

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: CONSIDERATIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR HOME VISITORS

This handout provides strategies and resources to support home visitors who work with families of children who are dual language learners. While English mastery is important for success in school, research¹ shows that being fluent in more than one language contributes to academic success. In fact, supporting the home language builds an important foundation for learning English and for all later learning. When working with families of children who are DLLs, home visitors might try the following strategies:

STRATEGIES TO REINFORCE THE VALUE OF BILINGUALISM

- Support families as they learn to view their home language as a gift to pass down to their child.
- Encourage families to honor the strength of their home language and use it to support their relationships.
- Make it clear to families that their child benefits most from words, stories, songs, and conversations provided in the language they are most comfortable speaking. This helps their child learn in both their home language and in English.
- Use hand gestures, body movements, or other visual aids to demonstrate ideas when working with a family who speaks a language you don't understand. Show video clips of responsive practices and bring key messages that have been translated for the family.
- Build families' confidence as they use home language as the best way to communicate and nurture their child to strengthen parent-child relationships.
- Provide some socialization activities in the family's home language and some in English to achieve a level of balance that supports strong bilingual skills.
- Share ways families can help their child learn English so they are ready for school. Assure them that their child will learn English during socialization activities and interactions in the community. For children birth to age three, there should be a focus on home language development with exposure to English; for children ages four and five, the focus includes English acquisition along with home language.
- Work with families to understand what English and home language supports their child might receive in their local school district as they prepare their child to start school. If the family is interested in supporting English language learning at home, they may want to introduce some stories and songs in English—but this can be just a small part of each day or week.



DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS STRATEGIES FOR HOME-BASED OPTION

A planned language approach (PLA) is a comprehensive, systemic, research-based way for Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care programs to ensure ideal language and literacy services for children who speak only English and for those who are dual language learners (DLLs). The *Planned Language Approach (PLA)* includes five key components: a research base; home language support; strategies to support dual language learners (DLLs); policies, practices, and systems; and the Big 5 for All.

To be ready for school, young children who are dual language learners (DLLs) and those who speak English require many experiences in each of the Big 5 skill areas. The Big 5 are Background Knowledge, Oral Language and Vocabulary, Book Knowledge and Print Concepts, Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing, and Phonological Awareness. Definitions for each of these are included in the Big 5 document located here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/pla-big-5-for-all-introduction-eng.pdf>

STRATEGY	IMPLEMENTATION FOR HOME VISITORS WORKING WITH FAMILIES OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS	IMPLEMENTATION FOR HOME VISITORS WORKING WITH FAMILIES OF PRESCHOOLERS
Build on a child's prior experience and Background Knowledge .	Support families as they follow children's leads. When children show their interest, they reveal what they are thinking about and processing. Families can build on that by having conversations and choosing related stories or activities. For example, if a toddler likes to pretend that blocks are trucks (vroom vroom!), try reading picture books about trucks, too. If an infant is learning to clap his hands, find board books about clapping hands, and other pictures of people using their hands.	Support families as they follow children's leads. When children show their interest, they reveal their existing knowledge and vocabulary. Let parents know that when children ask for the same story or song over and over, they should go along with it to build on their children's prior knowledge. They might even ask questions or talk about the topic to help their child learn even more.
Include the family's cultures and traditions in learning to support Background Knowledge .	Infants and toddlers can learn so much from participating in their families' cultural traditions. Support families as they talk about items that are a part of these traditions, even when they think their infant or toddler may not understand or be able to say the words. It's important for their child to be exposed to these words (and the child is probably understanding more than we realize). For example, name and describe the decorations you display for a holiday and invite the child to imitate the words. Use props and hands-on materials from the home culture for dramatic play around meal times and routines.	Books, stories, games, rhymes, chants, celebrations, pictures, music and instruments, hobbies, and activities all represent aspects of families' cultures that are relevant and meaningful to children. Let families know that even though it can be tempting to focus on purchased toys, everyday objects in children's home support language and learning in children's culture.
Support Book Knowledge and Print Concepts by reading books and telling stories in the child's home language.	Encourage families to find books at the library or ask family members to send them from their home country. Wordless books give families lots of opportunities to share stories, words, and pictures with their child when it's hard to find simple books in their language. Partner with families in using family photos to create home language stories the child can truly relate to.	Encourage families to visit the library to find books to read with their child in their home language. If they don't find what they need, they should ask the librarian to order books or start interlibrary loans. Assure families that it is good practice for them to point out the letters and characters in their home language—research shows learning the alphabet and early writing in the home language helps them learn the English alphabet later.

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<p>Use props and materials for hands-on learning that promotes Oral Language and Vocabulary.</p>	<p>Infants and toddlers may not understand what culture means, but they benefit from predictable routines, traditions, and items. Let families know that the way they talk when they greet children, or gather for a meal, or take an evening walk contributes to their children's language and learning. Playing with familiar items at home, like stacking cans or banging pots and pans, gives families plenty to talk about in their home language.</p>	<p>Children can learn so much from participating in their families' traditions and activities. For example, if a family enjoys gardening, the child can learn vocabulary, expand their oral language skills and learn about family rituals, as they talk about their active learning in a cultural context. Look up the names of tools and plants in the home language to build home language learning and literacy skills.</p>
<p>Support Phonological Awareness as well as Alphabet Knowledge and Early Writing in the home language.</p>	<p>Phonological awareness is an important building block for early literacy. Families need to know that their child can make connections between sounds and meanings successfully in any language. Rhyming is a skill we practice for English-speakers, but it is not necessary for phonological awareness, and may not be the best way to support letter-sound connections in other languages.</p>	<p>As children begin to make connections between letters, sounds, and words, families can support and expand children's knowledge in their home language. The early literacy skills families practice in their home language help children understand how the alphabet works and how sounds make meaning. This understanding helps them learn phonological awareness and alphabet skills in English as well.</p>
	<p>Families should use what they know about the sounds in familiar words to help their child focus on making meaning from sounds in the home language. Families can share nursery rhymes, songs, or chants with infants and toddlers, and talk about how words sound alike or different.</p>	
<p>Explain the meanings of words in the home language and English to build Oral Language and Vocabulary.</p>	<p>Reinforce the benefit of bilingualism by noting the child knows two or more words for the same object! (Ex. milk/leche)</p>	<p>As children begin to talk, talk more, and start to show their understanding of words, families can explain what words mean to the child. This research-based strategy helps children build meaningful vocabulary in any language. Research has also shown that explaining the connections between home language words and English words helps young children learn¹.</p>
	<p>It is important for families to catch children's attention and talk about things they focus on together, using whatever language is comfortable for the adults. Encourage families to take time to be quiet and observe their child. Listen to the sounds and babbling produced by their children. They should keep a record of the attempts their children make at saying words in English or the home languages to share with their home visitors.</p>	
<p>Support the maintenance and growth of the home language in families of children who participate early intervention to support learning in all The Big 5 for All components.</p>	<p>If a child qualifies for early intervention services, intervention and implementation should incorporate the family's language and culture to support and honor the family practice's. Support the family as they advocate for maintaining the child's home language as there is no scientific evidence that being bilingual causes or leads to language delay. Supporting a child's home language, in fact, acts as a linguistic resource and bridge to learning another language, even for children with disabilities. See the Division of Early Childhood Position Statement on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness for background to make this case.</p>	



HEAD START PROGRAM PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

“§1302.35 Education in home-based programs.”

- (a) A home-based program must provide home visits and group socialization activities that promote secure parent-child relationships and help parents provide high-quality early learning experiences in language, literacy ... A program must implement a research-based (home-based) curriculum that delivers developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate home visits and group socialization activities that support children’s cognitive, social, and emotional growth for later success in school.
- (b)(1) Planned jointly by the *home visitor* and parents, and reflect the critical role of parents in the early learning and development of their children, including that the home visitor is able to effectively communicate with the parent, directly or through an interpreter;
- (c)(2) Strategies and activities that promote parents’ ability to support the child’s cognitive, social, emotional, language, literacy, and physical development;
- (c)(3) Strategies and activities that promote the home as a learning environment that is safe, nurturing, responsive, and language- and communication-rich;
- (c)(4) Research-based strategies and activities for children who are dual language learners that recognize bilingualism and bi-literacy as strengths, and:
- (i) For infants and toddlers, focus on the development of the home language, while providing experiences that expose both parents and children to English; and,
- (ii) For preschoolers, focus on both English language acquisition and the continued development of the home language;
- (d)(1)(i) Promotes the parent’s role as the child’s teacher through experiences focused on the parent-child relationship and, as appropriate, the family’s traditions, culture, values, and beliefs...”

RESOURCES

The resources in this brief offer ways to reinforce the value of raising children who can speak more than one language with families who may be unsure about the benefits of bilingualism or feel pressured to help their child speak English in lieu of their home language.

Code Switching: Why it Matters and How to Respond

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/code-switching-why-it-matters-eng.pdf>

Cognitive Benefits of Bilingualism

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-03-cognitive-benefits-bilingualism.pdf>

Families Support their Children who are Dual Language Learners

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/families-support-their-children-who-are-dual-language-learners>

Gathering and Using the Language Information Families Share

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/gathering-using-language-info-families-share.pdf>

Growing Up as a Dual Language Learner

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-02-growing-up-dual-learner.pdf>

Hearing Language is Learning

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-01-hearing-language-learning.pdf>

Importance of Home Language Series – available in 7 languages

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/importance-home-language-series>

Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24677/promoting-the-educational-success-of-children-and-youth-learning-english>

Revisiting and Updating the Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs Serving Children Birth – 5 (Strategies and reflection questions available in English and Spanish)

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/multicultural-principles-early-childhood-leaders>

Division of Early Childhood Position Statement on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/dec-position-statement-cultural-linguistic-responsiveness>

REFERENCE

1. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures. (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2017), 385. doi.org/10.17226/24677