



Enhancing Policy and Practice for Young Dual Language Learners: What Is the Research Base?



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Agenda

What do we know?

- The educational circumstances for ELLs: A mandate for bilingual preschool
- The preschool landscape in the US for ELLs
- Recent studies of preschool for ELLs
- Research on bilingual acquisition
- Research-based strategies to support bilingual acquisition

Policy Recommendations



Demographics of Pre-K ELLs

Hernandez, Macartney & Denton, 2010

Language Spoken at Home

- 21% of 3-4 yr olds live in an immigrant family with at least one foreign-born parent
- Only 1% of all and only 5% in immigrant families lives with a parent who speaks no English at home
- The highest is Mexican immigrant families at 9%
- 80-90% have 1 parent who speaks English
- 40% of these parents are limited English proficient
- 32% live in linguistically isolated households



Demographics of Pre-K ELLs

Hernandez, Macartney & Denton, 2010

- 80%-97% in immigrant families are US citizens
- 57% lives with at least one parent who is an American citizen
- 87% in immigrant families live with two parents, compared to 75% for children in native-born families
- Poverty rate:
 - 9% for Whites and Asians
 - 19%-22% for Mexicans, Other Hispanics, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders,
 - 27%-36% Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans



ELLs In Early Education

Head Start Home Languages (2006):

- English: 69.40%; Spanish: 25.83%; Native American: 0.14%; Other: < 5%

State Pre-K Provision for ELLs:

- 24/38 states collect data on ELLs in pre-k
- 27 pre-k programs target low-income
- 17 states use home language as a criterion beyond income
- 24 states offer at least one support for ELLs



How to best educate this important and growing population is a concern for policymakers and practitioners.



Research on Pre-K for ELLs

Four recent studies substantiate that:

- Attendance in high quality preschool improves outcomes for ELLs
- Dual language practices enhance these outcomes in **BOTH** languages



Gormley's Tulsa Pre-K Study

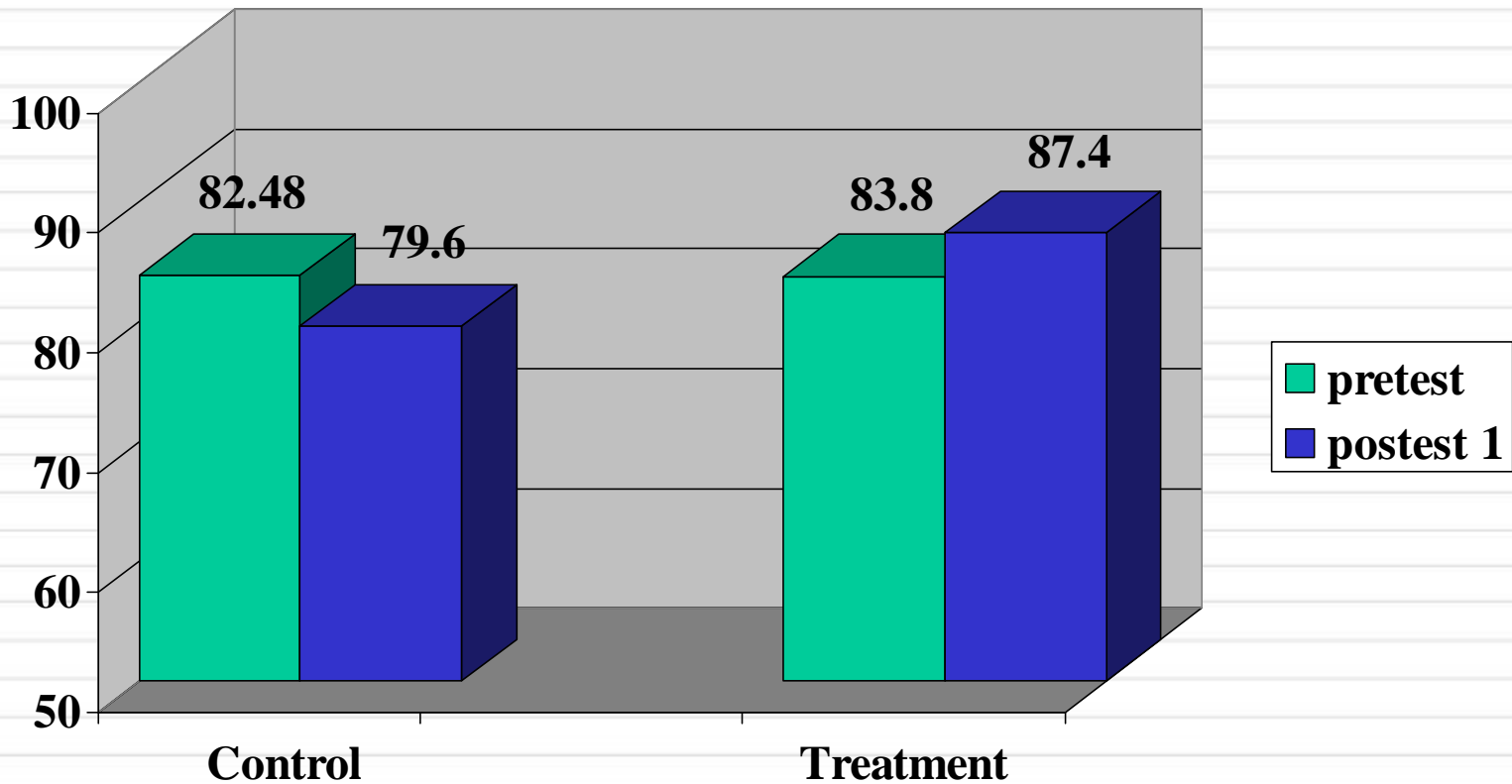
As a result of Pre-k attendance:

- Hispanic students improved in early literacy and mathematics
- Children of Mexican immigrants or from Spanish-only homes made the most gains
- Being in a classroom with a Spanish-speaking teacher enhanced gains
- Gains were greater in English language tests but children gained in both languages



Two Way Immersion Vs English Immersion Programs: TVIP Scores

(Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007)





Barnett, et al. Conclusions

In a high quality preschool program:

- Both TWI and EI boosted the learning in early literacy and early math of children in English.
- TWI also improved the Spanish language development of both native Spanish and native English speakers without losses in English.
- Children in EI classrooms decreased proficiency in Spanish.



Farver, Lonigan & Eppe, 2009

- Three conditions:
 - Pre-k no add-on
 - Literacy SGT in English only
 - Literacy SGT in Spanish and English
- All gained in English
- Add-on groups gained more
- Dual language add-on also gained in Spanish



Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies

(ELIAS; K. Kersten, E. Frey, & A. Hähnert)

- Multi-national:
England, Germany, Sweden, & Belgium
- Two-way immersion in 1 classroom: 2 adults –
1 bilingual
- Child addressed in each language by native
speaker and asked to respond in that language.
- 266 preschool-aged children



Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies

(ELIAS; K. Kersten, E. Frey, & A. Hähnert)

Findings:

- Success in L2 acquisition mainly dependent on contact time with the L2;
- L1 does not suffer from the intensive exposure to an L2;
- L1 may even benefit from early language awareness



Conclusions

In a high quality preschool program:

- Both TWI and EI boosted the learning in early literacy and early math of children in English.
- TWI also improved the language development of both languages regardless of home language.
- Children in EI classrooms decreased proficiency in Spanish.



Research on Young ELLs

- Can learn 2 languages: “as natural as learning one”
- Code switching is a normal for bilinguals
- Young ELLs can easily lose first language
- Strong home language base facilitates learning English
- Bilingual children have higher achievement
- Bilingualism leads to more efficient brain functioning
- Low-income children who start kindergarten with only non-English rarely catch up with bilingual or English speaking peers
- Techniques for 1st – 3rd unlikely to work for pre-K



Simultaneous bilingual children:

- Same language milestones as monolingual
 - Use 1-, 2- and 3-word utterances at expected ages
 - Understand and use correct grammatical forms for each language
- Acquire vocabulary at a slower rate and at first have less total vocabularies in each language, BUT...
- Experience similar growth rates and combined “concept” vocabulary in both languages equal to or greater



Language Mixing is Normal

- Children's search for best word results in code-mixing
- Partly learn this from the adults
- In adults, code-mixing often means high level of language competence not confusion
- However, code-mixing by teachers CAN cause confusion. Teachers should use high quality, linguistically rich standard language.



Barriers to Family Engagement

- Their own concerns about lack of education
- Respect for teachers and interested in their child's school but view their role as different and possibly not valued by teachers
- If not English proficient less likely to engage in learning activities such as book reading and playing number games
- Appreciate explicit directions in how to assist their children and participate in the school



Supporting Bilingual Acquisition

- Provide a warm, emotionally supportive, low anxiety environment to encourage communication
- Display books, print and literacy props in both languages (color-coded)
- Scaffold comprehension of new concepts and vocabulary in both languages with pictures, materials, role playing, and real life experiences
- Support early literacy skills in both languages
- Intentionally use content-related vocabulary during 1:1 interactions woven throughout the day



“Good” teaching is good teaching
for all children!



Research on the Workforce

- Having bilingual staff facilitates dual language instruction
- Most ELL children do not have a teacher who speaks their language or who has specialized knowledge in DLL
- Teacher preparation programs rarely offer substantive coursework in linguistic and cultural diversity
- Bilingual teachers often use home language only for commands and discipline



Research Conclusions

- High quality preschool benefits all children
- Young ELLs clearly benefit and may even gain more than others
- Dual language programs enhance learning in BOTH languages
- We need more well-qualified, bilingual teachers but ALL teachers need to know how to support language acquisition since all preschoolers are English language learners



State, Federal, and Local Policy

Recommendations

- 1. Fund and Establish Quality Data Systems:** who is being served and under what conditions
- 2. Form Early Learning Councils in Local Communities** to plan coherent provision of services and recruit underserved families
- 3. Require Bilingual Education Program Improvement Plans** that enhance dual language acquisition, support teachers in learning a second language and in supporting ELLs, ensure coherence from preschool through 3rd grade, and assist parents in supporting the home language



State, Federal, and Local Policy Recommendations

4. Increase Provision of High-Quality Dual Language Preschool

- Fund more and conveniently located high quality preschool
- Improve systematic dual language programming
 - Two-way immersion side-by-side classrooms
 - Two- way immersion rotating times of day
 - Push-in home language instruction (daily “specials” teacher)



State, Federal, and Local Policy

Recommendations

- 5. Educate and Hire Qualified Bilingual Staff**
- 6. Provide Pre-service and In-service Education on Dual Language Acquisition and Effective Teaching Practices**
- 7. Support Language Minority Family Engagement**
- 8. Implement Appropriate Assessment Measures**



For further information see:

García, E. and Frede, E. (Eds.; 2010)
*Developing the Research Agenda for
Young English Language Learners.* NYC:
Teachers College Press.