Supporting Our Young Dual Language Learners: From Practice to Policy

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Acknowledgement

Supporting Our Young Dual Language Learners: From Practice to Policy is one component of a larger publication, the Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC) Report. The DLLTC Report was developed under the leadership of Alliance for a Better Community, Antonia Lopez of National Council of La Raza, and Dr. Marlene Zepeda of California State University, Los Angeles. Early education experts from around the nation, which comprised the DLLTC Advisory National Committee, helped guide the contents of the report. We would like to extend our utmost appreciation to them.

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Policy Brief

California has a significant Dual Language Learner (DLL) population with a diverse background. Yet, the academic achievement of DLL students lags far below those who are not classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) in the K-12 education system. How well early care and education (ECE) teachers understand child development and support the learning of DLLs contributes significantly to their success in the school.

Adequate teacher preparation is at the core of determining academic success for DLLs. However, there is no system in place to ensure that all ECE educators receive training as it relates to dual language development and cultural competency. The critical importance of preparing our current and growing future ECE workforce has recently been acknowledged by California and steps are being taken at both the local and state levels. However, further commitment and structures must be in place in early education settings, particularly preschools, to ensure that DLLs have the best possible learning experience.

YOUNG DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS (DLLs)

Defined by the Office of Head Start, Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are children learning two or more languages, as well as those learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. Young DLLs are frequently also classified as English Language Learners (ELLs). One of the states with the highest number and share of DLL students is California where many of them are enrolled in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the nation’s second largest school district. During the 2009–2010 school year, LAUSD classified 40% of its incoming kindergarten students as ELLs. Statewide, ELL kindergarten enrollment was slightly lower at 36%.

While the last few years have seen a decrease in the percentage of DLL students, a large percentage of children continue to grow in households where English is not the first language. According to the 2000 Census, 54.1% of households in Los Angeles County speak a language other than English at home. However it is estimated that in 2010, the percentage increased to 56.4.

The diversity of families and children is also reflected in the 53 languages identified by the California Department of Education (CDE) as spoken by ELLs. Within the LAUSD, Spanish is the most frequently spoken language other than English, followed by Armenian and Korean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Kindergarten Student and ELL Enrollment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
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<td>2009-10</td>
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</tbody>
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SCHOOL READINESS

There is consensus among the education, policy and economics fields that in order to succeed as a nation, our students must be academically prepared to engage in 21st century opportunities and careers. As a predictor of achievement in young students, third grade reading test scores assess children’s academic attainment in their early education years and not only high school graduation but also college enrollment and success. In California, 23% of third graders statewide and 26% of those in LAUSD, scored below/far below in English-Language Arts on the 2012 California Standardized Test (CST). When the data is further disaggregated by English Learners, the number of third grade students scoring below basic significantly increase to 40% at the state level and 50% within LAUSD.

The academic achievement gap between DLL and non-DLL students in high school graduation settings further illustrate the marginalization young learners can face if they are not adequately prepared to succeed in school. A study of factors predicting high school graduation and college enrollment among LAUSD students revealed that only 33% of ELL students graduated from high school in four years and only 11% graduated having completed the courses needed to enroll in a four-year university.

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS

The large number of EL students, in particular young DLL children, and the significant role teachers play during the early academic years of a student exemplifies the need to prepare a highly qualified workforce that reflects a deep knowledge of the linguistic and cultural diversity of its students. The support that educators impart on children and their families plays a key role in fostering the learning environments necessary for young DLLs to develop the skills to succeed once they enter the K-12 school system. While specific data on the characteristics and training levels of the ECE workforce is limited, a 2006 study by Dr. Marcy Whitebook, Director of the Center for the Study of Childcare Employment at UC Berkeley, revealed that children under the age of five are cared for by approximately 130,000 people (teachers, assistant teachers, center directors, and family child care home providers) throughout California. Due to the high number of children under the age of five, close to 30% (36,310) of the total state ECE workforce works in Los Angeles County. Furthermore, the number of child care workers and preschool teachers within the Los Angeles-Long Beach Metropolitan Statistical Area is expected to increase by 37% and 36% respectively between 2006 and 2016. The large and growing number of ECE educators in a geographic area with a high number of DLLs indicates the ongoing need to prepare and train teachers to adequately care for and educate diverse children.

Ultimately, ECE educators in California, as well as the rest of the nation, are not being prepared to help the development of young DLLs. The 2006 ECE workforce study further revealed that only 18% of family child care providers participated in non-credit

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### 2009-2010 Top 5 Languages Spoken in School (other than English)

**CALIFORNIA**
1. Spanish
2. Vietnamese
3. Filipino (Pilipino or Tagalog)
4. Cantonese
5. Hmong

**LAUSD**
1. Spanish
2. Armenian
3. Korean
4. Filipino (Pilipino or Tagalog)
5. Somali

California Department of Education, 2011

### ELL 3rd Grade Reading Scores, California Standardized Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CALIF.</th>
<th>L.A. COUNTY</th>
<th>LAUSD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced/Proficient</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below/Far Below</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

California Department of Education, 2011
cultural and linguistic relevant training. Similarly, only 15% of providers with some college experience reported that they completed college coursework focused on children who are dual language learners.\textsuperscript{xv} While the number of ECE educators who have received specific training in cultural and linguistic competency is low, a high percentage of them have regular interaction with non-English speaking families. In Los Angeles County, for example, 61% of family providers and 59% of assistant teachers reported they are more likely to communicate with young learners and their families in a language other than English.\textsuperscript{xvi}

\textbf{STATE POLICY AND INITIATIVES}

The passage of Proposition 227 in 1998 classifies California as an ‘English only’ state,\textsuperscript{xvii} thereby mandating children to enter a K-12 system based on English only instruction. While there are no state requirements for preschool teachers working with Dual Language Learners as early education programs and services are exempt from Proposition 227, the Child Development Division of the California Department of Education (CDE), has taken steps to address DLLs within its preschools. In 2008, CDE developed the California Preschool Learning Foundations which included an English-Language Development domain detailing the knowledge and skills children, whose home language is not English, can achieve during their second language development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.\textsuperscript{xviii}

In 2010 and in conjunction with First 5 California, CDE released the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Competencies, which highlight dual language development in one of their competency areas. The overall purpose of the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Competencies is to provide a coherent structure and content school site practices to foster the professional development of ECE educators; inform the course of study that early childhood educators follow as they pursue study in institutions of higher education; provide guidance in the definition of ECE credentials and certifications; and give comprehensive descriptions of the knowledge, skills and dispositions that early childhood educators need to support young children’s learning and development across program types.\textsuperscript{xix} The CDE Early Childhood Educator Competencies provide a broad baseline of the skills needed for quality instruction from ECE teachers. However, a comprehensive and detailed look into fundamental knowledge, skills and abilities needed by teachers to support DLLs and their families will strengthen CDE’s Competencies. With this in mind, the Alliance for a Better Community (ABC) coordinated the development of Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC), focusing on the Socioemotional and Language & Literacy competencies preschool teachers need in working with DLLs and their families. More recently, the CDE/CDD is also working with experts in dual language development and ECE fields to incorporate best practices for dual language learners in the updated version of the California Preschool Program Guidelines.

\textbf{Developing the Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC)}

From 2010-2011, the Alliance for a Better Community convened a body of early education and language development experts from across the nation to develop Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC) for preschool teachers. Under the leadership of Antonia Lopez, National Council of La Raza, and Dr. Marlene Zepeda, California State University, Los Angeles, advisory members were identified to help guide the development of preschool teacher competencies to support the learning and development of culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families. Advisory members were identified based on their history and expertise in research and practice in early education settings as well their leadership within the field. In addition, input sessions with current ECE teachers and professional development administrators assisted the development of the competencies.

Guided by core principles, the DLLTC addressed two domains: (1) Language and Literacy and (2) Socioemotional Development. The competencies details the knowledge and skills educators need at different stages of their careers based on their language ability and cultural competency.

The DLLTC and accompanying documents can be downloaded at www.afabc.org.
Recommendations

In order to optimize the cognitive and social emotional development of young dual language learners the education and training of their teachers is critical. By standing for and promoting policy changes at the state and local level, elected officials and other stakeholders provide teachers of DLL children with tools and resources to support high quality instruction to close the achievement gap. Recommendations are offered for action at the state and local level:

State Level

• Strengthen the current ECE workforce by prioritizing efforts to increase the number of teachers who receive training in understanding dual language acquisition and the socioemotional development of DLLs.

• Include indicators in quality rating improvement scales and systems that highlight program’s abilities to address the linguistic and socioemotional development of dual language learners (i.e. Race to the Top Early Learning Fund).

• Streamline and centralize a data collection system that analyzes the current workforce including variables such as educational status, job title, compensation, bilingual ability, and specified coursework and/or training focused on DLLs.

• Supplement efforts in integrating teacher competencies with higher education coursework to include the DLLTCs. Increase investments in efforts to test and evaluate cultural and linguistic appropriateness of measures focused on teacher effectiveness.

Local Level

• Integrate the DLLTC in existing and proposed professional development efforts including coaching and mentoring, teacher observation, assessment and evaluation such as Los Angeles County's Steps to Excellence Program (STEP) and LAUP’s 5 Star Quality Assessment and Improvement System.

• Identify and expand opportunities for evidence-based culturally and linguistically relevant professional development (credit and non-credit) offered by groups such as First 5 LA, Los Angeles Universal Preschool, local resource and referral agencies, the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) and WestEd.

• Support and provide economic incentives to recruit and retain bilingual early educators and administrators.

• Increase the number of early education centers that develop site specific strategies and practices that support the professional development of teachers and the linguistic and socioemotional development of DLLs.

CONCLUSION

Despite the large number of students in California and Los Angeles County with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the current ECE workforce is not adequately trained to support the educational development of Dual Language Learners. With over a third of children entering the K-12 education system as English Language Learners and only 11% successfully completing high school graduation ready to go on to university, preparing the teachers who play a critical role during the most important years of a child’s life and education is essential. With this in mind, ABC offers several recommendations to support professional development training the current and future ECE workforce needs. Our recommendations and the Dual Language Learner Teacher Competencies (DLLTC) bring us one step closer in ensuring teachers have the tools necessary and are competent to support the needs of children and their families.

ENDNOTES


ii - This brief utilizes Dual Language Learner (DLL) and English Language Learner (ELL) interchangeably.


vii - Data for this district is not available since the Los Angeles Unified School District did not complete and certify the Spring 2010-11 CALPADS Data Submission. Therefore English learner (EL) data by language or Fluent-English Proficient (FEP) data by language is not available.


xii - Whitebook, Marcy; Sakia, Laura; Kipnis, Fran; Lee, Yuna; Bellm Dan; Almaraz, Mirella; and Tran, Paulina. “California Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Licensed Child Care Providers Los Angeles County 2006.” Center for Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2006. Web. <http://ceo.lacounty.gov/ccp/pdf/la%20fcch%20report%2007-28-06.pdf>


xv - Whitebook, Marcy; Sakia, Laura; Kipnis, Fran; Lee, Yuna; Bellm Dan; Almaraz, Mirella; and Tran, Paulina. “California Early Care and Education Workforce Study: Licensed Child Care Providers Statewide 2006.” Center for Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley, 2006. Web. <http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/csccce/wp-content/uploads/2006/01/statewide_centers.pdf>
The Alliance for a Better Community (ABC), a non-profit, has actively participated in significant educational justice and health campaigns for over 10 years. Its model collaborative approach to systemic reform – connecting communities to decision-makers in order to promote solutions to the region’s most vexing challenges – has led to remarkable achievements in under-served communities.

Founded in 2000, ABC promotes equity for Latinos in education, health, economic development and civic engagement for the betterment of the Los Angeles region.