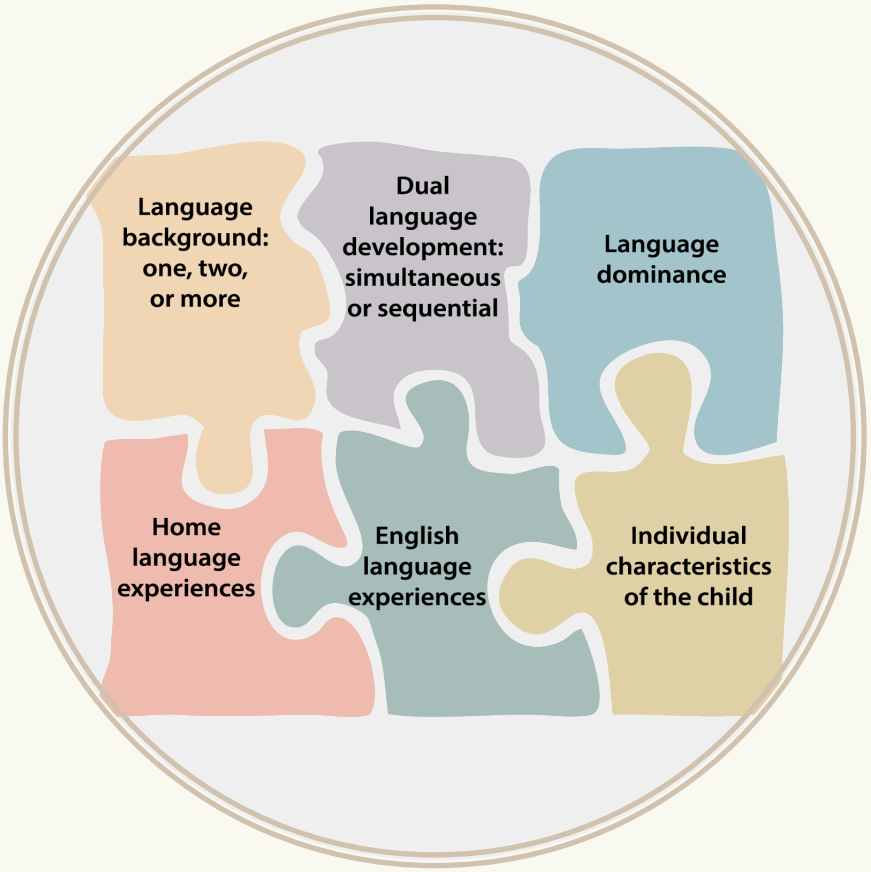
Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share

EXPANDED!

One-third of the children in Early Head Start and Head Start are Dual Language Learners (DLLs). Recent research provides insights into dual language development and key ways to support children's progress. The studies note

- many similarities among ALL children (e.g., children are born with natural capabilities for language and for learning),
- key differences between children growing up with one language and children who are DLLs (e.g. children may learn some ideas, such as counting, in one of their languages but not in the other), and
- children who are DLLs are each unique individuals with unique experiences, learning styles, and preferences.

When adults understand children's past experiences with language/s they are able to build upon those experiences and support their optimal progress.



Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share

THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

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Young Dual Language Learners: Gathering Background Information

Considerations	Possible Questions to Ask Parents and Families
Language background: one, two, or more	What language(s) does your family speak? How much experience (exposure) has your child had with the(se) languages? Is your child growing up with two languages? If so, what are the languages? Can you tell me about your child's use of English (if at all)?
Dual language development: simultaneous or sequential	Did your child grow up with two languages from birth (simultaneous)? Did your child grow up with one language from birth, and then learn a second language after the age of two (sequential)? How old was s/he when the second language was introduced? About how much time does your child spend using his/her home language (speaking, listening, comprehending)? About how much time does your child spend using English (speaking, listening, comprehending)?
Language dominance	Does your child use one of his/her languages more often than the other? When your child wants to communicate, which language does he/she use?
Home language experiences	Who are the people in your child's life who speak the home language to him/her? What are some experiences or activities your child has using language (e.g., speaking Chinese each evening while cooking with grandmother; speaking Spanish with father while doing weekend chores)? What experiences with early reading and writing has your child had in his/her home language?
English language experiences	Who are the people in your child's life who speak English to him/her (e.g., the librarian during weekly story hour; older brother in the evening)? What experiences with early reading and writing has your child had in English?
Individual characteristics of the child	What are your child's interests and favorite activities? • Are there toys or things that your child especially likes to play with? • Are there pretend play activities that your child likes? • What does your child like to talk about? • What does your child like to learn about? • Can you give examples of experiences from the past that your child can recall and talk about?

Collecting Information From the Families of Dual Language Learners (DLLs)

Language Background		
Possible Questions	**What You Learn**	**Why It Matters**
What language(s) does your family speak? How much experience (exposure) has your child had with the(se) languages? Can you tell me about her use of English (if at all)?	Which languages the child has been exposed to and how much she has heard and/or spoken each of her languages If the family is speaking their Home Language to their children and if they have concerns about it Some children learn a great deal of English at home from adults, older children, and others in their lives	Staff need to know which languages to assess and support. The amount of exposure a child has to a language directly affects her ability to learn it. The rule of thumb is that a child has to hear a language at least 25% of the time. Many families may not know how critical keeping their Home Language is to their child's development. Others consider it important. Staff learn each family's beliefs and preferences so they can plan the best ways to partner with each family. Some children learn a great deal of English at home from adults and older children. Others may not have any exposure, and many are in-between. It is important to have an idea of how much English a child may know in order to plan for welcoming her into the classroom and for promoting her learning from the start.

Collecting Information From the Families of Dual Language Learners (DLLs)

Simultaneous and Sequential		
Possible Questions	**What You Learn**	**Why It Matters**
Did your child grow up with two languages from birth (simultaneous)? Did your child grow up with one language from birth, and then learn a second language after the age of two (sequential)? How old was s/he when the second language was introduced?	Increased understanding of a child's language background, experiences, and development Understanding the amount of time a child has had to acquire and learn each of their languages Understanding that the child may know some concepts in one language and some in the other	Provides a context for deciding the language(s) in which to screen the child Helps inform on-going assessment practices; i.e., understanding how much time a child has had with each of their languages can help observers understand a child's communication and gather information about what he knows and can do Helps inform curriculum planning and teaching methods; a child may need non-verbal cues and communications or prefer one language to another

Collecting Information From the Families of Dual Language Learners (DLLs)

Language Dominance		
Possible Questions	**What You Learn**	**Why It Matters**
Does your child use one of his languages more often than the other? When he wants to communicate, does he prefer using one of his languages? Does it vary with peers…with siblings…with parents…with teachers?	Is the child stronger in one language or another? He may use his languages with different groups because • some settings require one language over the other (e.g., grandparents do not speak English), or • he feels more comfortable.	Children have more knowledge in their dominant language than in their less dominant one, and it is important to find out what they know in both. Understanding where and with whom a child uses his languages gives staff insight into what he may know in each language, and his developing beliefs about the value of each language. These insights will need to be verified as the staff get to know him better.

Home Language Experiences		
Possible Questions	**What You Learn**	**Why It Matters**
Who are the people who speak your Home Language with your child? How much time did she spend using your Home Language in the last year? What experiences or activities has she had in your Home Language? (E.g., trips, daily living, going on routine errands, in church, etc.) What experiences with reading and writing has she had in her Home Language?	Staff learn about • who she is learning her home language from and how much time she hears it each week, and • what information (i.e., background knowledge) she has learned in her home language.	Teaching staff get a sense of where to begin when the child enters the program in order to ensure she is initially successful. They are also gathering information about how to support her second language.

Collecting Information From the Families of Dual Language Learners (DLLs)

English Language Experiences		
Possible Questions	**What You Learn**	**Why It Matters**
Who are the sources of English language for your child? From what age? How much time has he spent using English in the last year? What experiences or activities has he had in his Home Language?	Staff learn about • how long the child has been learning English and from whom, • how often he hears English, and • experience with reading and writing English, if any.	This information helps staff know • what the child knows, • how well he knows it, • how much English he has been exposed to, and • how to support his Home Language.

Individual Characteristics of Each Child		
Possible Questions	**What You Learn**	**Why It Matters**
What are your child's interests and favorite activities? Are there materials she especially likes to play with? Are there pretend play activities that she likes to repeat? When does she use language? What experiences does she remember and talk to you about? Examples?	Staff have an excellent picture of the child and can plan activities and learning opportunities that will engage and interest her from the beginning.	The more comfortable and positive a child is in the first days in EHS/HS, the more she is able to learn.