PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GUIDE

SUPPORTING DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

1
Integrating Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Practices to Support Children Who Are Dual Language Learners

2
Intentional Language Support for Children Who Are Dual Language Learners

3
Engaging with Families of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners

2

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GUIDE:

INTENTIONAL LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

How we think about and use language matters. Language has power. It is a part of who we are, our history and culture.

Language provides a structure that frames how we understand, describe, and act in the world. Learning one, two, or more languages is a natural process. But adults play an essential, supporting role in this process. One of the best ways to support children who are dual language learners is to intentionally create space and time for their home or tribal language in various learning environments, including while on home visits. Provide support for children who are dual language learners beyond language and literacy experiences. Be intentional about including children's home or tribal language in everything from math and science to daily routines and play. Encourage families to do the same. It takes practice to support children who are dual language learners, whether you speak their home language or not. Creating a learning environment – in the home or classroom – that is supportive of children who are dual language learners can have a positive impact on their development across learning domains.

CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is the second in a series of guides designed to support program leaders, including education managers, as they develop practices and systems to support the full and effective participation of children who are dual language learners. A dual language learner is a child who is acquiring two or more languages at the same time, or a child who is learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. Use this series of guides, including a guide dedicated to integrating culturally and linguistically responsive practices and one on family engagement to review the latest evidence-based practices that support children who are dual language learners and their families. In this guide, program leaders can explore best practices for providing intentional language support to children who are dual language learners, as well as tools and resources to create learning environments supportive of dual language learners program wide.

USING THIS GUIDE: AN EXAMPLE

Elise is an Education Manager for a Head Start program that is about to welcome its first student, Peter, whose primary language is not English. None of her staff speak Mandarin like Peter, and she hasn't talked with them about supporting children who are dual language learners. Elise isn't sure where to begin. Elise could use this guide as a starting point to learn more about why providing intentional language support is so important. Then she could check out the tools and resources that highlight ways to prepare and adapt the learning environment for a child who is a dual language learner, especially the section "Supporting Children When You Don't Speak the Language." After reviewing the tools and resources, Elise can organize professional development with her staff and help them develop a plan for adapting the learning environment and program practices before Peter begins in the program. She can also reflect on ways to support her staff as they implement change.

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning

Early Childhood
National Centers

WHY IS INTENTIONAL LANGUAGE SUPPORT SO IMPORTANT?

Children learn best when adults support and celebrate their home language. Supporting a child's home language development allows them to build on the concepts they already know. They learn in context, linking their knowledge in their home language to English. By supporting a child's home language, educators ensure that children build on and strengthen skills they already know as they learn English. This also builds children's sense of belonging and connection with their communities. Research indicates that continued support of a child's home language is key to building strong school readiness skills[12] and long-term academic success.

ENACTING CHANGE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ALLOCATE TIME TO SUPPORT AND TEACH TWO OR MORE LANGUAGES

- Brain research shows that bilingual children are not two monolinguals in one. There is enormous variability in second language acquisition that is largely due to exposure. High quality and consistent language input from a young age is critical for children's developing language skills whether they are learning one, two, or more languages.

- It takes time and preparation to support more than one language in the learning environment, including home visits. Set aside planning time with program staff in each program option to focus on specific strategies to include children's home or tribal language(s) in that setting, so children who are dual language learners have continued support throughout the day. Think about and discuss how strategies can be used across program settings.

- Even if your program staff doesn't speak the child's home language(s), they can learn key words and phrases in a child's home or tribal language. Encourage them to choose specific vocabulary words to incorporate during lessons, routines, playtime, and around the learning environment or on a home visit. They can show intentionality by introducing key words from a book in a child's home language before reading the story. For an infant or toddler, staff can learn the word for bottle or milk in the child's home or tribal language and use it along with the English word during feeding time to help children make the connection between the two languages.

- When possible, support staff in inviting or recruiting adults who share the child's home language to read story books and have conversations in the home language so each child will hear, see, and have opportunities to use all their languages. Create a plan with program staff to reinforce those vocabulary words throughout the day in the learning environment or during a home visit. With home visitors, brainstorm ways they can help families use the supports available in the community and school districts to support their English-language learning.

1   McCabe, A., Bornstein, M., Wishard Guerra, A., Kuohirko, Y., Paez, M., Tamis-Lemonda, C., et al. (2013). Multilingual children: Beyond myths and toward best practices. Society for Research in Child Development.

2   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. https://doi.org/10.17226/24677.*

- Intentionally using a child's home language throughout the day helps children connect key pieces of information to prior knowledge they already have, and build on critical skills. By making a plan, educators can be intentional about when, why and how they use language, and take the time to learn key words in advance as necessary. Research shows that children need consistent and meaningful exposure to a language in order to develop that language.

ENGAGE CHILDREN IN CONVERSATION IN BOTH ENGLISH AND THEIR HOME OR TRIBAL LANGUAGE

- A "conversation" will look different for an infant, toddler, or preschooler. Staff should use the language they feel most comfortable speaking, but find ways to include a child's home or tribal language throughout the day.

  - For infants and toddlers, early language learning happens while they are simply listening to the language around them, even before they can talk back. When you say something and pause, they may respond by looking, babbling, or performing an action like pointing, in toddlers. Use their response to keep the interaction going! Model language by using full and complete sentences. Support staff in helping parents recognize when they should talk and how to support back-and-forth interactions in a "conversation" with their child in the language they feel most comfortable. A strong foundation in children's home language enables other language learning later on.

  - For older children, it was once widely thought that they are supposed to listen and learn, but now we know that engaging children in conversation is critical to language development.

- Engaging children in more conversation throughout the day supports their development in language and math. The more opportunities children have to actively participate in conversation, the better their language and math skills. If your program staff doesn't share a home language with a child, there are still ways to engage in conversation. Make time at a staff or coaching meeting to think about ways that you can sustain a back and forth exchange of ideas. That's a conversation! Consider using cue cards with pictures that represent common items or activities, such as milk, nap time, etc. The child and educator can both use these to communicate and connect. Using gestures, or even acting out what you are trying to communicate can encourage idea sharing. Working together to draw a picture, make a song, or build a tower are also good ways to encourage back and forth exchange.

- Children who are dual language learners benefit from small group interactions with program staff and other students.

  - For preschoolers, small group interactions tend to be more child-led and include more conversation. Help staff be deliberate in how they group children. Pair English-speaking children with children for whom English is not their first language. It encourages conversation in English among peers and gives English learners practice with English.

  - For infants and toddlers, staff should only plan small group activity time, as large groups are not optimal for these ages. Adults are able to be more responsive to infants' and toddler's needs in small groups, which is important for building strong relationships. Encourage staff to watch for infants' and toddlers' verbal and nonverbal cues as signs they are joining in the conversation!

- Take time to create a plan that increases the amount of small group time throughout each day. Small group time, including time spent with peers, gives children additional opportunities to practice their language skills[3].

USE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES THAT CELEBRATE CHILDREN WHO ARE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- Choose a curriculum that guides you in individualizing the learning environment, whether that be a classroom, center or the home, to include languages and cultures of all students. Research shows that promoting both the child's home or tribal language and English in every program option is a practice that leads to bilingualism. Bilingualism has a positive impact on children's cognitive, linguistic, and social development as well as their long-term academic achievement.[2]

- Acknowledge that there are differences between English and children's home or tribal languages and cultures and find ways to honor those differences. Talk to children and their families to learn about their background, experiences, language, and culture. Share the value of bilingualism with parents and support them to continue to use their home language. Help families understand the importance of using their home language throughout the day and during focused conversational times.

- Find ways to connect classroom and home experiences. For example, invite families to visit the classroom or socialization setting and read a story or invite them to share words in their home language with children and/or program staff. Family and community members can also help you to prepare a classroom or group socialization space that has print, books, posters, and family history boards in the child's home language. This practice allows each child to see representations of their home language in print. Be intentional about incorporating language, items, and images important to a child's culture in the classroom or group socialization space, without being stereotypical.

3 Espinosa, L. and Magruder, E. (2015). Practical and Proven Strategies for Teaching Young Dual Language Learners. In: L. Espinosa, ed., *Getting It Right for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds: Applying Research to Improve Practice with a Focus on Dual Language Learners, 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, pp.76-113.*

- Use a child's home language to develop their language skills, scaffold, teach content, and assess their knowledge.

  - Use a child's home language in a variety of contexts and across the day. Don't rely on home language only to manage a child's behaviors or reprimand them. When adults use a child's home or tribal language throughout the day, children will associate their home language with positive experiences, not just being in trouble.

  - Assess older children's language skills in their home language(s) to measure progress and in English to measure acquisition. To assess skills in other learning domains, use the language(s) that best capture the child's development and skills in the specific domain. If there isn't a staff member who speaks the home language and no interpreter is available, assessments can be conducted in English, but must be supplemented with structured observations and information in the home language provided by the family.

SYSTEM-WIDE TOOLS AND APPROACHES

THE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT (DLLPA)
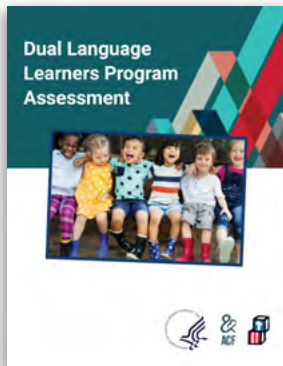
How can you use intentional language to create a supportive learning environment for children who are dual language learners? One place to start is The Dual Language Learners Program Assessment (DLLPA). The DLLPA is a powerful, self-assessment tool that can be used to integrate culturally and linguistically responsive practices across management systems and program services. The DLLPA is rooted in the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) regulation that requires a coordinated approach to serving children who are dual language learners and their families. Program leaders can use the DLLPA to identify areas of strengths and growth opportunities by completing this self-assessment. Access resources for improving practices using the hyperlinks within the DLLPA.

- Access the DLLPA here: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/guide-dual-language-learners-program-assessment-dllpa/dual-language-learners-program-assessment-dllpa-users-guide*

  - The Teaching and Learning Environment section highlights how to implement teaching practices and/or home visiting strategies to support the development of the home language and English. Learn more about this service area and assess your teaching practices for cultural and linguistic responsiveness: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dllpa-teaching-and-learning-environment-508.pdf*

  - The curricula section describes the importance of using developmentally appropriate curricula based on research to support children who are dual language learners. *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dllpa-curricula-508.pdf*
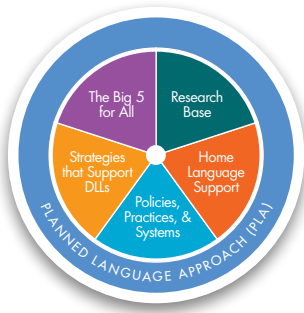

THE EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK (ELOF)

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) is based on a set of guiding principles that outlines the skills, behaviors, and knowledge children should have to be prepared for school. The guiding principles include intentional and responsive strategies and welcoming learning environments that support children who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The ELOF includes five central learning domains including the domain Language and Literacy. Program leaders can use the ELOF and embedded resources to support their team's professional development around language development to help them provide intentional language support. Intentional language support is necessary to help children who are dual language learners meet the developmental goals in the ELOF.

- Explore the ELOF here: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/interactive-head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework-ages-birth-five*

- Use the ELOF Effective Practice Guides to explore what practices to support language and literacy look like in early learning settings: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/effective-practice-guides/effective-practice-guides*

NATIONAL CENTER ON
Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning

THE PLANNED LANGUAGE APPROACH (PLA)

The Planned Language Approach (PLA) is a comprehensive, systemic, research-based way for Head Start and Early Head Start programs to support children's language development, particularly those who are dual language learners. The PLA is grounded in culturally and linguistically responsive practices. It includes resources specifically designed for adults who do not speak the home language(s) of the children in their care. Program leaders can explore the PLA and embedded resources here to support their team's professional development and improve practice.

- In particular, numerous resources address research-based strategies to intentionally center language and culture in supports for children who are dual language learners. Explore the PLA and embedded resources here: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach*

- The PLA focuses on the Big 5, which refers to five key skills related to children's later success in school:

  - *Background knowledge*: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach-background-knowledge*

  - *Oral language and vocabulary*: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach-oral-language-vocabulary*

  - *Book knowledge and print concepts*: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach-book-knowledge-print-concepts*

  - *Alphabet knowledge and early writing*: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach-alphabet-knowledge-early-writing*

  - *Phonological awareness*: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach-phonological-awareness*

MAKING IT WORK (MIW)
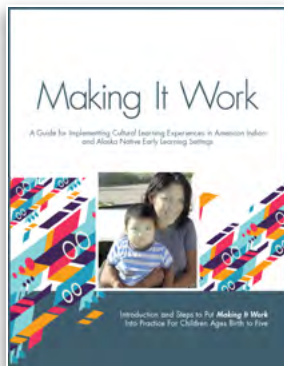
Making It Work (MIW) is a suite of products that American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) programs can use to connect their own unique traditional cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways with the ELOF domains or state and tribal early learning guidelines using their program's selected curriculum(s).

- Programs can use the Making It Work guide to connect tribal cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways to research-based guidelines, including the ELOF and state and/or tribal early learning guidelines: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/making-it-work-implementing-cultural-learning-experiences-american-indian-alaska-native-early*

SPECIFIC PROGRAM PRACTICES

## UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S HOME OR TRIBAL LANGUAGE

- **Acknowledge and communicate the value in supporting each child's home or tribal language** and the benefits of being bilingual to program staff and families. There is a direct link between **school readiness** for children who are dual language learners and their home language skills. Learn more about the benefits of bilingualism and essential role of families in this collection of resources:

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

- **Learn more about the importance of supporting children's home language in this short video.**

  - Resource: *Home Language for Success in School and Life* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/home-language-success-school-life*

- **Understand the impact Native language programs have had in different communities throughout the country in this series of videos.**

  - *https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ana/resource/stories-from-emi-grantees*

- **Review this one-page research brief for information on bilingual language development**.

  - *Growing Up A Dual Language Learner Research Brief* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-02-growing-up-dual-learner.pdf*

PREPARE AND PRACTICE

- **Review the *Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders*** for guidance on how to include home or tribal language and culture in your program and communicate with families. Each principle provides background research, discussion questions, and activities to guide your thinking.

  - Resource: *Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/multicultural-principles-early-childhood-leaders*

- **Be a strong language model** and plan your approach to support children's language and literacy development.

  - Resource: *Classroom Language Models: A Leaders Implementation Guide* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/pps-language-models.pdf*

- **Take the time to practice and help program staff develop the skills needed to support all children's development, regardless of their home language(s)**. While sharing the same home language as a child can help, it takes more than sharing the same language to provide effective support. To support professional development and improve practice, encourage program staff to complete the Individualized Professional Development (iPD) course, Celebrating DLLs: Spring Into Practice. This interactive course has four, on-demand modules that guide learners through research-based effective practices that support children who are dual language learners and their families.

- Resource: iPD course *Celebrating DLLs: Spring Into Practice* available in the iPD Portfolio https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/individualized-professional-development-ipd-portfolio

- **Talk to families about the benefits of bilingualism and strategies for supporting bilingualism in the home.**

  - Resource: *Brilliant Bilingual Babies* https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/brilliant-bilingual-babies

  - Resource: *Dual Language Learners: Considerations and Strategies for Home Visitors* https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/dual-language-learners-considerations-strategies-home-visitors

  - Resource: *Partnering with Families of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners* https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/partnering-families-dll.pdf

---

TRIBAL LANGUAGE SUPPORT
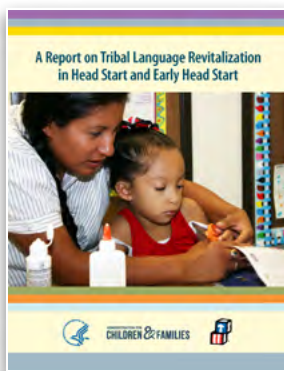
- **Learn about Head Start's efforts to revitalize tribal languages**. The chapters in the Tribal Language Support resource discuss how to prepare and develop a strategy, implement language learning for children and adult learners, and build community support.

  - Report: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/report-tribal-language-revitalization.pdf

- **Explore a toolkit of practical resources for running language nest programs in First Nations' communities**.

  - Language Nest Handbook: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ana/resource/language-nest-handbook

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

MATERIALS AND CURRICULUM

- **Support program staff in fostering a safe and welcoming learning environment**. What changes can program staff make to create a more supportive learning environment for children who are dual language learners? Encourage teachers and family childcare providers to look around their learning environment. Have they created a learning environment that is inclusive of the different languages and cultures of children in their care? Have home visitors consider how they deliver education services on home visits and during group socializations. How can home visitors help families use their materials in the home to support learning? Explore these resources to learn new ways to provide intentional language support.

  - Resource: *Creating Environments That Include Children's Home Languages and Cultures* *https:// eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-creating-environments.pdf*

  - Resource: *Including Children's Home Languages and Cultures* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/ default/files/pdf/dll-childrens-home-languages.pdf*

  - Resource: *Selecting and Using Culturally Responsive Children's Books* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/ sites/default/files/pdf/selecting-culturally-appropriate-books.pdf*

- **Consider your curriculum. Does it support the needs of children who are dual language learners?** Use the curricula section of the DLLPA to learn about the importance of using developmentally appropriate curricula based on research to support children who are dual language learners. *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dllpa-curricula-508.pdf*

- **Support staff in being intentional about how they use a child's home or tribal language and in what contexts.** Staff should use a child's home language to develop his/her language skills, to scaffold, to teach content, and to assess, not just for managing behavior.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WHEN YOU DON'T SPEAK THE LANGUAGE

- **Learn about ways to support children's home language when you don't speak their language in this series of resources.**

  - Resource: *Specific Strategies to Support Dual Language Learners When Adults Do Not Speak the Language* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/ specific-strategies-support-dual-language-learners-dlls-when-adults-do-not*

- **Download the Ready DLL mobile app** to access key words and phrases in the home language of children in your care. Encourage program staff to use the app to communicate with children and their families. The app also includes general strategies for supporting children who are dual language learners.

  - Ready DLL Mobile App: *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/ready-dll-mobile-app*

ENGAGE CHILDREN IN CONVERSATION

- **Engage young children in conversation**, whether you are speaking to a child in English or their home language. Learn tips for getting the conversation going!

  - Resource: *15-minute suite: Engaging Children in Conversations* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/engaging-children-conversations-birth-five*

- **Understand that code switching is a natural part of children's bilingual language development**. Program staff and families should support children when they code switch and not try to correct them. Practice how to respond to code switching throughout this helpful resource, *Code Switching – Why It Matters And How To Respond*

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

VOCABULARY AND LITERACY

- **Support staff in choosing specific vocabulary words that they and families can build in throughout the day or during a home visit**. For staff who don't speak the child's language, it's helpful for them to learn important words and phrases from families to help scaffold children's learning. Make a plan with staff on how to reinforce vocabulary words.

- **Use dialogic reading strategies** to foster literacy skills and engage children who are dual language learners during book reading activities. Show intentionality by reading a story in a child's home language first.

  - Resource: L*earning Module: Dialogic Reading That Supports Children Who Are Dual Language Learners and Their Families* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/dialogic-reading-supports-children-who-are-dual-language-learners-their*

ASSESSMENT

- **Consider how you screen and assess the developmental progress of children who are dual language learners**. Providing intentional language support also means using fair assessments that measure what children know and can do across all of their languages.

  - Resource: *Measuring What Children Can Do in All Languages* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/measuring-what-children-can-do-all-languages-developmental-assessment-children-who-are-dual*

  - Resource: *Screening Dual Language Learners In Early Head Start And Head Start* *https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/child-screening-assessment/article/screening-dual-language-learners-early-head-start-head-start-guide-program-leaders*

  - Resource: *Language Assessment and Proficiency Tools – ANA Webinar* *https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ana/resource/language-assessment-and-profiency*

INCLUSION

- **Adapt strategies and activities** for children who are dual language learners with disabilities or suspected delays to promote meaningful interactions and active participation.

  - Resource: *Supporting Children Who Are Dual Language Learners (DLLs) with Disabilities or Suspected Delays* *https://hsicc.cmail20.com/t/ViewEmail/j/9FE3BDE017A9E8DE2540EF23F30FEDED/FA208C9D2D6FD0F9948D468F162BC46E*

REFLECTION

Program leaders are encouraged to use these questions for their own reflection after working through this guide. These questions can also be used with program staff as reflection tools during a professional development training or experience.

What is one thing you can do to provide more intentional language support to children who are dual language learners? Use this question for both personal reflection and to guide your program staff in reflection.

What is one change that will require more planning, but that you can implement in the near future?

What kind of support do you need to help identify and implement this change to best support culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families?