

SAMIE DIFFERENT AND DIVERSE



Understanding Children Who Are Dual Language Learners (DLLs)

One third of the children enrolled in Early Head Start and Head Start are Dual Language Learners (DLLs). They are a diverse group who have different languages, experiences, strengths, and gifts. Recent research points out the

- *Similarities* among ALL young children – those who are learning one or several languages (e.g., children are born with natural capabilities for language and for learning);
- *Differences* between children growing up with one language (monolinguals) and children who are DLLs (e.g., children may learn some ideas such as counting, in one of their languages but not the other); and
- *Diversity* among children who are DLLs (e.g., individual differences of temperament, interests, etc.).

EHS/HS programs can best support the school readiness for Dual Language Learners when they understand each child's unique characteristics and needs.

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Understanding Children Who Are Dual Language Learners



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Cultural and Linguistic
Responsiveness

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Important Similarities Among ALL Children



ALL Children Have	What the Research Says
A natural capacity for learning and communication	Infants and toddlers who are learning one language, and those who are simultaneously learning more than one language, achieve developmental language milestones at the same time, e.g., babbling, first words, first word combinations (Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2011).
A biological capacity for language/s	Children are born with the ability to learn language/s. They can process and store individual sounds from different languages and remember the rules of grammar in each language (Byers-Heinlein, Burns, & Werker, 2010).
Ability to process multiple language/s	Children who are exposed to two languages prenatally are able to process both, and recognize that the two languages are separate (Byers-Heinlein, Burns, & Werker, 2010).
Need for environments that support their culture and language/s	<p>Children’s environments can be additive or subtractive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Additive” environments support children to develop one or more languages, and within one or more cultures. • “Subtractive” environments give children the message that diversity is not valued (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004).
<p>A need for teachers to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully understand where they are “at” • Plan and provide effective teaching targeted to their developmental needs 	<p>The Head Start Program Performance Standards are based on a comprehensive approach to education that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports all areas of children’s development. • Engages families as partners in their child’s education so they can <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ promote their child’s learning at home, and ○ share vital information about their child’s development. • Expects teachers to know what knowledge and skills children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ have and have not mastered, ○ are learning but have not mastered, and ○ do not yet know. • Requires teachers to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ individualize the curriculum to the specific needs and strengths of each child, and ○ scaffold the curriculum with targeted learning experiences that support each child to learn new concepts and skills.

Key Differences Between DLLs and Monolingual Children



Key Differences	What the Research Says
Different developmental pathways	Children who are DLLs may initially learn a concept, e.g., big and little, in one of their languages and not know the words for the concept in the other one yet. On the other hand, they may have different amounts of exposure to their two languages at different times; for example, there may be big spurts in one language when Grandma comes to visit and a sharp decrease in progress when she leaves.
Opportunities to code switch (language mix)	Dual Language Learners are able to switch between two languages. Code switching is a typical feature of dual language development and provides children with rich communication because they can use both languages.
Greater demands on memory	Children who are DLLs must store two sets of sounds, two sets of grammar rules, and two groups of vocabulary in memory. Their brains become very active and flexible (Zelasko & Antunez, 2000). They also develop strong thinking skills (Kessler & Quinn, 1980), and increased abilities to focus, remember, and make decisions (Bialystok, 2001).
Development within two (or more) cultures	Children who are DLLs develop in two or more cultural environments, learning multiple sets of cultural behaviors, ways of thinking, behaving, interacting, etc. This provides them with a broader understanding of the human experience and more skills in adapting to different expectations (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004).

DLLs Are a Highly Diverse Group



Children Have Different	For Example...	Why This Matters...
Languages	Children and their families may speak languages and dialects from around the world.	Every language has unique rules for grammar (syntax), etc., which those who speak the language must learn and use. If a family is one of a few speakers of their language in their community, the children have less exposure and opportunity to practice their home language.
Cultures	Children from the same language background may not share the same cultures even if they come from the same country.	Different cultures often have different expectations about how to communicate with one another and with whom, conversational rules, body language, etc.
Developmental pathways and experiences	Children may have different types of access to their home language(s) and to English, such as different <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speakers; • settings, e.g., home, school, church, and community; and • amounts and types of experience with each language, etc. 	Children may learn one language from one parent and one from another, OR they may hear their second language only when their grandparents visit or on weekends at church, etc.

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Children Have Different	Examples...	Why This Matters...
Community experiences	Children may live in communities in which speakers of the home language are numerous or in communities where there are few speakers.	A family may be the only speaker of their language in their community so the children only hear the language from their own family.
Family values and beliefs about home language	Some families may have a strong desire to have their children develop their home language/s; other families may prefer that their children only learn English.	If parents believe that learning their home language WILL limit their success in the United States, they may choose to teach them that English is more valuable and to diminish the value of their home language.
Individual child characteristics	Children who are DLLs demonstrate a wide range of individual characteristics, as do monolingual children, e.g., aptitude, interests, temperament, etc.	PLEASE NOTE: Children with cognitive disabilities can and do learn multiple languages at the same levels of competence (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004).

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