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**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GUIDE:
INTEGRATING CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY
RESPONSIVE PRACTICES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN WHO
ARE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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Taking the time to understand our own culture and beliefs about language, as well as working to understand different points of view is one of the best ways to support children who are dual language learners.

How we act and what we say everyday matters. Children are watching and learning not only from what we say, but also what we do, AND what we don't say. We all have different backgrounds and experiences, which lead to different ways of being and even to different beliefs about when and how language should be learned and used. By examining our own culture and our beliefs about language development, we can be more intentional about how we show up as we work to support children who are dual language learners.

CONTENTS

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE	3
WHY IS THIS WORK SO IMPORTANT?	4
ENACTING CHANGE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES	4
SYSTEM-WIDE TOOLS AND APPROACHES	6
SPECIFIC PROGRAM PRACTICES	8
REFLECTION	11



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This is the first of three guides designed to support program leaders, including education managers, as they develop practices and systems to support the full and effective participation of children who are dual language learners and their families. Use this series of guides, including a guide dedicated to intentional language support and one on family engagement, to review the latest evidence-based practices that support children who are dual language learners and their families. These guides also serve as a resource to inform trainings and areas requiring additional support. Begin with this guide to help program staff reflect on their own understanding and beliefs about learning and speaking more than one language. By reflecting on our own understandings, we are better able to make changes to our daily practices. Everyone has a role in the life of the children and families their program serves. This means that from the individual to the programmatic level, everyone must be engaged in culturally and linguistically responsive practices. To help programs in this work, there are resources and tools to analyze and improve practice embedded throughout this guide.

USING THIS GUIDE: AN EXAMPLE



Alex is a director of an Early Head Start Program in Los Angeles, CA. Many of the staff in the program speak Spanish and English, as do the majority of the families they serve. While Alex is usually happy with the programs ability to meet the needs of the children and families they serve, Alex thinks there is room for improvement. Alex could use this guide to reflect on his own understanding of what it means to learn and use more than one language, and the ways that he integrates culturally and linguistically responsive practices into his work every day. Then, based on his own reflection and learning, he can use the tools and resources outlined in the guide to create a series of professional development sessions for his staff to explore their own beliefs and develop strategies to integrate culturally and linguistically responsive practices program-wide.



WHY IS THIS WORK SO IMPORTANT?

IT IS CRITICAL TO INTEGRATE CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

Our actions and words signal who is welcome and who is an ‘outsider.’ Often, we don’t know if we are doing something that makes children feel alone or uncomfortable. We all learn best in environments where we feel comfortable, accepted and safe. It is wonderful to warmly welcome a child into a learning environment, or greet them at home during a home visit. But this is just the beginning. Program staff need to adapt and change the physical and social environments to make it more comfortable for each child. In order to make those changes, we first have to recognize how our own culture and beliefs shape our day-to-day behaviors, language and environment. This is because new research indicates that what educators believe about language learning translates into their own teaching practices¹. Our beliefs affect how we think about ourselves and others, and how we act. Some beliefs are unconscious, we may not even know that we hold them, but they can still influence our behavior. For example, educators may, unconsciously, hold the false belief that English is somehow “better” than other languages or that the way that ideas are expressed in English is “normal.” These unconscious or implicit biases can translate to teaching practices that don’t fully support children’s dual language development.

ENACTING CHANGE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

EXAMINE PERSONAL BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDINGS, ESPECIALLY AROUND LANGUAGE

- The research is clear: supporting continued growth of a child’s home or tribal language, in addition to English leads to improved school readiness, as well as linguistic, cognitive and social and emotional outcomes. However not everyone shares the same understanding, even if they share the same goal for the child. The good news is, beliefs can change. But first, we have to understand what those beliefs are.
- Research indicates that educators can have very different beliefs about bilingualism. This is true of teachers from the same community or even the same school. In a case study from a Latinx community in California, two teachers had very different beliefs about which language instruction model would lead to their shared goal: school readiness. One teacher believed in using English only instruction, while another used a bilingual approach. Both thought they were doing what was best to support the children.¹
- Examining personal beliefs about language, and why and how we formed those beliefs can lead to better understanding and more full and effective participation of children who are dual language learners and their families.

¹ Garrity, S. & Wishard Guerra, A. (2015). A cultural communities approach to understanding Head Start teachers’ beliefs about language use with dual language learners: Implications for practice, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 16 (3), 1-16.

REFLECT ON ACTIONS AND CHOICES MADE IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Research indicates that even young children can learn and internalize biased behaviors, just by watching adults. Often these behaviors, like treating someone differently or ignoring a child because they don't speak English or have a different skin color than your own, are unconscious or unintentional, but they still have strong impact. For example, using the child's home or tribal language is only when the child has done something wrong. Or in the context of a home visit, expressing discomfort, or saying that something in the home is "weird." Even if this is unintentional, over time the child will begin to associate their home or tribal language and culture with being wrong.
- Being mindful of choices and intentional about what behaviors you model for children and families helps create a learning environment where everyone feels comfortable, welcome, and can succeed.

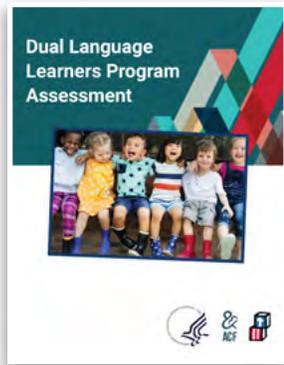
ACTIVELY WORK TO UNDERSTAND FAMILIES' BELIEFS, BACKGROUNDS AND CULTURES

- It can be easy to make assumptions about people that we don't know, or make generalizations about people who share a culture, race or religion. But every person and every family is different. Taking the time to get to know each family, and to talk with them about their language and culture is one of the best ways to build relationships and help families and their children feel comfortable and welcome.
- Just like anyone, families can have very different beliefs about bilingualism. These beliefs can be shaped not only by their previous experiences and culture, but also by the realities and challenges of speaking a non-dominant language in the United States. Partnering with families to better understand their beliefs can help build shared understanding. To support staff in this work, programs can provide trainings dedicated to family engagement focused on supporting home language development.
- Families love to talk about their children, and they know better than anyone else about their children's early language experiences. Honor this knowledge by setting up opportunities to talk in person, with a translator as needed, about children's language background, such as what language(s) are spoken in the home, and how often their child uses one language or another. Forming this connection and taking this information into account when planning curriculums and setting program policies is critical for supporting children who are dual language learners and their families.



SYSTEM-WIDE TOOLS AND APPROACHES

THE DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS PROGRAM ASSESSMENT (DLLPA)



The Dual Language Learners Program Assessment (DLLPA) is a powerful tool that can be used to support integrating culturally and linguistically responsive practices using a systems-wide approach. Within each of the 10 sections that cover management systems and program service areas, this self-assessment includes a series of questions that target culturally and linguistically responsive best practices. Program leaders can use the DLLPA to identify areas of strengths and areas to improve by completing this self-assessment. Resources for improving practice are linked within.

- DLLPA: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/guide-dual-language-learners-program-assessment-dllpa/dual-language-learners-program-assessment-dllpa-users-guide>

SUPPORTING SCHOOL READINESS



Embodying culturally and linguistically responsive practices is a key component of the core strategies that promote school readiness.

Family engagement and parent partnership is key to school readiness.

Culturally and linguistically responsive practices are the foundation to positive and goal-oriented relationships. The Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework can be used in program-wide strategic planning, program design and management, continuous learning and improvement activities, as well as with governing bodies and parent groups. The Framework is also useful as a professional development tool.

- Access the framework here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/pfce-interactive-framework>

Choosing and creating culturally and linguistically responsive curricula is also essential to supporting school readiness.

- Children learn best in environments that are meaningful and familiar to them. The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) is an excellent tool to help adults better understand what they should be doing to provide effective, meaningful, learning experiences that support important early learning outcomes. Throughout the ELOF there are examples of how cultural practices can influence children's behavior. The ELOF also provides developmental progressions across learning domains. Program leaders can use examples from the ELOF and the ELOF effective practice guides in trainings, or as a resource when choosing and implementing culturally and linguistically responsive curricula.

- Explore the ELOF here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>
- Use the ELOF Effective Practice Guides to explore what domain-specific practices look like in early learning settings: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/effective-practice-guides/effective-practice-guides>

Head Start programs can use the online Curriculum Consumer Report to select high-quality, research-based curricula that meet or exceed the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). The Curriculum Consumer Report provides reviews and ratings for infant and toddler, preschool, and home-based curricula. The ratings are based on criteria of effective, comprehensive curricula. Program leaders can use it to determine the extent to which your current curriculum meets HSPPS requirements, including supporting children who are dual language learners. This report is also useful in helping you to identify content areas you may want to augment in your current curriculum.

- Curriculum Consumer Report: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/curriculum/consumer-report>

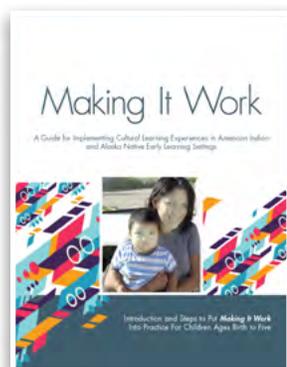
THE PLANNED LANGUAGE APPROACH (PLA)



The Planned Language Approach (PLA) is a comprehensive, systemic, research-based way for Head Start and Early Head Start programs to support children’s language development, particularly those who are dual language learners. Central to the PLA, is a grounding in culturally and linguistically responsive practices. In particular, numerous resources address research-based strategies to intentionally center language and culture in supports for children who are dual language learners.

- Education managers can explore the PLA and embedded resources here to support their team’s professional development and improve practice: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/planned-language-approach>

MAKING IT WORK (MIW)



Making It Work (MIW) is a suite of products that American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) programs can use to connect traditional cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways with the ELOF domains or state and tribal early learning guidelines using their selected curriculum(s).

- Programs can use the Making It Work guide to connect tribal cultural skills, values, beliefs, and lifeways to research-based guidelines, including the ELOF and state and/or tribal early learning guidelines: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/making-it-work-implementing-cultural-learning-experiences-american-indian-alaska-native-early>

SPECIFIC PROGRAM PRACTICES

DEDICATE PLANNING AND TRAINING TIME TO EXAMINING PERSONAL BELIEFS ABOUT SUPPORTING LANGUAGE GROWTH

- **Review the Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders and identify areas you want to explore more deeply.**
 - Resource: *Multicultural Principles for Early Childhood Leaders* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/multicultural-principles-early-childhood-leaders>
- **Talk about language and culture at staff meetings.** Ask staff to join you in examining their culture and experiences with language. Talk together about how previous experiences shaped your current understandings. Remember that understandings and beliefs are flexible and can change over time.
 - Resource: *Reflect of Your Own Perspective* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/developing-relationships-families/reflect-your-own-perspective>
- **Support professional development by encouraging program staff to complete the Individualized Professional Development (iPD) course, Celebrating DLLs: Spring Into Practice.** This interactive course has four, on-demand modules that guide learners through research-based effective practices that support children who are dual language learners and their families. Module one has a special focus on common questions and scenarios about supporting language growth for DLLs.
 - Resource: iPD course *Celebrating DLLs: Spring Into Practice* available in the iPD Portfolio <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/professional-development/article/individualized-professional-development-ipd-portfolio>
- **Be careful of assumptions based on language use or fluency.** For example, mistakenly thinking that anyone who speaks Spanish will be skilled at supporting children who are dual language learners. Supporting children who are dual language learners takes specific skills and practices that all educators need to learn, regardless of the languages that they speak. And when staff are acting as language models for children, or working with families who will be language models, they need to have basic levels of proficiency in that language.

WORDS AND ACTIONS MATTER – EXAMINE YOUR BEHAVIORS IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND IN THE COMMUNITY

- **Be mindful of what behaviors you or program staff are modeling for the children in your program or the families your program visits and works with.** For example, consider the body language you use when talking with someone who has a different background, culture or race than you do. What other behaviors or actions might you or members of your team be displaying without knowing it?
 - Learn more about how our implicit biases can contribute to inequalities in the learning environment in this resource: *Preschool Expulsions and Suspensions, and Why We Should Care*: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/video/preschool-expulsions-suspensions-why-we-should-care>

- **Be aware of and intentional about what language is used in what context.** Using a child's home or tribal language in the learning environment or while on a home visit can have a powerful positive influence. But it can also send unintended messages if used only in certain contexts. For example, make sure teachers, home visitors and family members are not only using a child's home language to reprimand the child. What message might this practice communicate to a child who is a dual language learner and their family?

BUILD AN INTENTIONAL AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- **Assess the materials and content of your program's curriculum.** One excellent tool is the Curriculum Consumer Report, which programs can use to evaluate how well their curriculum is rated in both cultural and linguistic responsiveness. In addition to a global review of the curriculum, take steps to assess the everyday objects and activities in your program. Do the books and other materials adequately represent the cultures and backgrounds of the children in the class or on the home visiting caseload? Are the curriculum activities adapted so that they are relevant to the children?
 - Resource: *Curriculum Consumer Report* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/curriculum/consumer-report>
 - Resource: *Creating Environments That Include Children's Home Languages and Cultures* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-creating-environments.pdf>
 - Resource: *Including Children's Home Languages and Cultures* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/dll-childrens-home-languages.pdf>
 - Resource: *Selecting and Using Culturally Responsive Children's Books* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/selecting-culturally-appropriate-books.pdf>



- **Honor the individual strengths that children bring to the learning environment.** Children all come with different experiences and skills. As program leaders, ensure that program staff take the time to learn about what each child brings to the learning environment, and have the time and resources to create spaces and activities where those strengths can shine.
 - Resource: Read more about a using a strengths-based attitude with families here: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/developing-relationships-families/strength-based-attitudes>
- **Model talking to children about differences and similarities.** Children are not only watching how adults behave, they also notice differences between people and often have questions about those differences. Noticing differences is a typical part of child development. Talking with children about the differences they notice, instead of quickly shutting down the conversation, helps children learn that everyone is different and that's okay! Help staff become more comfortable talking about differences and similarities by incorporating this topic into a training. At staff meetings, encourage program staff to talk about experiences they had during the week when children had questions about differences, and how they chose to answer the question.
 - Resource: *Talking to Children about Differences and Similarities* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/talking-children-about-differences-similarities>

DEVELOP AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

- **Work to develop authentic relationships and partnerships with the families your program serves.** Ensure you and your team are talking with families to better understand their background, experiences, language and culture. Help your program create open and welcoming learning and socialization spaces where families feel respected and trusted.
 - Resource: *Positive and Goal-Oriented Relationships* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/positive-goal-oriented-relationships>
- **Actively work to better understand families' relationship with their home or tribal language and English.** Do they have worries or concerns about their child speaking their home language? Support program staff in their efforts to talk with families about their language experiences.
 - Resource: *Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share* <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/gathering-using-language-info-families-share.pdf>

REFLECTION

Program leaders are encouraged to use these questions for their own reflection after working through this guide. These questions can also be used with program staff as reflection tools during a professional development training or experience.

Reflect on your own personal beliefs about language. Are there any actions or behaviors you might want to improve or change?

What is one change that will require more planning, but that you can implement in the near future?

What kind of support do you need to help identify and implement this change to best support culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families?