



RESEARCH BRIEF #2

Policy and Practice Issues Related to Serving Dual Language Learners: Summary from Listening Sessions

Overview

CECER-DLL conducted a series of listening sessions to obtain information concerning the most pressing needs related to the early care and education of DLLs. This brief focuses on issues that were raised related to gaps in knowledge and challenges in providing high quality early care and education to young DLLs. Between March and October 2010, four listening sessions were conducted at early childhood conferences with a wide variety of participants, including researchers, practitioners, state administrators, and policy-makers.¹ Based on discussions across sessions, the following themes were identified.

Key Themes

- 1. A broader array of professional development opportunities are needed to support practitioners in promoting the learning and development of DLLs.** Such professional development should include both teacher preparation programs and continuing education within early childhood settings. Teacher education programs should offer foundational coursework in dual language development and research-based approaches for teaching DLLs such as methods for incorporating the child's first language (L1) within the general curriculum and providing other instructional supports needed by DLLs. Professional development should include a range of ongoing supports such as coaching, mentoring, guided feedback and corrective feedback, and opportunities for collaboration. Within institutions of higher learning, teacher education programs should include courses on DLLs and applied experiences, and programs should provide an array of credentialing and degree options. In addition, government and program policies should be examined to ensure that they promote providers' opportunities for professional development, including provisions for financial aid for both new and experienced teachers.
- 2. Strategies are needed for enhancing the recruitment and retention of qualified practitioners to work with DLLs and their families.** The educational infrastructure contains several gaps that prevent fully supporting the recruitment and retention of practitioners who are qualified to work with DLLs. Recruitment strategies need to be developed and implemented to increase the number of providers who work with DLLs, especially multilingual teachers. In addition to the need for qualified personnel in center-based programs, particular attention should be paid to enhancing the availability of these providers in family child care, programs outside of the subsidy system, and license-exempt programs. Policies that provide financial incentives for increased education or improvements in classroom quality also can increase teacher retention.

¹The conferences included the Preschool California Early Learning Dual Language Learner Forum, Los Angeles, CA; the FPG Infant-Toddler Child Care Meeting, Chapel Hill, NC; the Head Start National Research Conference, Washington DC; the Meeting of State Administrators at the Child Care Policy Research Consortium Meeting, Washington DC.

3. **Strategies are needed to improve the access to and utilization of early care and education services by families of DLLs.** Early care and education programs need guidance to develop policies and practices that will improve access and limit barriers for families of DLLs. For example, such practices might include hiring outreach workers and staff with similar cultural and language backgrounds as the families, providing written materials in families' home languages, offering access to interpreters, and reducing any barriers to the enrollment process (e.g., interview requirements and internet access). In implementing such policies, it is necessary to ensure that these policies do not inadvertently limit participation when providers with the desired qualifications are not available.
4. **Guidance is needed for practitioners around methods for evaluating DLL children's skills in first (L1) and second (L2) languages.** Guidance is needed on measuring children's skills, both in their home language and in English, and in monitoring the child's development in L1 and L2. Issues to be addressed include considering the appropriateness of measures for different types of programs, settings, cultural and linguistic groups, and age groups; obtaining information from multiple sources; aligning assessment with early learning standards or goals; and involving families in the assessment process, including sharing results. An important outcome of such practices would be to reduce misdiagnosis and referrals of DLLs to special education.
5. **Early care and education of DLLs requires recognition that growth and development takes place within the context of a larger system.** Policies and practices that emphasize child outcomes to the exclusion of broader systemic factors risk overlooking important contextual issues (e.g., families and communities, classroom quality) that affect the learning and development of DLLs. In addition, before applying education policies and practices designed for older, school-age children, these approaches should be carefully reviewed to determine their developmental appropriateness for younger DLLs. ●

About CECER-DLL

CECER-DLL is a national center that is building capacity for research with dual language learners (DLLs) ages birth through five years. CECER-DLL aims to improve the state of knowledge and measurement in early childhood research on DLLs, identify and advance research on best practices for early care and education programming, and develop and disseminate products to improve research on DLLs. CECER-DLL is a cooperative agreement between the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children & Families (ACF), in collaboration with the Office of Head Start and the Office of Child Care. For additional information, see <http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu>

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