to have differential impacts on children's development and school readiness.*

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Different types of early care — for example, nonparental relative care, home-based care, center-based child care, and other educationally oriented preschools — have been shown to have differential impacts on children's development and school readiness.<sup>48</sup> Children who attend center-based prekindergarten programs, on average, perform better at kindergarten entry on measures of math and literacy skills than children who spend the prekindergarten years exclusively in parental care or in other types of informal care.<sup>49</sup> Some evidence also suggests that, relative to their higher income and monolingual English-speaking peers, low-income and DLL children especially benefit from center-based care and high-quality care.<sup>50</sup>

In an evaluation of the effects of the Oklahoma Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program on Hispanic children's early literacy and mathematical abilities, William Gormley and colleagues found that Hispanic children who spoke English at home made positive but statistically insignificant cognitive gains, while Hispanic children who spoke Spanish at home made large and significant gains in pre-reading and pre-math when assessed in English.<sup>51</sup> In addition, Hispanic children experienced different outcomes depending on their parents' country of birth: those with parents born in Mexico made the largest gains in

- 46 Diane August and Timothy Shanahan, eds., *Developing Literacy in Second Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006); Fred Genesee, Esther Geva, Cheryl Dressler, and Michael Kamil, "Synthesis: Cross-Linguistic Relationships" in *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*, eds. Diane August and Timothy Shanahan (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006); Claude Goldenberg, "Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does—and Does Not—Say," *American Educator* 32, no. 2 (2008): 8-23, 42-4; Kathryn Lindholm-Leary and Fred Genesee, "Alternative Educational Programs for English Learners" in *Improving Education for English Learners: Research-Based Approaches*, ed. California Department of Education (Sacramento: CDE Press, 2010).
- 47 Ellen Bialystok, *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Fred Genesee, "What Do We Know About Bilingual Education for Majority Language Students" in *Handbook of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism*, eds. Tej K. Bhatia and William C. Ritchie (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); Patricia K. Kuhl, "Early Language Acquisition: Neural Substrates and Theoretical Models" in *The Cognitive Neurosciences, 4th Edition*, ed. Michael S. Gazzaniga (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009).
- 48 Magnuson and Waldfogel, *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress*; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, "Early Child Care and Children's Development in the Primary Grades: Follow-up Results from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care," *American Educational Research Journal* 42, no. 3 (2005): 537-70.
- 49 Katherine Magnuson, Marcia K. Meyers, Christopher J. Ruhm, and Jane Waldfogel, "Inequality in Preschool Education and School Readiness," *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 1 (2004): 115-57; Deborah Phillips and Gina Adams, "Child Care and our Youngest Children," *Future of Children* 11 no. 1 (2001): 35-51.
- 50 Gormley, "The Effects of Oklahoma's Pre-K Program on Hispanic Students;" Katherine A. Magnuson, Christopher Ruhm, and Jane Waldfogel, "The Persistence of Preschool Effects: Do Subsequent Classroom Experiences Matter?" *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2007): 18-38.
- 51 Gormley, "The Effects of Oklahoma's Pre-K Program on Hispanic Students;" William Gormley and Ted Gayer, "Promoting School Readiness in Oklahoma: An Evaluation of Tulsa's Pre-K Program," *Journal of Human Resources* 40 no. 3 (2005): 533-58.





pre-reading, pre-writing, and pre-math while those with US-born parents made significant gains only in pre-writing. When the same early literacy and math skills were tested in Spanish, Hispanic children made gains in all three areas, but the gains in Spanish were not as large and were not statistically significant. The study authors concluded, “What the Tulsa research does demonstrate, clearly and unequivocally, is the value of a high-quality, school-based pre-K program for Hispanic children, especially English language learners, who arguably need help the most.”<sup>52</sup>

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*Research has also shown that children in immigrant families and DLL children are less likely than white and Black children to receive nonparental care during early childhood.*

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Despite the promise of high-quality ECE programs for promoting school readiness, a 2005 study by Katherine Magnuson and Jane Waldfogel reports that “racial and ethnic differences in enrollment in center care or preschool programs exist for young children in all age groups.”<sup>53</sup> In their analysis of nationally representative data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) from 1968-2000, the researchers found that at all ages, Black children were more likely to enroll in center-based care than white children. Hispanic children were the least likely of any group to attend center-based care. Magnuson and Waldfogel also found that among those already enrolled in child care, both Black and Hispanic children spent more hours per week in center care during the year before kindergarten than did white children.

Research has also shown that children in immigrant families and DLL children are less likely than white and Black children to receive nonparental care during early childhood, and, if they do, that they are less likely to attend center-based care or receive high-quality care.<sup>54</sup> Young DLLs, particularly children from Hispanic, Spanish-speaking households or those living in linguistically isolated households (i.e., those households where no one over the age of 14 speaks English very well), enroll in child-care centers and preschools at lower rates than English-speaking children with US-born parents.<sup>55</sup> Further, in California, where over half of all 4-year-olds are children of immigrants and almost half of all 4-year-olds speak a language other than English at home, the vast majority of child-care teachers of preschool DLLs report using English as their primary language.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to note a number of issues about the samples from the studies discussed here. In most of the studies, the samples are over 15 years old, while the availability, funding, and program requirements of early childhood programs have shifted dramatically over the past decade. The programs have become more widely available with increased levels of funding at local, state, and federal levels and explicit expectations for children’s growth and achievement.

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52 Gormley, “The Effects of Oklahoma’s Pre-K Program on Hispanic Students.”

53 Katherine Magnuson and Jane Waldfogel, “Preschool Child Care and Parents’ Use of Physical Discipline,” *Infant and Child Development* 14, no.2 (2005): 178-79.

54 Matthews and Ewen, *Reaching All Children?*

55 Jill S. Cannon, Alison Jacknowitz, and Lynn A. Karoly, *Preschool and School Readiness: Experiences of Children with Non-English-Speaking Parents* (San Francisco, CA: Public Policy Institute of California, 2012); Jodi Jacobson Chernoff, Kristin Denton Flannagan, Cameron McPhee, and Jennifer Park. *Preschool: First Findings From the Third Follow-up of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, US Department of Education, 2007), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008025.pdf>; Iheoma U. Iruka and Priscilla R. Carver, *Initial Results from the 2005 NHES Early Childhood Program Participation Survey (NCES 2006-075)* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006075.pdf>; Lynn A. Karoly, Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, Gail L. Zellman, Michal Perlman, and Lynda Fernyhough, *Prepared to Learn: The Nature and Quality of Early Care and Education for Preschool-Age Children in California* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).

56 Cannon, Jacknowitz, and Karoly, *Preschool and School Readiness: Experiences of Children with Non-English-Speaking Parents*.



In addition, some studies have grouped together diverse groups of Spanish-speaking individuals (e.g., Mexican-origin families in the Southwest, Puerto Rican families in New York, and Cuban families in Miami) into one broad, pan-ethnic category like “Latino,” although child-care values, access, and resources are likely to be quite different across these groups.<sup>57</sup> Finally, much of the work examining ethnic group differences in child-care choices has focused on Mexican-origin families, and even when national samples of Latinos/Hispanics are examined, they often over-represent Latinos from Mexico, such as in the ECLS-K.<sup>58</sup>

A more recent secondary analysis of the ECLS-B data set (a nationally representative sample of 14,000 US children born in 2001) found that, after controlling for country of origin, family education, income, and occupation, there were relatively few differences in the ECE experiences among DLL children and children whose families speak only English.<sup>59</sup> The study found that, during the preschool years, DLL children attended nonparental care (center-based or home-based) at similar rates and for similar amounts of time, and that the only reliable difference in quality was in home-based care during the preschool years. However, very few young DLL children received bilingual language exposure when they attended center-based care during the preschool years.<sup>60</sup>

## V. Elements of a High-Quality Early Childhood Education for Dual Language Learners

While there is no single definition of high-quality preschool, and there is little conclusive evidence about what program characteristics matter most,<sup>61</sup> some features are generally considered to be key parts of an excellent program. Findings from rigorous experimental studies, several meta-analyses, and research reviews all highlight the need for qualified teachers, extensive professional development and classroom-based support for teachers, and adequate teacher-child ratios. The instructional features of high-quality programs include responsive and enriched language interactions, individualized adult-child conversations that promote language skills and positive relationships, opportunities for children to learn and practice new skills and vocabulary, frequent assessment, and parental engagement.<sup>62</sup>

57 Bruce Fuller, Susan D. Holloway, and Xiaoyan Liang, “Family Selection of Child-Care Centers: The Influence of Household Support, Ethnicity, and Parental Practices,” *Child Development* 67, no. 6 (1996): 3320–37; Diane Hirshberg, Danny Shih-Cheng Huang, and Bruce Fuller, “Which Low-Income Parents Select Child Care? Family Demand and Neighborhood Organizations,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 27 no. 10 (2005) 1119–48; Xiaoyan Liang, Bruce Fuller, and Judith D. Singer, “Ethnic Differences in Child Care Selection: The Influence of Family Structure, Parental Practices, and Home Language,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (2000): 357–84; Susanna Loeb, Bruce Fuller, Sharon Lynn Kagan, and Bidemi Abioseh Carrol, “Child Care in Poor Communities: Early Learning Effects of Type, Quality, and Stability,” *Child Development* 75 no. 1 (2004): 47–65.

58 Maryah Stella Fram and Jinseok Kim, “Race/Ethnicity and the Start of Child Care: A Multi-Level Analysis of Factors Influencing First Child Care Experiences,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2008): 575–90; Katherine Magnuson, Claudia Lahaie, and Jane Waldfogel, “Preschool and School Readiness of Children of Immigrants,” *Social Science Quarterly* 87, no. 5 (2006): 1241–62; Kristin Turney and Grace Kao, “Pre-Kindergarten Child Care and Behavioral Outcomes among Children of Immigrants,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 24 no. 4 (2009) 432–44.

59 Linda Espinosa et al., *Child Care Experiences among Dual Language Learners in the US: Analyses of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey-Birth Cohort*.

60 Ibid.

61 W. Steven Barnett, “Effectiveness of Early Educational Intervention,” *Science* 333 (2011): 975–78.

62 W. Steven Barnett et al., “Two-way and Monolingual English Immersion in Preschool Education: An Experimental Comparison,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (2007): 277–93; Gregory Camilli, Sadako Vargas, Sharon Ryan, and W. Steven Barnett, “Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Early Education Interventions on Cognitive and Social Development,” *Teachers College Record* 112 no. 3 (2010): 579–620; Dickinson and Neuman, eds. *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*, Vol. 2; Clickinson and Porche, “Relation Between Language Experiences in Preschool Classrooms and Children’s Kindergarten and Fourth-Grade Language and Reading Abilities;” Espinosa, *High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like*.



Most studies focused on ECE program features and children's outcomes have either not included DLLs or administered cognitive and social assessments exclusively in English. Consequently, we are only beginning to amass a comparable empirical base that can offer guidance on how to design early childhood programs that provide effective, high-quality education for young DLLs. Some of the elements of early care and education settings, which are discussed in more detail below, that have shown to be salient for DLLs are:

- Program access
- Language of instruction
- Instructional practices
- Assessment
- Teacher quality and school-family partnerships
- Classroom quality (including emotional climate).

The following sections discuss each of these in turn.

### **A. Program Access**

In some states, including Arkansas, California, and Georgia, DLLs participate in center-based preschool programs at lower rates than their English-only speaking peers.<sup>63</sup> While the specific reasons for this reduced participation are not well understood, there is some evidence that the major reasons are lack of access and affordability.<sup>64</sup> In particular, Latino families have been shown to value early education and have high educational aspirations for their children, but have difficulty affording the costs of the programs and locating centers in their neighborhoods.

Issues of program access were the main focus of a 2007 policy report by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). The authors identified three possible barriers to increased ECE program participation by children of immigrants: awareness, accessibility, and responsiveness.<sup>65</sup> In this mixed-methodology study, the authors concluded that: immigrant families are often unaware of the types of early childhood programs available and their eligibility requirements; there is a lack of supply in communities where immigrants reside; and programs may be unresponsive to the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of immigrant DLL families and their children. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for policymakers at federal, state, and local levels that range from increasing resources to expanding access to high-quality early care, improving data collection and reporting, and recruiting bilingual, culturally competent staff. While these policy recommendations, if enacted, would undoubtedly increase access and attendance, they would not provide sufficient guidance on the program and classroom features that promote high levels of academic achievement and developmental competencies for DLLs.

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63 Hannah Matthews and Danielle Ewen, "Early Education Programs and Children of Immigrants: Learning Each Other's Language" (paper prepared for the Urban Institute's Roundtable on Young Children of Immigrants and the Path to Educational Success, Washington, DC, June 28, 2010), [www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/412205-early-education.pdf](http://www.urban.org/uploadedpdf/412205-early-education.pdf).

64 Donald J. Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton, and Suzanne E. Macartney, *Children in Immigrant Families: Looking to America's Future* (Washington, DC: Society for Research in Child Development, 2008), [www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/22\\_3\\_hernandez\\_final.pdf](http://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/documents/22_3_hernandez_final.pdf).

65 Hannah Matthews and Deana Jang, *The Challenges of Change: Learning from the Child Care and Early Education Experiences of Immigrant Families* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2007).



## B. Language of Instruction

The language of instruction issue has been the most intensely debated aspect of the education of DLLs in K-12 settings for decades and is often politically charged.<sup>66</sup> Basically, all educators and scholars agree that to succeed in US schools and participate in civic life in the United States, children need to develop strong English proficiency and literacy skills. The debate surrounds the question of how best to support the acquisition of English and promote English reading comprehension, and whether it should come at the expense of continued attention to the development and maintenance of the child's home language. Some unresolved questions include:

- As English skills deepen, what is the ongoing role of the primary home language?
- What are the social and cultural costs of losing proficiency in the home language?
- What is the appropriate role of ECE programs in supporting the primary home language?
- How do English-only approaches and dual-language approaches fit with community values?

Further, there are still many unresolved practical questions about the best methods to promote English language development while continuing to support home languages.

Research shows that teaching children to read in their home language supports higher levels of English achievement in the long term.<sup>67</sup> Five meta-analyses of bilingual education have reached this conclusion.<sup>68</sup> The most recent study has found that by the end of elementary school, children who have been in a bilingual program since kindergarten had much stronger Spanish skills, with no differences in English skills, compared to children who had been in an English immersion program.<sup>69</sup> In another study, Spanish-speaking children's academic skills were higher when they received more instruction in Spanish.<sup>70</sup>

Similar results have been found for preschoolers: Classroom use of both the first language and English leads to improvement in first language skills and at least equivalent English language skills in comparison to children in all-English contexts.<sup>71</sup> Dual-language preschool programming thus confers the simultaneous benefits of maintaining and developing the home language while still supporting English proficiency.<sup>72</sup> Several studies of programs that used a 50-50 English-Spanish bilingual approach with preschoolers found that young children were able to develop English skills on par with their monolingual English-speaking peers while also continuing to develop their Spanish skills.<sup>73</sup>

66 Patricia Gandara and Megan Hopkins, *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

67 August and Shanahan, eds., *Developing Literacy in Second Language Learners*; Claude Goldenberg, "Research on English Learner Instruction" in *Breaking through: Effective instruction & Assessment for Reaching English Learners*, ed. M. Calderón (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2012).

68 Claude Goldenberg, "Research on English Learner Instruction."

69 Robert E. Slavin, Nancy Madden, Margarita Calderón, Anne Chamberlain, and Megan Hennessy, "Reading and Language Outcomes of a Multiyear Randomized Evaluation of Transitional Bilingual Education," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 32 (2011): 47–58.

70 Margaret Burchinal et al., "Instruction in Spanish in Pre-kindergarten Classrooms and Child Outcomes for English Language Learners," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2012): 188–97.

71 Barnett et al., "Two-way and Monolingual English Immersion in Preschool Education;" James L. Rodríguez, Rafael M. Díaz, David Duran, and Linda Espinosa, "The Impact of Bilingual Preschool Education on the Language Development of Spanish-Speaking Children," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1995): 475–90; Winsler, Díaz, Espinosa, and Rodríguez, "When Learning a Second Language Does Not Mean Losing the First."

72 Jo Ann M. Farver, Christopher Lonigan, and Stefanie Eppe, "Effective Early Literacy Skill Development for Young Spanish-Speaking English Language Learners: An Experimental Study of Two Methods," *Child Development* 80, no. 3 (2009): 703–19.

73 Barnett et al., "Two-way and Monolingual English Immersion in Preschool Education;" Rodríguez, Díaz, Duran, and Espinosa, "The Impact of Bilingual Preschool Education on the Language Development of Spanish-Speaking Children;" Winsler, Díaz, Espinosa, and Rodríguez, "When Learning a Second Language Does Not Mean Losing the First."



Conversely, several recent studies have found that English-only instruction in preschool is a detriment to Spanish development without providing an added boost to English development.<sup>74</sup> Thus, it appears that some form of bilingual education in preschool is additive rather than subtractive,<sup>75</sup> meaning that children experience overall language gains: they maintain and develop their first language (which has cognitive, social, and cultural benefits) while beginning to acquire English skills.

Together, these studies demonstrate that learning more than one language during the preschool years does not delay the acquisition of English or impede academic achievement in English when both languages are supported. Research on children who learn English after their home language has been established — usually around three years of age — has also shown that most young children are capable of *adding* a second language and that this dual language ability confers long-term cognitive, cultural, and economic advantages.<sup>76</sup> Current research has clearly indicated that young DLLs should be given opportunities to develop high levels of proficiency in both of their languages because the advantages are significant and lasting.<sup>77</sup>

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*Several recent studies have found that English-only instruction in preschool is a detriment to Spanish development without providing an added boost to English development.*

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Although a balanced approach to bilingualism is recommended by most recent research, in reality dual language instruction with the goal of biliteracy and bilingualism is not possible in all contexts. Early education programs throughout the country are reporting not only more DLL children, but also a greater diversity of languages represented among their children and families. Head Start has documented more than 140 different languages among families enrolled in 2009-10, with approximately 30 percent of all children identified as DLLs.<sup>78</sup>

California, where children of immigrants represent a larger share of children than in any other state, provides a good example of the practical challenges of bilingual instruction. Approximately 25 percent of all K-12 students in California speak a language other than English at home, and more than half of all 4-year-olds are children of immigrants.<sup>79</sup> In some communities the concentration of DLLs is even more dramatic. In Los Angeles County, for example, more than 55 percent of 5-year-olds entering kindergarten in 2009-10 came from homes where the primary language was a language other than English, and 88 percent were from Spanish-speaking homes.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, fewer than 10 percent of California teachers are fluent in more than one language and few teachers certified in early childhood education have any training in cultural and linguistic diversity.<sup>81</sup>

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74 Barnett et al., “Two-way and Monolingual English Immersion in Preschool Education.”

75 Winsler, Díaz, Espinosa, and Rodríguez, “When Learning a Second Language Does Not Mean Losing the First.”

76 Ellen Bialystok, “Bilingualism: The Good, the Bad, and the Indifferent,” *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 12, (2009): 3-11.

77 Ibid.

78 Linda Espinosa, *Challenging Common Myths About Young Dual Language Learners: An Update to the Seminal 2008 Report* (New York: Foundation for Child Development, 2013): 11, <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Challenging%20Common%20Myths%20Update.pdf>.

79 Cannon, Jacknowitz, and Karoly, *Preschool and School Readiness: Experiences of Children with Non-English-Speaking Parents*.

80 Linda Espinosa and Marlene Zepeda, “Early Childhood Education for English Language Learners Plan” (Internal Report, Los Angeles Unified School District, 2009).

81 Espinosa, *Challenging Common Myths About Young Dual Language Learners: An Update to the Seminal 2008 Report*, 11.





### C. Instructional Practices

Recent studies have documented the value of well-known elements of effective teaching on the learning experiences of DLLs. However, not all instructional approaches are equally effective for DLLs.<sup>82</sup> In relation to reading comprehension, an area where DLLs have been shown to struggle, explaining vocabulary words and using them in different contexts,<sup>83</sup> as well as strengthening oral language skills,<sup>84</sup> have proven helpful. Moreover, knowledge of academic language, narrative skills, listening comprehension, and understanding complex grammatical structures are all important to English reading achievement.<sup>85</sup>

The underlying principle for young DLLs is that they need additional scaffolds and supports to comprehend the meaning of lessons, because they are simultaneously learning the new language while also learning the cognitive and conceptual content.

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*The underlying principle for young DLLs is that they need additional scaffolds and supports to comprehend the meaning of lessons.*

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Even when teachers cannot instruct in the home languages of the children, they can still provide this scaffolding and support. Many scholars have identified strategies that teachers can implement to support continued development of children's first language in the preschool classroom.<sup>86</sup> For example, Claude Goldenberg and Judy Hicks, based on a comprehensive review of the literature on effective instructional strategies for young DLLs, recommend the following instructional strategies for classrooms serving young DLLs from diverse language backgrounds:<sup>87</sup>

Reading from books in the child's home language. Teachers, family members, or community volunteers can participate, and can obtain books from local libraries and children's homes. Homemade books can be saved in the classroom from year to year.

- Creating books that include children's home languages. These can be class books (about animals, for example, where each animal is labeled in all of the classroom's home languages) or individual books (e.g. about children's families, with many words or labels in the home language.)
- Teaching children rhymes, letters, and numbers in their home language. This may require community or parental support.
- Teaching all children in the class the greetings of all of the home languages in the classroom.
- Pointing out cognates and connections between words in the home language and words in English.

82 August and Shanahan, eds., *Developing Literacy in Second Language Learners*.

83 Molly F. Collins, "ELL Preschoolers' English Vocabulary Acquisition from Storybook Reading," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2010): 84-97.

84 Noonie Lesaux, "Slide presentation, Panel I: Vocabulary and Academic Language" (presented at the Workshop on the Role of Language in School Learning: Implications for Closing the Achievement Gap, Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park, CA, October 15-16, 2009).

85 University of Chicago, Urban Education Institute, *Getting on Track Early for School Success: An Assessment System to Support Effective Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago, Urban Education Institute, 2010).

86 Espinosa, "Language and Literacy for Bilingual and Monolingual Children;" Claude Goldenberg, Judy Hicks, and Ira Lit, "Teaching Young English Learners," in *Handbook of Research-Based Practice in Early Education*, ed. D. Ray Reutzel (New York: The Guilford Press, 2013); Dina C. Castro, Cristina Gillanders, Margarita Machado-Casas, and Virginia Buysse, *Nuestros Niños Early Language and Literacy Program* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, 2006).

87 This list appears in (at the time of this writing) an unpublished article by Goldenberg and Hicks. For a similar accounting of instructional strategies, see Claude Goldenberg, Judy Hicks, and Ira Lit, "Dual Language Learners: Effective Instruction in Early Childhood," *American Educator*, Summer 2013, [www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2013/Goldenberg\\_Hicks\\_Lit.pdf](http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2013/Goldenberg_Hicks_Lit.pdf).



- Letting parents know what topics are going to be explored in the classroom (e.g. insects, weather) so that families can build concept knowledge in the home language before children are exposed to those concepts in English.
- Setting aside time and space for adults who speak the child's native language to interact with children in that language. If there are adults in the preschool who speak the child's home language, ensure that there are opportunities for those adults and children to interact.

In my own work in the state of California, I have developed a set of instructional strategies for supporting the dual goals of home language maintenance and English language development:

- Have teachers meet early in the school year with parents to learn critical information about the child and family.
- Create visual displays that represent the languages, cultures, and family practices of the children in the classroom.
- Provide books and materials that authentically represent the cultures and languages of students and their families. Encourage students, parents or volunteers to help you understand and read them.
- Ask parents or volunteers to introduce key vocabulary words in the child's home language.
- Ask parents or volunteers to pre-read stories in the child's home language.
- Identify cognates in the home language to bridge into English.
- Use pictures, real-world objects, and concrete experiences to convey the meaning of words and concepts.
- Use visual cues, physical gestures, and signals linked to specific vocabulary to imprint the meaning.

A variety of specific instructional strategies including those listed above have been linked to improved short- and long-term outcomes for DLLs that are practical and within the range of what can be expected of all ECE teachers. High-quality ECE programs that provide specific scaffolds and supports for DLLs offer the best chance for kindergarten and later school success.

#### **D. Assessment**

The accurate and valid assessment of DLLs' development is also critical to enhancing the quality of instruction and improving their early care and education.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, most standardized assessments have not been designed and validated for DLLs and have serious limitations when used with this population. As María Teresa Sánchez and María Estela Brisk note, most teachers and assessment professionals have not been trained to conduct nondiscriminatory assessments with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, many of them do not speak the child's native language, and are also unfamiliar with the home culture. Moreover, many teachers lack knowledge of how test questions are constructed and therefore have difficulty making informed judgments about the suitability of specific tests for students with linguistically diverse backgrounds.<sup>89</sup>

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88 Espinosa and García, "Developmental Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners with a Focus on Kindergarten Entry Assessment;" Linda Espinosa and Micheal M. López, "Assessment Considerations for Young English Language Learners across Different Levels of Accountability" (report prepared for The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force and First 5 LA, August 11, 2007), [www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-k\\_education/Assessment%20for%20Young%20ELs-Pew%208-11-07-Final.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Pre-k_education/Assessment%20for%20Young%20ELs-Pew%208-11-07-Final.pdf).

89 María Teresa Sánchez and Maria Estela Brisk, "Teachers' Assessment Practices and Understandings in a Bilingual Program," *NABE Journal of Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2004): 193-214.



Nevertheless, ECE teachers must accurately assess young DLLs' development and achievement in order to individualize instruction, improve the quality of education, and improve academic school readiness. This is a multi-step process that requires staff to be knowledgeable about the linguistic and cultural development of young DLLs as well as the specific characteristics of the assessment instruments they administer.<sup>90</sup> These professionals will need to understand the stages of English language acquisition for preschoolers and the importance of home language development for future academic achievement. They will also need skills in observational assessment methods and linking ongoing assessment results to individualized instruction.

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*There is an urgent need for better designed and linguistically appropriate assessment instruments for DLLs.*

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Program staff must also understand how tests are constructed so that they can identify any biases or limitations, and thus make the best decisions about the use of specific assessments for DLL children. Teachers need training on how to use their professional judgment when interpreting and applying the results of standardized tests.<sup>91</sup> The process of assessment in ECE requires a team of individuals who all contribute specialized information about the child, and therefore staff must be skilled in team collaboration. Finally, all staff must be competent in working across cultures to establish effective working relationships with diverse families, many of whom may hold distinct parenting values and beliefs.

More broadly, there is an urgent need for better designed and linguistically appropriate assessment instruments for DLLs. Assessment tools, procedures, and purposes must consider the unique aspects of linguistic and cognitive development associated with growing up with two languages, as well as the social and cultural conditions that influence overall development.

### **E. Teacher Quality and School-Family Partnerships**

For DLLs in the early grades, teacher effectiveness is one of the most important variables for student achievement.<sup>92</sup> Professional organizations have concluded that to be effective educators of DLLs, teachers should be knowledgeable in five main content areas:

1. the structural aspects of language development (e.g., syntax, phonology) and the development of both the first and the second language;
2. the role of culture in language development;
3. instructional practices that promote development and learning in DLLs;
4. the role of assessment and how to implement appropriate assessment strategies with DLLs; and
5. the teacher's own role as a professional in the education of DLLs.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Espinosa and García, "Developmental Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners with a Focus on Kindergarten Entry Assessments."

<sup>91</sup> Linda M. Espinosa and Vera Gutiérrez-Clellan, "Assessment of Young Dual Language Learners in Preschool," in *California's Best Practices for Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers* (Sacramento: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care, 2013): 172-208.

<sup>92</sup> Eugene E. Garcia and Erminda H. Garcia, *Language Development and Early Education of Young Hispanic Children in the United States* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012).

<sup>93</sup> Marilou Hyson, ed., *Preparing Early Childhood Professionals: NAEYC's Standards for Programs* (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2003); National Association for the Education of Young Children, "NAEYC Position Statement: Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity—Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education," *Young Children* 51 no. 2 (1996): 4-12; Marlene Zapeda, Dina C. Castro, Sharon Cronin, "Preparing Early Childhood Teachers to Work with Young Dual Language Learners. *Child Development*," *Perspectives* 5 no. 1 (2011): 10-14.



Along with teacher quality, strong school-family partnerships have been a hallmark of high-quality early education for decades.<sup>94</sup> The empirical research base for parent education, family visitation, parent conferences, and home-school communication interventions with DLL populations is “minimal, but promising.”<sup>95</sup> Researchers have found that sending literacy materials home in the family’s primary language and sharing literacy strategies with parents can increase the frequency of home literacy activities and promote literacy skill development in DLLs.<sup>96</sup> Establishing partnerships with families implies engaging in a dialogue through which teachers learn about families’ childrearing beliefs and practices, as well as their expectations for their children’s development and learning.<sup>97</sup>

## F. Classroom Quality

Since research has linked high-quality ECE instruction to positive language, literacy, and mathematics outcomes for most children, there is probably a considerable overlap between the effective practices for DLLs and monolingual English speakers.<sup>98</sup> Focused attention on key skills during the preschool years — such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, letter knowledge, and positive peer and adult relationships — is important for all children. Therefore, what we know about high-quality ECE instruction is most likely also the foundation of effective instruction for DLLs. Multiple studies have concluded that enhancing the basic quality of instruction will better meet the linguistic and developmental needs of DLLs.<sup>99</sup>

Defining and measuring the quality of the ECE environment for DLLs is an emerging area of research, given that most measures were developed for use in settings with English-only instruction and/or monolingual populations.<sup>100</sup> A 2011 review of the literature from the past decade examined 49 commonly used measures of the quality of care and education in center-based and home-based settings, and found that “it is not possible to draw conclusions about the validity of specific measures for use with DLLs....”<sup>101</sup> The inconclusive results were due to the fact that few studies were devoted to any particular measure, and only two of the studies examined measures that were specifically designed to analyze DLL populations. The researchers did find, however, that widely-used instruments for measuring the quality of ECE settings functioned similarly for DLL and English-monolingual populations in the small number of studies that

94 See Robert Crosnoe, *Preparing the Children of Immigrants for Early Academic Success* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2013), [www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/COI-EarlyAcademicSuccess.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/COI-EarlyAcademicSuccess.pdf).

95 Mathematica Policy Research, “Evaluating Universal Preschool Outcomes: First 5 LA,” [www.mathematica-mpr.com/earlychildhood/upcos.asp](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/earlychildhood/upcos.asp).

96 Claude Goldenberg, Leslie Reese, and Ronald Gallimore, “Effects of School Literacy Materials on Latino Children’s Home Experiences and Early Reading Achievement,” *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 4 (1992): 497-536.

97 Concha Delgado-Gaitan, *Involving Latino Families in Schools: Raising Student Achievement Through Home-School Partnerships* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2004).

98 Espinosa, “Language and Literacy for Bilingual and Monolingual Children.”

99 Dina C. Castro, Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, Virginia Buysse, and Cristina Gillanders, “Language and Literacy Development of Latino Dual Language Learners: Promising Instructional Practices,” in *Contemporary Perspectives on Language and Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood Education*, eds. Olivia Saracho and Bernard Spodek (Scottsdale, AZ: Information Age, 2011); Claude Goldenberg, “Reading Instruction for English Language Learners” in *Handbook of Reading Research, Vol. IV*, eds. Michael Kamil, P. David Pearson, Elizabeth Moje, and Peter Afflerbach (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2010); Theresa Roberts and Harriet Neal, “Relationships among Preschool English Language Learners’ Oral Proficiency in English, Instructional Experience and Literacy Development,” *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 29, no. 3 (2004): 283-311.

100 Dina C. Castro, Linda Espinosa, and Mariela Pérez, “Defining and Measuring Quality Early Childhood Practices that Promote Dual Language Learners’ Development and Learning” in *Quality Measurement in Early Childhood Settings*, eds. Martha Zaslow, Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, Kathryn Tout, and Tamara Halle (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 2011).

101 Center for Early Care and Education Research-Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL), *Early Care and Education Quality Measures: A Critical Review of the Research Related to Dual Language Learners* (Chapel Hill, NC: FPG Child Development Institute, 2011): 1, <http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/sites/cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/documents/Brief%20%235%20Qual%20Final%20Rvsd%2010-31-11.pdf>.



have examined this question.<sup>102</sup> However, as Dina Castro, Linda Espinosa, and Mariella Paez (2011) have pointed out, none of the commonly used measures of ECE classroom quality capture the specific instructional scaffolds and supports described above that have been shown to be important to language development and academic achievement for DLLs.

## VI. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

It is clear that young Dual Language Learners, many of whom are children of immigrants, face unique linguistic, cognitive, and academic challenges while also possessing much intellectual, cultural, and social potential that is frequently unrealized. While DLLs are a diverse group with important distinctions across family and early learning contexts that affect early development, all are growing up with the task of learning about the world through more than one language. Ongoing research is shedding light on the neurological, cognitive, social, cultural, and academic consequences of learning a second language during the early childhood years. Over the years, researchers have formed a consensus on the major features of effective early childhood education programs and practices for DLLs. The evidence strongly supports high-quality early interventions that include specific scaffolds, adaptations, and enhancements — many of them based on specific language abilities and needs — that will promote school readiness for DLLs.

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*Family partnerships that are mutually respectful, engage in two-way communication, and incorporate important cultural and family background information offer promise for stronger home-school connections.*

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The research reviewed in this report has implications for practice and policy that need urgent attention. Attention must be paid to the accessibility of high-quality ECE programs to families whose primary home language is not English and the rates at which DLL children enroll in ECE programs relative to other children. Targeted outreach to under-represented groups, expressed in the languages and styles that are meaningful to them, will increase new immigrant families' awareness of ECE programs.

For enrolled children, family engagement efforts need to be examined through the lens of diversity. Traditional models may need to be expanded to include a focus on developing meaningful relationships with extended family members and a better understanding of family expectations for their children's development and learning. Family partnerships that are mutually respectful, engage in two-way communication, and incorporate important cultural and family background information offer promise for stronger home-school connections.

At every level — local, state, and federal — rigorous quality improvement efforts should be identified, tested, and vigorously implemented. Global high-quality ECE is the basis of effective education for DLLs — but it is not sufficient to close the achievement gap at kindergarten entry. Quality improvement efforts should target the full range of ECE contexts and settings, including home-based and center-based care. For example, the global quality for language-enriched and academically focused learning opportunities in home-based care, which many infant and toddler DLLs attend, needs to be improved. Center-based settings, where most DLL preschoolers are enrolled, must focus on developing more bilingual educational services and supports.

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<sup>102</sup> CECER-DLL, *Early Care and Education Quality Measures*.





To assess the extent to which both new and old programs and practices are benefiting DLLs, state and federal support for linguistically and culturally appropriate assessment instruments and procedures for young DLLs is also desperately needed. In order to accurately capture the true language, conceptual, and learning abilities of DLLs, ECE staff will need to assess children in both of their languages — not just English. This information is critical for instructional planning as well as educational decision-making.

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*All ECE teachers of young DLLs can learn and implement strategies that systematically introduce English during the preschool years while simultaneously promoting home language maintenance.*

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Finally, the ECE profession urgently needs a clear definition of what constitutes “best practices” for young DLLs across different programmatic and community contexts. For example, a community that has two primary language groups and the capacity for full-fledged bilingual programs should be encouraged to implement dual language instruction. In communities where there are multiple language groups represented and mostly monolingual English-speaking teachers, the approaches will vary but all ECE teachers will need professional development and ongoing support to implement the English language development strategies described in this report. The important principle must be stressed: All ECE teachers of young DLLs can learn and implement strategies that systematically introduce English during the preschool years while simultaneously promoting home language maintenance. Not all teachers can teach in all languages, but all teachers can support all languages. The research reviewed here has clearly indicated that young DLLs should be given opportunities to develop high levels of proficiency in both of their languages because the cognitive, social, cultural, and academic advantages are significant and lasting.

For more on MPI's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy visit:  
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## About the Author



Linda M. Espinosa, Professor of Early Childhood Education (Ret.) at the University of Missouri, Columbia has written, lectured, and consulted widely on effective curriculum and assessment practices for young children from low-income families who are Dual Language Learners. She is currently Co-Principal Investigator for the Center for Early Care and Education Research—Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL) at Frank Porter Graham CDI at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and Lead Consultant for the Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners Project at the California State Department of Education, Child Development Division.

Dr. Espinosa also served on the Head Start National Reporting System (NRS) Technical Advisory Group and recently completed her term as a member of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation. Recently, she co-authored the English Language Learners chapters in the *California Early Learning Foundations* and the *California Preschool Curriculum Frameworks*; and "English Language Development Assessment Measures" in the *Desired Results Developmental Profile*, 2010. Dr. Espinosa recently served as the lead consultant for the Los Angeles Unified School District's Transitional Kindergarten program development team. Dr. Espinosa has worked extensively with low-income Hispanic/Latino children and families throughout California as a school administrator and program director in San Francisco, San Jose, and Redwood City. She developed and directed the Family Focus for School Success program in Redwood City, which has received national recognition.

She has published more than 75 research articles, book chapters, and training manuals. Her latest book, *Getting it RIGHT for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds: Applying Research to Improve Practice*, was first published in 2009 and a second edition will be published in early 2014.

Dr. Espinosa completed her BA at the University of Washington, her EdM at Harvard University, and her PhD in educational psychology at the University of Chicago.



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