

Dual Language Learners: Program and Family Support Module

Handout: Conversations to Gather Language Information

Introduction

The charts on the following pages list sample questions educators can ask families of young children who are dual language learners to gather language information. Alongside each question is a note about what you learn by asking each question and why that information is important.

Gathering Language Background Information

Sample Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
What language(s) does your family speak?	This tells you which language(s) the child hears and uses.	Educators need to know which language(s) the child hears and uses to assess and support.
How much experience or exposure does your child have with the(se) languages? Can you give me some examples, like “both parents speak the language with him at home” or “he hears the language when his grandmother visits”?	You learn if the family is speaking their home language with their child and if they have any concerns about it.	Families may not know how essential it is to continue their child’s home language development.
Can you tell me about your child’s use of English?	How much English the child has learned from other children and adults in their lives.	It is important to know about the child’s exposure to (and possible use of) English to plan appropriate levels of support at school.

Simultaneous or Sequential?

Sample Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
Did your child grow up hearing and/or using two languages from birth?	You gain an increased understanding of the child's language background, experiences, and development.	It provides a context for deciding in which languages to screen or assess the child's abilities.
Did your child grow up hearing one language from birth, and then learn a second language (or multiple languages) after turning 2 years old?	The amount of time a child has had to learn each of their languages.	It helps inform ongoing assessment practices about what the child understands, what they can communicate, and how they communicate.
How old was your child when the second language was introduced?	You learn and understand that the child may know concepts in one language and other concepts in another.	This helps inform curriculum planning, teaching strategies, and individualizing instruction.

Language Dominance

Sample Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
Does your child use one language more often than the other?	This tells you if the child is stronger in one language than another.	It is essential to account for what the child knows in each language.
When your child wants to communicate, do they prefer using one language over another? Does it vary with peers, siblings, parents, or teachers?	You learn whether children use their language with different groups because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some settings require one language versus another. They feel more comfortable using one language over another. 	To have an understanding of each setting (specifically, the who and where) in which a child uses their languages gives staff insight into what they may know in each language. Language use may also change as the child becomes more comfortable in their classroom setting.

Home Language Experiences

Sample Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
Who are the people who speak with your child in your home language?	Who is involved with the child's learning of their home language How much the child hears it each week What information (background knowledge) they have learned in their home language	Educators get a sense of where to begin when the child enters the program in order to ensure that they are initially welcomed, comfortable, and successful. Educators also gather information to support the child's second language learning.
How much time did your child spend using your home language last year?	Same as above	Same as above
What experiences or activities has your child had in your home language?	Same as above	Same as above
What experiences with reading and writing has your child had in their home language?	Same as above	Same as above

English Language Experiences

Sample Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
Who are the sources of English language for your child? From what age?	You learn how long the child has been learning English and from whom.	Educators can support the child better if they know: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the child knows • How well they know it • How much English they have been exposed to • How to support their English and continued development of their home language

Sample Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
How much time has your child spent using English in the past year?	This tell you how often the child hears English.	Same as above
What experiences or activities has your child had in English?	You learn if the child has any experience with reading and writing English.	

Individual Child Characteristics

Sample Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
What are your child's interests and favorite activities?	This gives educators a well-rounded picture of the child.	Educators can plan activities and learning opportunities that will engage and interest children from the beginning . The more comfortable and positive a child feels in their first days at school, the more they will be able to learn.
What does your child especially like to play with?	Same as above	Same as above
What experiences does your child remember and talk about with you? Would you be able to share an example?	Same as above	Same as above