Connecticut Office of
Early Childhood

Supporting All Children Using the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards:
Dual Language Learners

CTELDS
Connecticut Early Learning
and Development Standards

OEC Inclusion Statement

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) expects that all children and families have a sense of full belonging and are valued, respected and supported. OEC policies, funding and services address the needs of children and families to ensure the right conditions for every child to achieve their full potential. This occurs through full participation in everyday activities at home, school and in the community. The OEC, providers, communities and schools adopt and promote the culture, practices and relationships necessary to foster inclusion and meaningful access and participation for the benefit of ALL children. All children, with and without disabilities or differences, their families and their caregivers benefit from inclusive environments.

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Introduction

An increasing number of children are exposed to more than one language during their first five years. It is critical that their unique needs are considered as the Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) are implemented. Programs implementing the CT ELDS must consider the language background of the children served and support staff to increase their knowledge and skills related to dual language development. It is important to recognize the unique nature of learning multiple languages during the first five years, a developmental period when ALL children are developing language.

To fully support young dual language learners, programs must:

• Create a climate that welcomes and honors all languages, cultures and abilities

• Ensure each child receives support in their home language to help them build upon current skills and knowledge as they also gain the benefits of growing up bilingual

• Support staff in continuous learning and improvement of skills to help dual language learners learn language and develop skills and knowledge in all areas of development

This document is designed to be a companion document to the CT ELDS and the Dual Language Learner Framework that begins on page 52 of that document. It is intended to provide specific guidance for supporting children who are dual language learners while using the CT ELDS.

Additional information can be found in the other documents in this series:

Supporting All Children Using the CT ELDS:

• *A Guide to the Domains and Strands*

• *Building Meaningful Curriculum*

• *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*

• *A Guide for Families*

> *"The children and families served in early childhood programs reflect the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the nation. The nation's children all deserve an early childhood education that is responsive to their families, communities, and racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds."*
>
> *National Association for the Education of Young Children (1995, p. 1)*

The CT ELDS Dual Language Development Framework

The CT ELDS document includes a Dual Language Development Framework for considering children's development of a second language. It was designed as a supplement to the CT ELDS to raise awareness of the typical stages of acquiring a second language and to assist early care and education providers in supporting growth and development for young children learning more than one language.

The CT ELDS Dual Language Development Framework includes a general progression of skills, loosely based on what might be typical for a child with some initial experiences in their home language who receives continued support in their home language while learning a second language. The general progression in the CT ELDS Dual Language Development Framework is shown below.

Beginning	Middle	Later
Home Language and first experiences with second language	Beginning use of second language	Increasing use of second language

The CT ELDS Dual Language Development Framework promotes continuing support for children's language development in their home language. While supports for first and second language development may not occur in the same settings, communication and coordination to ensure common goals across settings will help to ensure the best outcomes for children (OEC, 2013).

This document builds on the foundation set forth in the CT ELDS Dual Language Development Framework, providing greater detail about dual language development and providing strategies for supporting growth and development in all areas for young children who are dual language learners.

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Dual Language Learners

There are a variety of ways in which children may come to learn more than one language. Children might learn two or more languages at the same time in their home. They might be in the process of learning one language at home and begin to learn a second language when they attend an early care and education setting. No matter the pattern of exposure, all children between birth and age five are learning language. Understanding more about how children acquire multiple languages and supporting their learning of all languages will help them grow and develop across all domains.

There are many different terms used when describing children who are learning more than one language. You may see these terms used within this document and in other publications.

• **Dual language learners:** Children who are learning two (or more) languages at the same time, as well as those learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (or home) language (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). The use of this term promotes the value and importance of home language development.

• **English learners:** Children whose home language is something other than English and who are learning English. This is a term commonly used in public school systems where general education instruction is offered in English. While some instruction may be offered in children's home language, there is a focus on learning English so that these children can fully benefit from their school experience.

• **Monolingual:** Describes individuals who speak only one language.

• **Bilingual:** Describes individuals who are fluent in two languages.

• **Multilingual:** Describes individuals who are fluent in two or more languages.

Although the variations in children's experience with language are endless, there are two terms generally used in the research and literature to refer to patterns of learning more than one language.

• **Simultaneous bilingualism:** Exposure and learning of two languages occurs at the same time, beginning at birth

• **Sequential bilingualism:** Exposure and learning of a new language after a home language has begun

> *"Now we can answer with confidence that infants and young children have the innate capacity to learn two or more languages from birth and that if early multiple language exposure is sufficient in quantity and quality, young children can successfully become fully proficient in multiple languages."*
>
> *(Espinosa, 2014, p.5)*

Learning Language

Learning language is one of the most important and complex tasks that young children accomplish. As the number of children who speak languages other than English increases, early childhood professionals are eager to learn how to best support their growth and development across all domains. In many ways, language development for children learning multiple languages is similar to that of children learning one language. In this section, common stages of learning language will be shared, highlighting some ways in which learning more than one language might impact these stages of language acquisition.

We will start with the basic stages of learning language.

Babbling: The process of language development begins with babbling. This early sound production initially reflects not only the sounds heard in the baby's environment, but all of the sounds the child might need to speak any language. As the baby grows and hears more of certain languages on an ongoing basis, they shift to only using sounds from the languages they are hearing regularly.

First Words: At around 12-18 months, most children will begin to put those sounds together to produce their first words. A baby's first 50 words usually contain a mix of different types of words: names for important people, such as daddy, object names, such as cookie, functional words, such as up, and social words, such as "bye-bye" (Tabors, 2008; Conboy & Kuhl, 2011).

Putting Words Together: At around 2 years of age, children begin putting two words together to make simple sentences (e.g.., "me go", "more cracker"). As they get older, they will use more combinations and begin to put more words together.

Growing Vocabulary and Linguistic Complexity: During the preschool years, children's primary task is to increase their oral language development. This becomes obvious as children begin to participate in conversations, use explanations, develop arguments and tell stories (Tabors, 2008).

Children are accomplishing other language development tasks at this time as well. Most of these skills vary across different cultures:
• developing awareness of syntax or how to combine words to express a more complex meaning
• conversational norms such as turn-taking and eye contact
• social uses of language such as greetings and requests will vary from one culture to another.

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The chart below details the basic components of language. These components are relevant to learning any language, however, learning multiple languages may impact children's development across these basic component of language. These possible differences are included in the chart as well. The following chart details the typical stages of sequential bilingualism.

Impact of Dual Language Learning on the Basics Components of Language

Basic Components of Language	Impact of Dual Language Learning on Development of these Components
Phonology – the sounds of language	Phonological awareness is a skill that transfers across languages, but the way it is learned depends on the languages used (Anthony, et al., 2009; Byers-Heinlein, et al., 2010). For example, rhyming is often considered an important part of phonological awareness in English, but it is not as important in Spanish. Differences in phonological development have been found; however, these differences later faded away, and bilingual children caught up to their monolingual peers during the preschool years.
Receptive vocabulary – understanding the words of language	All children understand more language than they can use and this difference may be greater for children learning more than one language than it is for children learning one language, especially in the early stages of second language acquisition (Fuller, Bein, Kim & Rabe-Hesketh, 2015; Gibson, Peña & Bedore, 2014).
Oral language or expressive language – how words and sentences are used to convey a message	Children learning multiple languages may develop expressive language more slowly than children learning one language (Páez, Bock & Pizzo, 2011). Differences in oral language development may also be impacted by other factors, such as parental education and socio-economic status. Differences have been found in vocabularies of infants learning multiple languages when compared to monolingual peers. Bilingual infants had smaller vocabularies in each of their languages, but their conceptual vocabularies were similar in size.
Pragmatics – the awareness/ understanding about how to use the language	Children begin to learn how to think and talk about language skills (metalinguistic skills) during the preschool years (Tare & Gelman, 2010). For example, they might say, "I learned a new word today." They are more likely to understand how one language relates to another when they are older than 3 years.
Syntax – how the words are put together to make sentences in the language	Understanding the structure or syntax of one language helps children learn syntax in a new language, especially when there are similarities between the languages (Paradis, Genesee & Crago, 2011). For children (and adults) who speak multiple languages, they may use words from more than one language when communicating. This is called code switching. This is a common and expected way for children to maximize their communication abilities. This practice may impact children's use of syntax in one or both languages.

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Learning a Second Language

Learning of a home language develops in a fairly predictable pattern of stages. Children who are learning two languages at the same time (simultaneous bilingualism) follow the same basic stages. When a new language is added after infancy (sequential bilingualism), there may be greater variation in the progress or stages of development. Additional factors such as age, personality, motivation and experience also influence learning of a second language. How quickly a child learns a second language is influenced by:

• how similar the languages are to each other, in terms of sounds, vocabulary and syntax

• how much the child is exposed to and uses the second language

• the amount of home language the child knows, as this acts as a foundation for second language learning to build on

It is important for early care and education providers to understand how first and second languages develop. This knowledge helps in planning experiences that support all children to learn and grow. Knowledge about dual language development can also promote appropriate expectations for each child's participation and progress. It is important to understand children's current skills across all areas of development and to plan for supporting them in all areas, even if they speak a language different from the adults caring for them.

Stages of Sequential Bilingualism	
Pre-production	This is also called "the silent period," when the child takes in the new language but does not speak it. This period often lasts six weeks or longer, depending on the individual.
Early production	The individual begins to speak using short words and sentences, but the emphasis is still on listening and absorbing the new language. There will be many errors in the early production stage.
Speech Emergent	Speech becomes more frequent, words and sentences are longer, but the individual still relies heavily on context clues and familiar topics. Vocabulary continues to increase and errors begin to decrease, especially in common or repeated interactions.
Beginning Fluency	Speech is fairly fluent in social situations with minimal errors. New contexts and academic language are challenging, and the individual will struggle to express themselves due to gaps in vocabulary and appropriate phrases.
Intermediate Fluency	Communicating in the second language is fluent, especially in social language situations. The individual is able to speak almost fluently in new situations or in academic areas, but there will be gaps in vocabulary knowledge and some unknown expressions. There are very few errors, and the individual is able to demonstrate higher order thinking skills in the second language, such as offering an opinion or analyzing a problem.
Advanced Fluency	The individual communicates fluently in all contexts and can maneuver successfully in new contexts and when exposed to new academic information. At this stage, the individual may still have an accent and use idiomatic expressions incorrectly at times, but the individual is essentially fluent and comfortable communicating in the second language.

Chart contents from Everything ESL.net (Haynes,n.d.) used with permission. (available at: http://www.everythingesl.net/inservices/language_stages.php)

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The Connection Between Language and Relationships

Special consideration needs to be taken when interacting with very young dual language learners. Two major developmental tasks for young children are developing a strong emotional relationship with the important people in their lives and learning about their environment. These two tasks allow a child to develop a sense of belonging and to fully participate as a member of their family and community. The primary language used at home is important for young children to develop strong relationships. Their primary language also helps them understand what is happening around them, especially if their families do not speak English. While very young children are quite good at learning new languages, a new language cannot take the place of their home language.

Research has shown that babies and families need many interactions over a long period of time to form attachments (Brazelton, Koslowski & Main, 1974; Lamb, 1982). Shared language helps build those attachments. If children enter an early care and education setting where their home language is not used, they may begin to lose that home language. In some cases, they may resist using their home language, especially if use of that language is not nurtured and supported. Young children who can no longer communicate in their home language may lose out on the rich interactions that build the emotional ties within families (Sanchez, 1999). Maintaining the home language supports family strength. Providing home language supports while also exposing the infant to English will help the child grow up with the benefits of being bilingual.

In addition, early care and education providers must consider how they can build strong relationships with children in their care who do not speak the same language. Gestures, facial expressions and physical comfort may become more important than language in establishing relationships when providers do not share a language with children in their care. It is also important to understand cultural differences when considering the best ways to approach building a relationship with children. Another strategy to build relationships is to learn a few key words in the child's home language. This effort shows caring and respect for a child's home life and can support a sense of belonging.

For some children, preschool marks the first time children spend time away from their family. Some families who do not speak English consider preschool as a good way for their children to learn English before beginning kindergarten. It is important to remember that children's home language is still very important to them. Their home language may offer comfort and security, provide an opportunity to express themselves, allow them to access prior knowledge and support the family bonds that continue to be important.

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The Benefits of Bilingualism

Learning two or more languages can have a positive impact on brain development. When children learn two languages in a balanced way with similar exposure and skills in each language, the advantages are larger. The human brain is a very complex system that allows us to think, organize information and maintain control of our actions. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2013) describes executive function and self-regulation in the following way:

> Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully. Just as an air traffic control system at a busy airport safely manages the arrivals and departures of many aircraft on multiple runways, the brain needs this skill set to filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses.

For children developing language in more than one language, these executive function processes are more frequently in use as they use them to figure out the differences and similarities in words that they hear in all languages they are exposed to. This ongoing use of these processes can actually change the regions of the brain associated with executive function (Marian & Spivey, 2003).

Here are some of the benefits of growing up with two languages. Children who are bilingual can:

- Develop improved cognitive control systems at 7 months (Kovacs & Mehler, 2009)

- Demonstrate advantages in attention and inhibition (Hernandez, Martinez & Kohnert, 2000)

- Show advantages in tasks that require conflict management and ability to focus on relevant task information (Prior & MacWhinney, 2010)

- Store and use two sets of vocabulary, understand grammar rules in both languages, store two sets of sounds which leads to better metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 1993)

- Demonstrate improved school achievement as better self-control is a key indicator of school success (Kovacs & Mehler, 2009)

- Develop strong thinking skills (Kessler & Quinn, 1980) and increased abilities to focus, remember and make decisions (Bialystok, 2001)

The Challenges of Growing up Bilingual

While there are many advantages to bilingualism, there are some challenges that come with learning multiple languages. When the adults supporting young children acknowledge these challenges and work to minimize the impact of these challenges, children are more fully able to benefit from learning multiple languages.

> *"Certainly the most critical need that young children have in terms of language learning is the development of the oral language foundation for their later literacy acquisition"*
>
> *(Tabors, 2008, p.13).*

Some of the characteristics that might be noticed in young children who are dual language learners are:

- Young bilingual children take longer to recall words from memory, probably because they have to sort out which language to search for a needed word

- Slower word retrieval times in picture naming tasks may also be a result of the challenge of finding words in two language systems

- Lower verbal fluency in English, which may result in differences in assessment scores

- Smaller vocabularies in each language, but when vocabularies from both languages are combined, the total is similar to monolingual children (Hindman & Wasik, 2015)

These characteristics are not actually considered to be delays in development. They are just part of the normal process of learning two languages. With enough support of both languages in the early years, bilingual children often outgrow any lags (such as those in fluency or word retrieval times).

It is important for families and early childhood providers to provide lots of opportunities for children to talk, respond and converse in the languages they are learning. Practice with oral language in both the home language and their new language is important to this continued development. Active use of a new language has more impact that just listening to it in their environment (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2012). It is also important to remember that when children continue to learn and grow using their home language, this supports their growth and development overall and will ultimately increase their language and literacy skills in English.

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Strategies for Teaching Young Dual Language Learners

As the diversity of languages and cultures grows, early care providers need to enhance their knowledge and skills to work effectively with all of the children in their care. Simple adaptations can be made from the very first interactions with a dual language learner. The first step is to create a community that welcomes all learners and supports them based upon their unique strengths and needs. Some basic strategies can ensure that children learning multiple languages can learn and thrive, even if they do not share a language with their early care and education provider.

The following table describes strategies that can help all early childhood educators prepare for success with young dual language learners.

Birth through Age 5	Preschool
Become knowledgeable about and respectful of each child's family, culture and home language.	Use small group activities to increase direct interactions with children who are dual language learners.
Establish responsive and accepting relationships to help each child feel confident to listen and talk in either their home language or English.	Teach the meanings of everyday words, phrases and expressions not yet learned in the context of play.
Provide many experiences to help children gain understanding of the new language. Make sure they hear the new sounds of the language and connect them to people, objects and experiences.	Teach language that will be helpful in learning activities (e.g., words related to math, science or creative arts).
Provide experiences to encourage and help children practice the sounds and words of the new language. Serve as appropriate role models, using correct word forms and vocabulary.	Promote social and emotional development through responsive teacher-child and peer relationships.
Plan environments and experiences so that children are exposed to multiple cultures and languages. Provide opportunities for children and families to share their cultures and languages, making sure it is done in a way that celebrates differences for all children.	Use strategies to help children understand language used throughout the day, such as gestures, pictures and facial expressions. Think about what you need to do to make what you are saying, reading or singing more understandable to all of the children.
Extend children's language by repeating what they say and adding another word or concept.	Focus on vocabulary and content that children need and are going to use in the classroom. When choosing vocabulary activities consider why you are teaching that vocabulary and how the children will use it during routines or learning.
Learning a few key words in a child's home language (greetings and words that will help in daily routines) can help them feel accepted and safe.	Use lots of language! Very high levels of oral language must be present in classrooms where bilingual children are participating.

(Ackerman & Tazi, 2015; Castro, Paez, Dickinson & Frede, 2011; Council for Professional Recognition, 2013; Gillanders, 2007)

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Intentionally Building Language Skills

It is important that children's language skills are supported in intentional ways. Because children hear and use language throughout the day, it is important to consider the ways in which we interact with children on an ongoing basis. It is important to plan rich learning experiences for children, but incorporating strategies to build language throughout the day means that they will always be learning language.

One set of strategies that are particularly good for supporting language development are scaffolding strategies. Scaffolding to support language development involves adjusting the complexity of the language used with children based on their level of language development. The chart below shows a continuum of verbal interactions according to the level of complexity. When children answer open-ended questions, they must use much more complex knowledge of a language than they do when listening to someone talk about what they are doing. Observing children and the language they use will help to determine what strategy would be a good fit for their language level.

Moving up or down the continuum based on how a child responds helps encourage children to practice using language.

- Use open-ended questions
- Offer two choices as a response to a question or to support contributing to the conversation
- Ask the child to label something
- Ask a yes/no question
- Ask children to respond to a question that can be answered with an action e.g., "Show me how you jump."
- Use self-talk to model language

> It is important to support children to think about things in more complex ways even when their language skills are still developing.

When asking questions that involve a verbal answer, consider what types of responses the child will be able to provide.

- Make sure children have opportunities to be successful by asking some questions they are able to respond to in their new language.

- Make sure to ask questions that require slightly more complex responses so that they have a chance to put words together. If they aren't able to provide an answer yet, a response can be modeled.
- Ask questions that children can think about which are more complex. If they don't seem to understand the questions, work with families to ask some of these questions at home.

To illustrate how this type of scaffolding might work with a dual language learner using the CT ELDS Creative Arts Domain, examples of each type of question are provided below:

- **Ask open-ended questions:** Teacher – "What is different about the painting done with a sponge and the one done with a brush?" (Depending upon the child's exposure to the language, it may be appropriate to use less language, pointing to examples while asking "What is different?")
- **Offer two choices as a response to a question or to support contributing to the conversation:** Teacher – "Do you want to use a brush or a sponge to draw?"
- **Ask the child to label something:** Teacher – "What color of paint are you using?"
- **Ask a yes/no question:** Teacher – "Do you want to use the brush to paint?" or "Do you want the blue paint?"
- **Use self-talk to model language:** Teacher – "We're going to paint a picture. We need a paper, a smock and a paintbrush." (Point to the items as you get them).

Below are some questions or statements that prompt children's thinking but do not require a complex verbal response:

- "Look at the mark the brush makes. Does it look different if you use the sponge? I wonder why that is." (The child may respond to this question with a simple "yes" or "no" but is prompted to think about why there is a difference.)
- "Did you mix the colors of the paints? Do you know the name of the new color that you made?"
- "Here is the smock for painting. If you didn't wear the smock, I wonder what would happen to your clothes."

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Examples: Using Strategies to Support Children Who Are Dual Language Learners with the CT Early Learning and Development Standards

Strategies to support dual language learners can be embedded throughout the day and should be considered when planning learning experiences based upon the CT ELDS. Below are some examples of incorporating strategies into activity plans. General strategies to support dual language learners appear in bold. Additional details about how these strategies are used in the context of this learning experience are provided.

Domain: Science
Strand A: Early learning experiences will support children to apply scientific practices.

Learning Progression	Learning Experience	Strategies to Support Dual Language Learners	Why These Strategies Help Dual Language Learners
Investigating	Tubes and balls: Children work in small groups with tubes and balls. They experiment with how fast the different types of balls roll through the tubes and what happens when you change the angle of the tube. For older children, they measure how far the balls travel after exiting the tube and together you chart the results for different kinds of balls. Allow children to continue to play with the items independently and in small groups. Ask questions, self-talk and use other strategies to encourage ongoing use of language related to this experience.	• Conduct focused small group activities • Repeat and expand children's language • Scaffold language support • Learn key words in the child's home language Say the names of the items you are using before beginning to play in both home language and English. Model using the balls and tubes and use the vocabulary related to the action of the balls. As children play, observe what they are saying. If they are talking, repeat and expand on their language. If they are not talking, use scaffolding strategies, asking questions that are just right for them to answer and build from there.	Providing small group instruction makes it possible for the adults to have more focused, direct interaction with each child to support their learning. It also provides an opportunity to observe the child to see what they know, the words they understand and the words they use. Young children have strong connections to the language they have used with people who care about them. Using words from their home language gives them the sense that you value them and what they have already experienced. It also helps them connect all of their knowledge about something that they have learned in their home language to the new learning in English. Children who are dual language learners benefit from direct, intentional exposure to new vocabulary with explicit connections made to the same vocabulary in home language.

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Domain: Cognition
Strand A: Early learning experiences will support children to develop effective approaches to learning.

Learning Progression	Learning Experience	Strategies to Support Dual Language Learners	Why These Strategies Help Dual Language Learners
Cooperation with peers in learning experiences	Cooperative painting: Children work together to create a painting. For older children, an example from a particular artist might be used to inspire a particular type of painting. Clean up buddies: Children work in pairs after snack to take care of specific tasks (e.g., one pair clears garbage, one pair wipes the table and one pair sweeps the floor).	• Let children know what the expectations are and teach a few key words before the activity or routine begins. • Pair children with different levels of English development. If possible, match a child new to learning English with a child who speaks the same home language and has learned some English. If necessary, teach a buddy a few key words in the home language of the child who speaks more than one language. • Provide enough materials so that children with less language do not always need to request materials in order to participate.	Children's interactions with peers during learning experiences will be impacted by things such as personality, use of language and comfort level in the environment. By creating a welcoming environment and structuring some planned interactions, the child's comfort level may increase and allow them to take more risks in their interactions. By planning ahead for these differences you can make sure that children who are not using English consistently have an opportunity to participate.

Domain: Language and Literacy
Strand A: Early learning experiences will support children to convey meaning through drawing, letters, and words

Learning Progression	Learning Experience	Strategies to Support Dual Language Learners	Why These Strategies Help Dual Language Learners
Drawing and writing	Grocery store: Children work on making signs for the grocery store and make "lists" for shopping.	• Make signs that include English and the languages of the children in the setting. If necessary, ask families to send written words for certain items to use for signs. • Ask families about preferred food items so these can be incorporated. • Encourage families to model writing shopping lists with their child in their home language. Ask them to send in an example.	Children who are dual language learners can begin writing even if they are not fluent in English. They may have skills in their home language or may begin with writing skills that don't rely on vocabulary (e.g., making shapes, using pictures to convey meaning). Providing environmental supports creates a welcoming atmosphere that encourages children to take chances. Opportunities to practice writing allow children to develop early writing skills while they are still learning language. Exploring written language in different situations, such as a grocery store, helps children to understand the purpose of written language (Samway, 2006).

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Engaging Families of Children Who Are Dual Language Learners

Families play the most important role in the lives of young children. When early care and education programs value family engagement as a critical part of their mission, they nurture strong relationships. These strong relationships mean that children's development is supported in ways that go well beyond what programs or families can do alone. Positive family and child outcomes are connected to parent-provider relationships grounded in mutual respect and shared decision-making (Forry, Moodie, Simkin & Rothenburg, 2011; Forry, Bromer, Chrisler, Rothenberg, Simkin & Daneri, 2012). These outcomes are reached when family engagement is viewed as the development of a partnership with families.

Family engagement is not achieved through just a series of activities for families or by sharing information about what the family should do with their child. Strong partnerships between early care and education programs and families have these characteristics:

- Shared rights and responsibilities
- Shared decision-making
- Shared trust and respect

An additional document in this series, *Supporting All Children Using the CT ELDS: Building Meaningful Curriculum*, discusses the importance of family engagement when considering curriculum and instruction in an early care and education setting. All of the same principles for family engagement apply when working with families of children who are dual language learners and whose culture is different from the providers that support their growth and development.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, as a part of their Engaging Diverse Learning Project, developed the following principles of family engagement:

Principle 1: Programs invite families to participate in decision-making and goal setting for their child

Principle 2: Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication

Principle 3: Programs and teachers engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal

Principle 4: Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community

Principle 5: Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts

Principle 6: Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system

It is important for early care and education programs to intentionally support family engagement for all children and the principles above provide a foundation for considering program practices and policies. However, some additional consideration and planning may be necessary to ensure full engagement of linguistically and culturally diverse families. Studies show that while linguistically diverse families could benefit from the support that early childhood educators provide, language barriers may discourage them from participating in activities, such as parent meetings or parent orientation, where there is an opportunity for providers to learn about their family's needs and build a partnership (Park & McHugh, 2014; Trainor, 2010; Turney & Kao, 2009).

In addition, linguistically and culturally diverse families may experience other challenges to their full engagement. Research has shown that linguistically diverse families struggle more frequently with poverty, isolation and experiences of discrimination than families who speak only English (Cannon, Jacknowitz & Karoly, 2012; Skinner, Wight, Aratani, Cooper & Thampi, 2010; Whatley & Batalova, 2013). When planning for family engagement, considering the particular barriers or challenges to engagement is important, so that programs can tailor their practices to their individual families and communities.

When developing a plan to address parent engagement with linguistically and culturally diverse families, it is important to understand that there are similarities and differences amongst all families. A 2015 review of research related to parent engagement in linguistically diverse families (Barrueco, Smith & Stephens, 2015) found the following:

- Most of the research has focused on Spanish-speaking families or families with a Hispanic background
- Linguistically diverse families as a group have similarities with monolingual English speaking families, but because of the language difference also experience different challenges in becoming engaged in their children's education
- Most parent engagement studies, including those concerned with immigrant families or families speaking a language other than English at home, provide limited information about parents' language proficiency

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and about other potential characteristics that may influence parent engagement. Even when more information is provided, most studies have not been able to disentangle the role of English proficiency from other important characteristics affecting parent engagement in linguistically diverse families

As programs make decisions about parent engagement strategies, there are several things to consider. It is important to first recognize that parents across language and cultural backgrounds share a desire to support their children. That is a common place to start when engaging families.

It is generally good practice to first consider strategies that have evidence of being effective; however, most of the research has been done on families from Latino cultures. Strategies deemed effective with families of a Latino background may or may not be effective with families from other cultures or regions. Programs must understand the diversity of families in their community when planning for parent engagement and need to consider the fit between the strategies and the cultures represented. Programs must also consider families' language proficiency in both the home language and English. Strategies that work across different levels of language proficiency will be successful with more families than a strategy that involves a great deal of reading. For example, translating newsletters may be used as a strategy to communicate with families who speak different languages, but this is only useful for parents who read well in their home language.

Following their review of the literature, Barrueco, Smith and Stephens (2015) offer two primary research-based strategies. The first is to create a welcoming, supportive environment. The second is to support parent-child learning activities at home. Specific practices related to each of these strategies that have evidence behind them or are suggested as promising practices can be found in the following table.

Evidence-based Strategies for Creating a Welcoming Environment
• Offer professional development targeted at increasing providers' understanding of cultural differences that affect parent engagement and introducing more varied parent engagement strategies
• Employ bilingual, bicultural staff
• Strive to offer parent engagement activities in families' home languages
• Create opportunities for families of similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds to spend time together
Promising Practices Connected to Creating a Welcoming Environment
• Connect with community organizations that support linguistically diverse families
• Extend personal invitations to participate in school-based activities
• Hold parent-teacher conferences in groups with families who have similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds
• Provide basic needs supports as part of program-based family activities
Evidence-based Practice to Support Parent-Child Learning Activities at Home
• Provide a range of supports, including information (in families' home language) about the value of parent child interactions, materials, such as books and math games and demonstrations of learning activities on-site or through video

All of these strategies are reminders of the importance of relationships. For children, all learning takes place in the context of relationships, and this is especially true for language development. The relationship between families and early care and education providers provides the context for a team approach to support children's growth and development. It is critical to build warm, nurturing and responsive relationships with all the children and families with whom you work. In order to do this, you must show respect for their home languages and cultures. While the best fit might be when caregivers know some words or have some familiarity with the child's home language, warm and supportive relationships can occur even when families and providers do not share a language.

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One of the first steps in building a relationship is to understand families' language background. When engaging with new families, the document *Gathering and Using Language Information that Families Share* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013, p. 2-5) provides questions instead of gathering information from the families of children who are dual language learners. The reason this information is important is also included in the charts below.

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 languages he/she speaks? • Do you think your child knows as much of your home language as you would expect at his/her age? • Can you tell me about his/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 continuing to speak their home language to their children • If they have concerns about their child's language development • Whether or not children are learning some 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 the ability to learn it. The rule of thumb is that a child has to hear a language at least 25% of the time to learn to use that language. • Many families may not know how critical keeping their home language is to their child's development. • Staff can get a sense of whether the family has concerns about a child's language development. • 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 him/her into the classroom and for promoting his/her learning from the start.
Patterns of Learning Language (Simultaneous and Sequential)		
Possible Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
• Did your child grow up with two languages from birth? • Did your child grow up with one language from birth, and then learn a second language after the age of two? • How old was he/she when the second language was introduced?	• A child's language background, experiences and development • The amount of time a child has had to acquire and learn each of their languages • Whether the child might know some concepts in one language and some in the other	• This information provides a context for deciding the language(s) in which to screen the child. • Information about patterns of learning language informs ongoing 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. • Curriculum planning and teaching methods should take into account children's patterns of learning language; a child may need non-verbal cues and communications or prefer one language to another.

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Language Dominance		
Possible Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
• Does your child use one of his/her languages more often than the other? • When he/she wants to communicate, does he/she prefer using one of his languages? Does this change when he/she is with peers…with siblings…with parents…with teachers?	• Whether the child is stronger in one language or another • Whether a child's language use varies across different groups or settings due to other people's use of language (e.g., grandparents do not speak English) or comfort level	• 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/her developing beliefs about the value of each language. These insights will need to be verified as the staff get to know him better
English Language Experiences		
Possible Questions	What You Learn	Why It Matters
• Who has helped your child learn English? At what age did they begin to learn English? • 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/she hears English	• This information helps staff know what the child knows, how well he/she knows it, how much English he/she has been exposed to and how to support his/her home language

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Using Interpreters Effectively

Interpreters can be valuable resources for providers who work with families whose primary language is different from their own. While on the surface interpretation seems to be a simple process of conveying what is said in one language into another, it is actually rather complex. Interpreters must convey information, ideas and feelings and must pay attention to spoken words, actions and gestures. In addition, to accurately interpret the intent of the communication, they must consider both the contexts in which words are conveyed and the cultures in which the speaker and the listener live (Ohtake, Santos & Fowler, 2000).

To be truly effective, interpreters should:

- be proficient in the languages of the provider and the family
- be familiar with early care and education programs and the subject of the provider-family interaction
- be able to understand the meaning of both verbal and nonverbal communication in both languages; have good interpersonal skills
- be a source of knowledge regarding culturally appropriate behaviors that providers can use to show respect and understanding of the family's culture

When used well, interpreters can promote two-way communication between providers and family members. This can help promote family members as partners in the early childhood program. The use of interpreters ensures that family members with minimal English proficiency can concentrate on the content of their conversation rather than on attempting to translate their language to English. This also facilitates providers' ability to gain valuable information from families about their children as well as family values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. Family members have opportunities to convey their concerns and priorities, ask questions and get the information they need to make informed decisions.

Lynch and Hanson (2004) and Ohtake, Santos and Fowler (2000) identified specific recommendations for interpreters and for providers working with interpreters to ensure successful interactions and the building of positive relationships with families.

Recommendations for Interpreters

- **Prepare ahead of time.** Learn about the main purpose of the interaction with the family and about technical terms and information that will need to be shared.
- **Be a guide.** Help the provider understand cultural nuances (e.g., the meaning of body language that could be misunderstood).
- **Convey uncertainties.** Let the provider know if you do not understand what you are being asked to translate. Ask for clarification to be sure you understand.
- **Translate accurately.** Convey all information and do not make omissions, summaries or edits to the information you are translating.
- **Maintain neutrality.** Do not insert your own beliefs, values, advice, opinions or thoughts into the conversation. Do not try to influence the family or the interventionist.
- **Honor family confidentiality.** Do not disclose any family information to others. Honor the family's right to decide whether to convey private information through a third party.

Recommendations for Providers Working with Interpreters

- **Clarify expectations.** Discuss the interpreter's role ahead of time with him/her. Let the interpreter know about specific words and information that may be new to him/her. Support the interpreter in being impartial. Make the interpreter part of the early childhood program.
- **Foster the family's comfort.** Introduce the interpreter to the family and explain his/her role. When possible, use the same interpreter with the same family for multiple visits.
- **Speak to the family.** Address remarks and questions to the family, not the interpreter. Look at and listen to the family when receiving responses.
- **Make yourself easy to understand.** Speak slowly and clearly. Use standard English and minimize jargon (e.g., natural environments, developmental delay, etc.). Use simple sentences and questions. Give information in a logical sequence. Provide only a few remarks or questions between translations.
- **Be positive.** Use a positive tone and respectful facial expressions with the family. Convey your regard and respect for the family.
- **Check for family understanding and accuracy of translation.** Periodically ask the family to restate in their own words information you have tried to convey. Clarify information for the interpreter and the family.
- **Plan for additional time.** Allow enough time for accurate interpretation.

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Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Early care and education providers are continually working to increase their cultural and linguistic competence. These efforts help them facilitate their work with children and families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It is likely that all early care and education providers will work with families whose values, beliefs, language and behaviors differ from their own. Therefore, cultural and linguistic competence is an essential skill for everyone working with children and families. Providers must first recognize the influence their own culture has on their beliefs and values and must learn to respect and support the culture, values, beliefs and languages of all families with whom they work.

▣ Definition of Culture

There are many different definitions of culture; however, one of the key things to remember is that culture is not easily understood or observed. While we often think of customs, such as foods, holidays and manner of dress when we discuss culture, these are only very superficial representations of culture. While such easily observed aspects of culture may be tied to the deeper values and beliefs of a group of people, these things along do not constitute culture. Anderson and Fenichel (1989, p. 8) write, "Culture can be conceptualized as the specific framework of meanings within which a population, individually and as a group, shapes its lifeways. A cultural framework is neither static nor absolute. It is, in a sense, an ongoing process, within which individuals are constantly reworking or trying out new ideas and behaviors. The cultural framework must be viewed as a set of tendencies of possibilities from which to choose."

Lynch and Hanson (2011) described the following five considerations as useful for beginning an understanding of the range of perspectives individuals may bring to a situation and for recognizing diversity as a strength/resource:

- Culture is not static; it is dynamic and ever changing. Cultural beliefs and behaviors are influenced by new information and experiences.

- Culture, language, ethnicity and race are not the only determinants of a person's values, beliefs and behaviors. Many other factors (e.g., gender, age, educational level, place of residence, socioeconomic status, personal experiences, etc.) influence how individuals and families function.

- Within a group, differences are as great as or greater than across group differences. There are wide variations in values, beliefs and behaviors. No cultural, ethnic, linguistic or racial group can be described in generalities. Families and family members cannot be defined by characteristics of a group.

- Diversity is relational; each individual or group is diverse from another. One cannot assume that one group or value or belief is normative and acceptable, and that others deviate from the norm. Cultural diversity is never a problem to be addressed; rather, the response of individuals to diversity can be either problematic or accommodating.

- Everyone has a culture and that culture is influenced and shaped by one or more cultures. No one is ordinary.

Lynch and Hanson (p. 24)

▣ Cultural Competence

Cultural competence, like culture itself, is not a static set of knowledge or skills. In order to be culturally competent, early care and education providers must continually consider their own beliefs, values and behaviors and be open and reflective when interacting with families from different backgrounds. Lynch and Hanson (2011, p. 43) described cultural competence as "the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build on ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity."

Many authors agree that the process of becoming culturally competent is an ongoing learning process that involves:

Self-awareness – Becoming aware of personal values, beliefs and assumptions and which of these are tied to one's own culture. Gaining insight into one's own cultural background and its influence on how people think and act is the first step in learning to appreciate the different perspectives of families from other cultural backgrounds.

Increased knowledge – Gaining knowledge of other cultures and the ways in which values, beliefs and behaviors might differ across cultures helps to make early care and education providers open to communication and knowledge about other cultures. Factual information about other cultures can be helpful in understanding families from those cultures, but must not replace open communication and responsiveness. Basic information about a culture can be helpful but must be recognized as general information that will not apply to all individuals and families in the same way.

Technical skills – Early care and education providers can develop skills for engaging in two-way communication with families. Asking questions and using this information to try to understand families' priorities, values and beliefs helps to forge strong relationships. Understanding how these factors influence family choices, concerns and desires helps early care and education providers make decisions about how to best interact with and engage families.

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Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence relates to the ability to communicate effectively with people who have differing language and literacy skills, including those who may speak limited English or those who have disabilities (Goode & Jones, 2004). It can be difficult to communicate with families who do not speak the same language; however, some basic considerations can help.

According to Lynch and Hanson communication is improved when the service provider, "respects individuals from other cultures, makes continuous and sincere attempts to understand the world from other points of view, is open to new learning, is flexible, has a sense of humor, tolerates ambiguity well, and approaches others with a desire to learn" (2011, p. 68).

Working Toward Culturally Responsive Practices

In order to be culturally responsive, practitioners do not need to know everything about the cultures of the families with whom they work. Instead, practitioners need to continually work to find out what they need to know to work sensitively with each child and family. Virmani and Mangione (2013) describe three steps in communicating effectively with families: Acknowledge, Ask and Adapt.

1. **Acknowledge**: Acknowledge to yourself that a cultural difference may exist between you and a family with whom you work. Examine your own perspectives and be careful not to make a judgment that the family's way is wrong. Recognize the value of the family's contributions.

2. **Ask:** Find out how family members feel about issues that are important to them and how they would handle the situation. Ask questions to understand why family members take a particular stance or perspective. Try to see the world from the family's point of view and communicate your respect and understanding of their viewpoint.

3. **Adapt:** Use the information gathered from the family to find the most effective way to support the child and family's growth. Clarify the issue and work with the family to make sure they have the information they need to be part of making informed decisions about their child. Explore together family members' strengths and the supports and resources available to the family that could be brought to bear on meeting family concerns and desires. Assist the family in making decisions about the best action to take.

Partnering with Others to Understand Culture

Knowing and talking with someone from a culture can help in understanding the values, beliefs and actions that may influence partnerships with families. The practice of providing information between people from different cultures or groups in order to increase understanding and reduce conflict is often referred to as culture brokering. *Culture brokering* can be done by anyone, including teachers, caseworkers, nurses or a friend. People in this role help to bridge cultures by providing information about the differences and similarities between cultures. Families may benefit from someone who helps them to understand American culture and to make decisions about which parts of American culture they will embrace. Early care and education programs and providers benefit from individuals who help them understand the cultures and languages of the families they serve. Early care and education programs may consider reaching out to local cultural organizations or colleges in order to gain a better understanding of the cultures represented in their community (Nemeth, 2014).

> *Children use the distinctive vocabulary of a home language, which includes words, gestures, and patterns of speech, to understand others and to express their own needs, desires and emotions (Sanchez, 1999).*

Culture, Language and Learning

Culture plays an important role for young children as well as families. Culture, language and learning are intertwined in many ways. Cultural knowledge and learning is fostered by language proficiency. Furthermore, cultural experiences shape the way children learn and see the world. Culturally and linguistically diverse children bring with them ways of using language that may differ from those of their new school culture (Zentella, 1997). An understanding of children's backgrounds, including cultural practices around how and when language is used, can help teachers to understand children's behavior and skills (Phillips, 1983). Understanding children's cultures can also help in finding strategies to support their participation and provide feedback a manner most appropriate to their culture (McLaughlin, Gesi-Blanchard & Osanai, 1995).

Cultural and Linguistic Competence and the CT ELDS

When using the CT ELDS, it is important to recognize the role that culture and language plays in all areas of development. Expectations around children's behavior vary from culture to culture. Differing cultural expectations may impact the way children interact with adults and other children.

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Following are three commonly shared examples of cultural and linguistic difference in expectations for young children:

- In the United States, children are often expected to make eye contact to show that they are paying attention to adults. However, in some cultures, making eye contact with adults is considered a sign of disrespect.
- In the United States, independence is valued and children are encouraged to do things for themselves as early as possible. However, in some cultures, collectivism, or interdependence, is valued. In these cultures, children's learning of basic self-help skills may not be encouraged until they are older.
- In English, rhyming is often used to develop phonological awareness. However, in other languages rhymes may not be as easily constructed or may also involve matching tones.

The CT ELDS were reviewed for cultural and linguistic bias and such factors were considered deeply during the development process. However, the CT ELDS were written to address skills that build over time toward college and career readiness in the United States. Therefore, there may be learning progressions and/ or indicators within the CT ELDS which do not align perfectly with the values of some cultures represented in early care and education programs. Ongoing communication, understanding and flexibility are key when using the CT ELDS with families from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The following scenarios are examples of how the cultural and linguistic differences mentioned above may be addressed:

- A librarian leading a toddler play group has been using eye contact as a strategy to help children focus and develop self-regulation during groups (Social and Emotional Development, Strand B). The librarian learns that eye contact with adults is considered disrespectful for a particular culture represented in the community. The librarian adjusts her practice of asking all the children to look at her before beginning their finger-plays and songs and instead helps families to use physical contact as a cue to pay attention and listen.
- A preschool teacher learns that a 3-year-old child who has not yet learned to use the toilet or needs help with putting on his jacket is from a culture that values collectivism. She also learns that the child's parents

and older siblings take care of his daily needs. The teacher meets with the family so they can set mutual goals. The teacher shares information about the preschool classroom and how they usually work with young children to learn to use the toilet, put on their own coat and learn other self-help skills (Physical Health and Development, Strand C). The teacher acknowledges that this may not be a priority for the family and is open to focusing on other strands and/or learning progressions from the CT ELDS when working with this child. She does share two things to consider during the discussion with the family. First, she shares the adult-to-child ratio in the classroom. Because the classroom has two teachers working with 15 children, they are not able to provide the same amount of help that the family does at home. They are willing to help any children who need assistance, but transitions take longer if more children need help. The teacher also shares that despite a classroom culture that values all differences, some of the other children seem to be noticing that this child is not doing as much for himself as the other children. The family decides that it would be best for their child to begin working on these self-help skills both at home and at school. The family and teacher discuss that while the child will become independent in dressing and toileting, they will continue building a classroom community where everyone works together on projects and learning, including the children and the adults.

Finally, when using the CT ELDS to plan learning experiences, early care and education programs should make sure that the experiences reflect the rich variety of cultures in their community. Communicating with families or cultural brokers can ensure that the choices reflect the important aspects of a culture. While clothing, dress and celebrations play an important role in many cultures, focusing solely on fancy costumes and the commonly known dishes and holidays may not provide an accurate representation of a culture. Below are several examples of valuing cultural diversity while implementing the CT ELDS:

- A program that serves a large number of families from Mexico wants to incorporate a cultural celebration as one of their family events. The teacher learns that while Cinco de Mayo is commonly celebrated in the United States, the families in their community value Mexico's Independence Day in September as a more significant cultural celebration. They work with families to determine activities for the event that accurately represent the culture and are appropriate for the type of celebration.
- A preschool classroom is doing an ongoing unit of study on transportation. The teachers plan to address several different strands

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and learning progressions from the CT ELDS each week. As they plan to address Strand C in Social Studies (understanding economic systems and resources), they decide to explore how food gets from farms to homes. They feature several different modes of transportation that represent the families in their community and the cultures they come from (including cars, walking, bicycles and buses as ways that families get to the store to buy food). There is a child in the class that recently arrived from China and the teacher wonders whether they might want to include a rickshaw as they discuss transportation. Before doing so, the teacher checks with a staff member who is familiar with the region the family is from to make sure this would be relevant and appropriate.

- In a public school, a preschool teacher works with the 3rd grade teacher to arrange for a few children to come read to preschoolers in their home language. The children in the preschool classroom have an opportunity to hear books read in their home language and the 3rd graders have an opportunity to continue to develop their language and literacy skills in their home language. Books are also available in the book center in all of the languages represented in the program.

Screening with Children Who Are Dual Language Learners

Determining a child's skills across various areas of development is challenging when the child speaks a language different from that of the early care and education provider. One important part of considering children's development is called screening. Screening is a process used to compare children's skills to developmental milestones to determine if further evaluation might be needed. Screening often involves a formal standardized tool. These tools usually result in a score that indicates whether or not more assessment or evaluation should be done to find out if a child has a developmental delay or disability.

The document, *Screening Dual Language Learners in Early Head Start and Head Start: A Guide for Program Leaders* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014), includes several best practices for screening young children who are dual language learners:

- Use multiple sources of information when screening young children who are dual language learners. This may include formal observations, information shared by families, developmental checklists, samples of work and other sources of information.

- Use a screening tool appropriate for use in the child's home language when possible. This is the best way to gather accurate information about what the child knows and can do without the impact of a language difference.

It is difficult to find screening tools appropriate for use in languages other than English and Spanish. Before using a screening tool with a child who does not speak English, it is important to make sure there is evidence showing that the tool is valid and reliable for use with children who speak another language. Some screening tools have been standardized with children who are dual language learners or have the ability to accurately measure the performance of diverse populations including young dual language learners. However, this is not the case for all screening tools. If a tool is not appropriate for use with children who are dual language learners, then another tool should be selected or an alternative plan for gathering information about a child's development must be put in place. Some possible alternatives are:

- Use families as a source of information. You may choose to provide families with good literacy skills with a screening tool or developmental checklist designed to be completed by parents. Any such tool should be available in their home language and there should be research showing it is appropriate for use in this language. You may also choose to use an interpreter to facilitate discussions with families. The section of this

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document on engaging families of dual language learners includes questions related to children's language development and exposure, but for a full screening process, additional questions about development in other areas should be included.

- Observe and document children's skills in the classroom. Note what skills they are able to use that do not require language and how they seem to use their home language to communicate. Look for progress or evidence of growth over time.

- Compare those observations of child behavior to developmental checklists. Look for evidence that a child is doing what they are expected to do at their age.

- Collaborate with families to make decisions about referrals for further evaluation.

- Use an interpreter to administer the screening.
  - If this strategy is used, the interpreter must work with someone who regularly uses the screening tool and can guide the interpreter to administer it and record the child's responses correctly.
  - Completing a screening tool using an interpreter impacts the reliability and validity of the tool and cutoff scores cannot be interpreted in the same way as they would with children who speak the language in which the tool was developed. The information is simply additional information that supports or negates the other information collected through observation and family report.
  - If an interpreter will be used during the screening process, programs must thoroughly research how to select interpreters and how to work effectively with them during a screening or assessment process.

The document, *Screening Dual Language Learners in Early Head Start and Head Start: A Guide for Program Leaders* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014), includes valuable information about using interpreters during a screening process.

Assessment with Children Who Are Dual Language Learners

Assessing young children who are learning two languages can be challenging because language is often used when considering children's skills and knowledge. Children who are dual language learners have often learned a great deal in their home language. While it may be difficult for them to understand directions or share their skills, this may not mean that they have not developed a specific skill. When assessment processes require children to listen and respond in English, there is a risk that only the children's progress in learning English will be considered. Research has shown that for many young children learning more than one language, their skills are underestimated in multiple areas of development when providers do not speak their language or understand their culture (Espinosa, 2010; García & Frede, 2010; Paradis, et al, 2011).

> *"…few standardized assessments of children's early development are developed and validated for DLL's or use developmental models that address their specific social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics."*
> *(Peña & Halle, 2011, p. 29)*

Important Things to Remember About Assessment

- *The CT ELDS are not an assessment tool*

- *A formative assessment process happens as a part of learning and provide information that teachers/ providers can use immediately*

- *Any assessment tool must have evidence of validity related to the purpose for which it is being used*

- *Selecting assessment tools that are aligned to the CT ELDS will help teachers and families make connections between assessment information and their goals for children*

This document is focused on supporting young children using the CT ELDS. A formative assessment process that provides information to guide curriculum and instruction is most appropriate for use in conjunction with the CT ELDS. Such a process may involve a formal system for observation and documentation.

When using a formative assessment process with young children who are dual language learners:

- Provide experiences that will allow children to demonstrate their skills without needing to use language (e.g., showing three fingers after counting instead of saying the number "3")

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- Learn a few key words in the children's language related to what you are teaching so that you can listen for their responses
- Ask families questions about children's skills to gain information

Remember, a formative assessment process is about teaching and learning. The focus is not on children showing you what they know. It's okay to provide adult support, visual cues and other prompts to help children understand and show their emerging skills. If they need support or feedback to do something, valuable information is gained.

🔲 Special Considerations for Other Types of Assessment

When using standardized assessments, or when gathering information to make decisions about services or supports for young children who are dual language learners, there are several additional considerations:

- Use multiple measures and sources of information when making decisions. While this is important whenever assessment is used, it is especially critical for children who are dual language learners and may not be able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge using English.

- Standardized assessment tools must be valid and reliable for the purpose and the audience.

- Those conducting assessments should understand the children they are working with and the tools they are using. The adults who engage in any assessment process with young children who are dual language learners should be culturally and linguistically competent. They also need to know the specifics of any assessments being used, including any appropriate modifications or adaptations.

- Standardized assessments offer very specific information. Young children are not test takers. Standardized assessments provide information about how young children perform on specific tasks under specific circumstances. While this provides information that allows for comparison to developmental norms or other groups of children, this offers a very limited picture of individual children. For young children who are dual language learners, the value of this information may be even more limited, depending upon the nature of the child and the assessment.

Distinguishing Delays and Dual Language Development

Early care and education providers often work with young children who are dual language learners who may appear to have a developmental delay or disability. When children show signs of language delay or disorder, it may be difficult to figure out whether the areas of concern are due to language differences or whether the child does have a developmental delay or disability.

Learning more than one language does not result in development delays in children. Understanding the difference between the typical stages of learning multiple languages and characteristics of language delay is important. For example, a child learning a second language may use slightly less language or make more errors in syntax than a child who speaks one language during the early years. This is very different from a child who is not learning new words in any language or who does not learn to put words together to convey ideas.

Knowing the characteristics and stages of language development and dual language development is the first step in understanding the difference between bilingualism and language delay. When considering whether there is a need for further evaluation based upon a child's pattern of skills, it is important to consider how children learn more than one language. It is also important to gather as much information as possible about their language development in their home language. Children who have language delays or disabilities in one language will generally exhibit this delay in other languages. Getting a good sense of their language development in their home language can provide a picture of their underlying strengths and areas of need.

> *A language disorder is "an inability to understand and process language either expressively or receptively" (Tompkins, 2002, p. 6). In contrast, a language difference is a difference in understanding and using a language that is influenced by a child's linguistic and cultural experiences with a first language (Roseberry-McKibbin, 2002).*

Communication with families and careful observation of young children who are dual language learners will help you in determining whether or not differences in behavior and language use are due to language differences or developmental delays or disabilities. Below are some questions to guide your observations of young children who are dual language learners:

- How often does the child speak? Observe the child with peers, family if possible. Does their pattern of language use change depending upon the language spoken to them?

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- Does the child seem to use words in their home language to label objects or describe actions? Does the child seem to use more than one word together? While they may not use their home language with adults who do not understand them, work to find opportunities to observe them using their home language with families, peers or other adults who speak the same language. Even if you do not understand exactly what is being said, you can gain some general observations about their use of their home language.

- How does the child interact with peers during play-based learning experiences? Does the child engage in pretend play?

- How does the child use and interact with the materials in the classroom? Do they seem to be able to solve problems and understand some beginning concepts typical for their age? While this may not provide information about a language delay, you can gain insight into their development in other areas.

(Nemeth & Brillante, 2011, p.12-17):

After careful observation in different contexts, consider the following "red flags" for children who are dual language learners. While these characteristics do not necessarily indicate the presence of a delay of disability, they warrant further investigation and evaluation:

- Lack of bilabial sounds (sounds made by putting both lips together, including "ba", "ma", "pa") in the 2-6 month age range

- Not using 6 or more words in home language in the age range of 6-15 months

- Using fewer than 20 words (combining across languages spoken) by 20 months of age

- Not using word combinations by 30 months

- Challenges in learning new words at a rate compared to other learners, despite support in the languages they are learning

- As children get older, using only short utterances in the languages spoken

- Difficulty remembering or understanding in all languages. Difficulty coming up with words in both languages

- Primarily using words or phrases that are repeated or "echoed" from what others have said

- Difficulty communicating with others from a similar language background

- Challenges in putting words together in order in home language

- Extended period of not using language in a variety of settings.

(Fierro-Cobas & Chan, 2001, p.80)

◻ Children Who Are Dual Language Learners and Receive Special Education Services

When planning for early intervention or preschool special education services for dual language learners, it is important to consider functional objectives and to address supports for the home language and culture as well as for learning English. Children who experience disabilities or require special educational services are not harmed by continuing to support both languages. Just as is the case for other children who are dual language learners, continued support for home language helps children with disabilities to:

- Benefit from knowing multiple languages

- Experience the other benefits of bilingualism (executive function skills, etc.)

- Build on prior knowledge

- Maintain strong family relationships and cultural identity

Careful consideration around appropriate goals, language(s) used during intervention services and communication with families is also necessary. With ongoing support and communication, children with disabilities can continue to learn in both languages.

Continued Support for Working with Children Who Are Dual Language Learners

Early care and education providers benefit from ongoing opportunities to discuss how to best meet the needs of children who are dual language learners. Ensuring a team approach to meeting the needs of all children in a program is an important part of a quality early care and education program. Family involvement in such a team approach is critical. Involving team members with expertise in dual language development, when possible, will support early care and education providers to meet the needs of individual children who are learning more than one language.

Providers need ongoing professional development on best practices in supporting young children who are dual language learners. Professional learning communities may find it helpful to explore this document and other resources related to dual language learners and to work together to develop strategies to implement in their programs. Such ongoing support and professional development will help providers build their knowledge and practice so that they are able to capitalize on the benefits of dual language learning and support children's growth and development in all areas.

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- *A Guide to Domains and Strands*
- *Building Meaningful Curriculum*
- *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*
- *Dual Language Learners*
- *A Guide for Families*

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