

PREPARING YOUNG HISPANIC DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS FOR A KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

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If ever there was a time to devote attention to the Hispanic preschool population it would be now. Nearly one in 4 children in the United States is Hispanic and more than one in 5 comes from a home where a language other than English is spoken (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). For the vast majority this other language is Spanish. With a movement afoot to reclaim the economic prosperity of the country, the growing Hispanic population will play a key role in any economic resurgence. Yet, statistics on the educational success of Hispanic children, which is surely a key to their future economic success, are hardly encouraging. Among Hispanics, only 18 percent are proficient in reading and 24 percent proficient in math at fourth grade, while only 63 percent graduate from high school (NCES, 2011).

Early childhood education has often been touted as a magic bullet to remedy these educational problems and promote economic success. In truth it has substantial potential, but it is not a panacea, and its success depends to a great extent on how widely quality pre-K is actually accessed by Hispanic children and on how well these programs are implemented. This brief addresses issues of access and quality that are specific to Hispanic children, though some are relevant to other largely disadvantaged and immigrant groups. Fortunately, a good deal is known about best practices and policies and what matters most, though there is still much that remains to be learned (Garcia & Frede, 2010). Perhaps the most important challenge for policy makers is to incorporate into programs and policies what has been learned from research about effectively addressing the real needs of Hispanic preschool aged children.



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What We Know:

- Hispanics account for the largest growth in population over the past 10 years, but have higher rates of poverty and lower rates of educational attainment than any other large ethnic group.
- One in 4 children under age 5 is Hispanic.
- One in 7 children entering kindergarten has a primary language other than English (NCES, 2012).
- Hispanic children are less likely than any other ethnic group to enroll in preschool programs. This is not primarily due to any reluctance of Hispanic parents to enroll their children but rather to limited access.
- Limited English language proficiency at kindergarten entry is a significant contributor to low achievement and other poor schooling outcomes for Hispanic students.
- Dual language preschool programs improve children's acquisition of Spanish without reducing acquisition of English.
- While bilingual teachers can facilitate dual language instruction, improving acquisition of both English and a home language, most children do not have the benefit of a bilingual teacher.
- Many teachers lack specialized knowledge about how to support English as a second language due to a lack of course offerings that meet these needs in teacher preparation programs.
- Development of oral language skills in both the home language and English are important for later achievement in reading skills in English, though the relationship between the two is not yet well understood.

Policy Recommendations:

- Implement state-level databases to report on the language characteristics, such as English proficiency of preschool ELLs enrolled in all types of public or publicly subsidized programs and at kindergarten entry, to facilitate planning and implementation of personnel preparation programs and more appropriate services for young DLLS.
- Increase the availability of preschool programs, in particular high-quality dual language preschool models or programs that provide at least some support for instruction in their home language as well as English. A concerted effort must go into educating and hiring bilingual staff with special attention to enhancing practices supportive of dual language learners.
- Programs should foster family engagement or bridge gaps between home and school. Specialized efforts are needed to inform Hispanic families about access to preschool programs for their children, to locate more programs where Hispanic families can easily participate in them, and to encourage and support more literacy activities in the home.

Population Trends and Characteristics

The Hispanic population accounted for half of the population growth in the United States since 2000 and constituted 16 percent of the population in 2010. The largest increase was seen by the Mexican population, which grew by 54 percent between 2000 and 2010. In 2010, most Hispanics identified as Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban accounting for three-quarters of the overall Hispanic population. In addition, the country at large saw not only a surge in Hispanic population, but Hispanics spread into regions of the country where they had not typically been before (Ennis, Rios-Vargas & Albert, 2011).

The demographic profile of young Hispanic children though similar to other low-income minority subgroups is markedly different in several respects. Hispanic children account for about a quarter of the total population of children under age 5 and 26.3 percent of all births in 2011 (Passel, Livingston & Cohn, 2012). For Hispanic children under 5 years of age, it is estimated that 33.9 percent live in poverty while for Hispanic children age 5-12 the poverty rate is 45.3 percent (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Hispanic children also have a higher percentage of foreign-born parents and low parental educational attainment (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). In 79.3 percent of impoverished Hispanic households parents hold a high school degree or less. For Hispanic children in poverty with foreign-born parents this figure is even larger, representing 82.3 percent of households as compared to Hispanic children in poverty of native born parents, for which the number is 73.1 percent (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Thus, Hispanic children have a higher incidence of risk factors for low achievement and school failure even if they are not in poverty. When they are in poverty these other risk factors exacerbate an already serious problem.

Language proficiency and school success

Though potentially beneficial to have exposure to a language other than English at home, an overall lack of English proficiency by kindergarten has been found to hamper later school success (Galindo, 2010). Therefore, it is im-

portant to understand that the benefits from maintaining and developing children's home languages can be obtained without interfering with English language acquisition (Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007). Dual language immersion programs have been found to be successful in promoting proficiency in both languages in young children. With dual language and other approaches it is essential to keep in mind that the earlier English language proficiency is achieved the better and that proficiency in English by kindergarten can lead to better achievement in math, reading, and science all the way through grade 8 (Halle, Hair, Wandner, McNamara, & Chien, 2012).

In 2009, about 71.9 percent of children who were reported to be Hispanic lived in homes where Spanish was the primary language spoken (Shin & Kominski, 2010). In 47 percent of these homes families reported that they spoke English "less than well." Hispanic students also account for the largest portion of children scoring below the 25th percentile on both tests of reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NCES, 2011). Though some of these gaps can be accounted for by risk factors similar to those of other poor subgroups, lack of English language proficiency is one that is largely unique to the very youngest of Hispanic DLLs.

The disparities in preschool program participation are even more striking when looked at by the child's predominant language. As Table 1 shows, children whose primary language is Spanish are much less likely to attend any kind of preschool center compared to children whose primary language is English. Children speaking English and Spanish are near equivalence in participation at age 4, but far lower at age 3. In general, children who speak a language other than English are much more likely to be educated entirely at home at both ages 3 and 4. This greatly limits their exposure to English.

English language proficiency is even more critical a factor when considered with those of educational attainments as one affects the other both for parents and children. In 2009, Hispanics accounted for 17.6 percent of student dropout rates nationwide among 16-24 year olds (NCES, 2011).

This number is significantly larger than for Whites and Blacks in the same age range and for whom the rates are 5.2 and 9.3 percent respectively. Hispanic students pass the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading tests at a level of “proficient” at a rate of 16 percent in fourth grade and 18 percent in eighth grade. Hispanic students achieve proficiency on the math portions of the test at a rate of 22 percent in fourth grade and 18 percent in eighth grade (NCES, 2011). These statistics are troublesome given the correlations between early reading and math abilities and later educational attainment. One study found that 33 percent of poor Hispanic students who were not reading proficiently by third grade failed to graduate from high school (Hernandez, 2012). In 2009, Hispanics had a dropout rate nationwide of 17.6 percent, significantly higher than the rates for other students (NCES, 2011). In keeping with this, Hispanics are less likely than other ethnic groups to enroll in undergraduate and graduate degree granting institutions of education (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012).

Early Learning Experiences in the Home

In the first five years of life, parents are the strongest influences on their children’s learning. Hispanic families in the United States are disproportionately characterized by low levels of educational attainment, low levels of English proficiency, low paying and inconsistent employment, and poverty. Family activities that provide important stimulation of language and cognitive development in the early years include book reading, trips to parks and museums, and one-on-one, child-directed conversations, none of which are frequent in poorly educated, low-income families (Rodriguez, Le-Monda, Spellman, Pan, Raikes, Lugo-Gil & Luze, 2009; Duncan & Magnusson, 2005). In 2007 37 percent of Hispanic children between the ages of 3 and 5 were read to every day as compared to 67 percent of their White Non-Hispanic peers and they were less than half as likely as children from any other ethnic group to be reported to know all the letters (O’Donnell, 2008).

The lack of early learning experiences at home is particu-

larly important as children who predominantly speak Spanish are also the most likely to be cared for exclusively in their homes as we discuss below. This helps to explain why Spanish-speaking children account for so much of the school age population failing to become proficient in reading and math (Skinner, Wight, Aranti, Cooper, & Thampi, 2010). Though policy can impact some of the factors contributing to shortfalls regarding poverty and low parental educational attainment, it can most readily impact children who have access to and enroll in preschool programs that use best practices to enhance language and literacy learning as soon as possible.

Young children in homes where only Spanish is spoken are the most educationally disadvantaged. In a study seeking to investigate the home lives of Spanish-dominant preschoolers it was found that children residing in homes where English and Spanish are spoken were more likely to engage in literacy tasks than were children residing in homes where only Spanish was spoken. The authors attributed this difference to both parents’ low education levels

and length of time living in the United States (Hammer, Miccio, & Wagstaff, 2003). Families speaking only Spanish at home had children with below average scores on measures of English and Spanish. Mothers speaking only Spanish have been found to have less understanding of young children’s language acquisition and to believe that language learning was a natural process that required little effort by parents to stimulate language learning even in their home language (Lopez, 2005).

Hispanic parents, especially those who do not speak English, have a great need for education about how to stimulate their young children cognitively and socially even before preschool. Part of this education should emphasize the importance of early experiences inside as well as outside the home for the development of their children (Burchinal, McCartney, Steinberg, Crosnoe, Friedman, McLoyd, & Pianta, 2011; Rodriguez, et al., 2009; Hammer, Miccio, & Wagstaf, 2003). For the Hispanic parents of DLL students, parenting education should also include the importance of

home language maintenance as well as English language acquisition.

DLL Participation in Preschool

Participation in preschool has been cited as being significantly helpful for linguistically isolated Spanish speaking Hispanic children (Gormley, 2008). Benefits of preschool include enhanced development of early language and literacy skills, math skills, and self-regulation, which are all strong predictors of future achievement and high school graduation (Burchinal, et al., 2011; Dickinson & Porsche, 2011; Galindo, 2010; Duncan, Dowsett, Claessens et al., 2007). In addition, preschool education offers students and families a first opportunity to interface with school culture and socialize with peers. For Hispanic DLL children it may be a first opportunity to acquire English.

Given the potential of high-quality preschool education to improve the learning and development of these children, it is distressing that enrollment rates for Hispanic children are lower than for their White and African American peers.

Presently, only 64 percent of Hispanic 4-year-old children

are enrolled in pre-K (public or private) as compared to 70 percent of their non-Hispanic peers (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011). For 3-year-old children these numbers are even more disparate as only 25 percent of Hispanic 3-year-olds are enrolled compared to 43 percent of their non-Hispanic peers (Barnett, et al., 2011).

Research on the home language environments of young DLLs lends insight into potential interventions outside the home that could prove helpful. Aside from gaps in grade-level test scores, there are also discrepancies in the ways in which Hispanic and DLL children use child care systems that could help to introduce English earlier. In Table 1, Hispanic children's predominant language spoken can be seen relative to their representation in various child care settings at ages 3 and 4. What can be seen in the table is that for children in both age groups, those with Spanish as a primary language are the most likely not to participate in any kind of structured early care programs and instead remain at home with a parent; at age 3 most of those who speak Spanish predominately are at home.

Table 1. Child Care Setting by Home Language

Type	CHILD'S PREDOMINANT LANGUAGE					Total
	English	Spanish	English & Spanish	English & Other	Other	
Age 3						
Center Primary	52.7	26.6	26.9	47.0	71.4	50.5
Relative Primary	12.5	14.9	16.2	4.3	18.9	12.9
Non-Relative Primary	7.0	5.0	11.2	0.0	0.0	6.7
Relative Secondary	10.0	3.6	7.8	9.5	0.0	9.2
Non-Relative Secondary	5.3	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.8
None	27.8	53.5	45.7	48.7	9.8	29.9
Age 4						
Center Primary	75.5	50.9	73.6	62.7	86.6	73.5
Relative Primary	5.4	9.8	9.9	0.0	1.8	5.7
Non-Relative Primary	2.3	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.3
Relative Secondary	18.5	4.4	3.8	18.9	2.6	16.8
Non-Relative Secondary	5.3	7.6	3.5	0.0	3.6	5.4
None	16.8	36.2	16.5	37.3	11.6	18.5

Source: NIEER estimations based on NHES 2005

More than half of America's Hispanic population resides in three states – California, Texas, and Florida (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011) – and all three have been noted to have significant holes regarding high-quality preschool standards and adequate funding (Barnett, et al., 2011). More disconcerting are recent reports indicating that the gap in math achievement for Hispanic students in fourth grade has widened in some states, including Texas (Hemphill & Venneman, 2011). These reports also indicate that New Jersey has been among the few states that have been able to narrow achievement gaps in both math and reading (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). Perhaps not coincidentally, New Jersey also has provided quality pre-K for the past 10 years (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald & Squires, 2011).

Though there have been many hypotheses about why Hispanic and Spanish-language dominant children in particular are less likely to enroll in preschool programs, it seems likely that lack of access to quality programs is at least as important as factors such as income, parental education, and other family characteristics (Power-Pac, 2009; Barnett & Yarosz, 2007; Nores, Barnett, Epstein, & Curenton, 2011; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Though not specifically focused on Spanish dominant families, a recent study in Chicago found that parents reported the following reasons to explain their lack of participation in pre-K programs:

- Affordability
- Lack of transportation
- Misalignment of school hours with work hours
- No availability
- Lack of awareness of the importance of preschool education
- Lack of information about preschool options
- Worries regarding documentation requirements

These reports from parents are consistent with the results of statistical analyses and geographic variations in use (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). It is particularly noteworthy that

when quality preschool is offered to all children, Hispanic families have near universal enrollment rates as in Oklahoma and even in New Jersey's "Abbott" districts where preschool education begins at age 3 (Frede & Barnett, 2011). Anyone who might suppose that there is a general cultural reluctance to participate in quality preschool should know that Mexico and other countries in Latin America have universal preschool as part of the public education system. Nevertheless, some parents (Hispanic and non-Hispanic) do fail to recognize the value of quality preschool education. The Lopez (2005) study found that the young children farthest behind were those whose parents spoke only Spanish at home and held beliefs that language learning occurs incidentally and that academic skills are best taught in schools. These beliefs coupled with lack of access to quality pre-K contribute to perpetuating gaps that can be found in low-income and DLL children before the start of kindergarten (Burchinal et al., 2011).

The list above also points to some policy fixes that could increase the enrollment of Spanish-dominant children beginning with increased access. Table 2 shows that Spanish speaking children rarely attend private programs and the primary reason they are more likely to attend preschool at age 4 than age 3 is the greater availability of public programs. Head Start offers fewer places for children at age 3 and state-funded pre-K is much less frequently offered at age 3 than age 4.

Evidence in this regard can be obtained from New Jersey's Abbott preschool programs where full-day preschool is a required offering in targeted school districts for all 3- and 4-year-old residents. In many of these districts Spanish-dominant families are the majority. Participation rates in these New Jersey districts nearly reach capacity, enrolling close to 100 percent even when the population is almost entirely immigrant and Hispanic. New Jersey's example is important because it sheds light on the willingness of Spanish-speaking families to enroll their 3- and 4-year-old children in preschool experiences when they are accessible and of high quality. New Jersey's example not only illustrates the potential for full participation from Spanish-

Table 2. Preschool Participation by Home Language

CHILD'S PREDOMINANT LANGUAGE						
Age 3						
Type	English	Spanish	English & Spanish	English & Other	Another	Total
Head Start	7.48	13.94	15.33	21.81	3.524	8.119
Public	7.085	2.417	8.151	13.63	10.96	6.82
Private	38.37	10.26	3.415	11.54	56.87	35.76
Other	47.07	73.39	73.1	53.03	28.65	49.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Age 4						
Type	English	Spanish	English & Spanish	English & Other	Another	Total
Head Start	12.19	21.88	28.22	28.82	4.448	13.32
Public	18	21.36	28.75	5.838	31.62	18.53
Private	45.32	7.672	16.66	28.08	50.54	41.67
Other	24.49	49.09	26.37	37.26	13.39	26.48
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: NIEER estimations based on NHES 2005

speaking families, but also the attributes of highly effective programs for this population.

Improving Features of Hispanic Serving Preschool Programs: Language and Literacy

Early childhood educators and researchers see preschool as an ideal setting in which to support English language acquisition for young DLL children as well as to support and continue their Spanish language development (Garcia & Frede, 2010). Research on the positive impacts of dual language supports (Barnett, et al., 2007) together with other research on developing school readiness for young Hispanic children provides a strong base on which to build preschool programs. One consideration in program design is achieving balance in supporting the home language, English language development, and the acquisition of other

school readiness skills. Many programs high standards of both process quality and structure (resources) are the beginning, but to meet the needs of young DLLs what must also be considered is the language of instruction and what practices are most effective.

Language of Instruction and Classroom Practices

Spanish-speaking school age children comprise about 72 percent of children speaking a language other than English at home (Shin & Kominski, 2010). Twenty-seven percent who speak Spanish speak English less than “very well” (Shin & Kominski, 2010). Unfortunately, regardless of dominant language, Hispanic students are found to have consistently low scores on tests of both English and Spanish vocabulary (Skinner, Wight, Aratani, Cooper & Thampi,

2012; Howes, 2011). This is a stark reminder that most young DLLs face the same disadvantages in home language proficiency associated with other low-income children who are native English speakers.

For many DLLs the preschool classroom environment is a first opportunity to experience English. There is a consensus in the research community that development and maintenance of the first language can be supported without interfering with English language and literacy skill acquisition (Barnett et al., 2007; Castro, Paez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011). Models that incorporate use of the home language can be best for young DLLs as they help children to maintain native languages while acquiring English. Additive language models that incorporate use of the home language by at least one teacher have been shown to yield positive child outcomes whereby DLLs perform better both in measures of home language development as well as those of English acquisition than do their peers in groups where only English is used (Vitiello, Downer & Williford, 2011; Farver, Lonigan & Eppe, 2009; Barnett, et al., 2007; Gormley, 2008). Other research has also found that growth in children's receptive language, regardless of which language, is positively related to reading outcomes in first grade both within and between their languages (Davison, Hammer & Lawrence, 2011).

Language of instruction is not the only preschool program feature that matters, of course. Other elements of quality teaching matter a great deal as well. Karoly and Gonzalez (2011) for example, found educational quality was particularly low in center-based programs serving high proportions of Spanish-speaking immigrant children in California. In their analysis, classrooms scored low on both the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). For children to benefit significantly in any language, the quality must be high (Burchinal, Field, Lopez, Howes, & Pianta, 2012).

Research has identified specific aspects of instruction in preschool classrooms that bolster language acquisition and are essential for designing high-quality programs. For ex-

ample, conversations between teachers and individual children during unstructured parts of the day have been shown to have direct impacts on future learning proving, further that conversations and one-on-one interactions are the prime means of developing language (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Teaching to increase vocabulary breadth has been identified as of particular concern due to its crucial relationship with later reading comprehension (Castro, Paez, Dickinson & Frede, 2011). For DLLs this is particularly important as vocabulary development is crucial as they try to catch up to the language proficiency of their native-speaking peers (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005).

Evidence about the importance of teacher-child interactions points to specific needs for practices, preparation, and professional development that encompass the social-emotional aspects of high-quality classroom experiences for young DLLs. Some research has found that DLL children with a Spanish-speaking teacher or in more social-emotionally supportive classrooms had larger gains on academic tests (Burchinal, et al., 2012). Hypotheses about why this occurs include that children in Spanish-speaking teachers' classrooms may have been better able to develop relationships with their teachers and that developing social competence led them to become better communicators (Burchinal, et al., 2012). Given what is known about relationships between positive identity formation and later school success, the quality of social-emotional supports in early childhood also should be considered important for later achievement (Bernhard, Cummins, Campoy, Ada, Winsler & Bleiker, 2006; Fantuzzo, Perry, & McDermott, 2004). For young DLLs the interface between language and culture and their self-perceptions can contribute to establishing a positive sense of self and to maintaining familial relationships that have also been shown to be related to later academic success (Garcia & Frede, 2010). Finally, teachers must foster relationships not only with children but also with families so that they may learn information that can help to create classroom environments that are culturally responsive (Zepeda, Castro, & Cronin, 2011).

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

A critical component in determining how to implement high-quality programs that effectively address the needs of ELLs is to examine the current workforce of early childhood professionals. In a nationally representative sample of early childhood teachers 78 percent reported speaking English only, 15 percent reported speaking Spanish, and about 7 percent reported speaking other languages (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011). Low numbers of Spanish-speaking professionals present challenges in delivering instruction to linguistic minority Spanish speaking students in their home language. Despite the lack of bilingual teachers, center directors and administrators alike seem to agree that there is a need to recruit speakers of linguistic minority languages in their classrooms (Whitebook, Ryan, Kipnis & Sakai, 2008) as well as a need to support home language development (Buysse, Castro, West & Skinner, 2005).

Other important factors include the extent to which teachers who do report that they are bilingual are proficient enough in each language to conduct meaningful instruction that is rich enough in content to actually impact student learning (Freedson, 2010). This point is critical in the face of recent findings about the amount and quality of preschool teachers' language use during free play time as a predictor of vocabulary and comprehension skills in fourth grade (Dickinson & Porche, 2011). Though the study was conducted with monolingual English speakers, teachers looked to for models of Spanish would likely need to offer language interactions that are semantically robust enough to offer or contribute to these benefits in Spanish or to bolster learning in English.

The above study also sheds light on the importance of specific content in teacher preparation programs. Clearly teachers need to be equipped with specialized knowledge that allows them to tailor their instruction to the needs of children with varying levels of both English and Spanish proficiency (Zepeda, Castro & Cronin, 2011). In addition, teachers need to know how to sensitize their learning envi-

ronments for particular student needs by preparing their classrooms with materials that are challenging as well as reflective of the cultures from which children come. Teachers also must understand both how children acquire language as well as the implications that varying levels of English proficiency have for their practices.

Despite the shortage of bilingual early childhood professionals, research also shows that professionals have not received sufficient training in best practices to help ELLs acquire English in spite of recommendations from high-profile groups (Maxwell, Lim & Early, 2006). The National Center for Early Development and Learning found in 2006 that of 1,179 institutions of higher education, fewer than 15 percent of bachelor's and master's degree programs required students to take a course devoted specifically to working with dual language learners (Maxwell, Lim & Early, 2006). One reason may be that many college faculty members themselves are not prepared to teach courses regarding issues of young dual language learners (Freedson, 2010). As a result, stand-alone course offerings at colleges and universities tackling the issue of effective strategies for DLLs are limited though some of the content may be embedded in other courses. Surveys indicate a lack of offerings at two- and four-year degree granting institutions for students to enroll in courses about cultural and linguistic diversity (Early & Winton, 2001).

Given the lack of pre-service preparation of teachers for DLL students, ongoing professional development regarding the teaching of DLL students takes on even greater importance. Unfortunately, much of the burden of finding and providing appropriate professional development for teachers falls to ill-prepared administrators (Freedson, 2010). There is limited research on models of effective professional development for early childhood teachers working with DLL populations. One study measured the effects of a professional development program focused on language and literacy development for non-Spanish speaking preschool teachers serving a majority Spanish-speaking population. Teachers were taught specific, research-based strategies to support DLL children. Teachers substantially improved at creating learning environments that were linguistically

and culturally supportive of Hispanic DLLs, though no gains were found for children (Buysse, Castro, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010).

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement refers to the ways in which parents interact both with their children's learning at home and with their children's schools and teachers (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Some research has found that Hispanic families believe that teaching, as far as academics go, is better left to the "experts" and that in this regard that expert is the preschool and the teacher (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). Despite this, Hispanic families can still be receptive to suggestions offered by school personnel to enrich language, literacy, and math learning at home. Teachers and schools must invite Hispanic parents to engage rather than assume that parents simply don't want to be involved (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). Efforts to enhance parent engagement should seek to capitalize on the social-emotional benefits that Latino families offer their children by way of their tight-knit familial culture (Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010).

Conclusions

As the United States strives to recover from a stagnant economy, Hispanics – with the largest growth in population over the last decade – will likely play a key role in any possible economic resurgence. Thus, the educational success of Hispanics, including young English language learners, takes on increased urgency. One way to promote educational success, especially for children from low-income families, is through high-quality early education programs, including models like dual language/two-way immersion programs that maximize impacts and facilitate learning for these young children as they enter kindergarten (Gormley, 2008; Barnett, Jung, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung and Blanco, 2007; Frede, Barnett, Jung, Lamy & Figueras-Daniel, 2010). Some broad findings from these works include the following:

- Latino children are at greatest risk for reading difficul-

ties and academic underachievement as compared to their White and other minority peers.

- The vast majority of young English language learners are likely to be from low-income families.
- Proficiency in English at kindergarten entry has significant effects on later school achievement.
- High-quality preschool experiences can have large cognitive effects on young Hispanic children who have not yet had formal exposure to English language.
- Families are in need of improved access to high-quality preschool programs.
- Teachers must be adequately trained and prepared to maximize early learning experiences for young DLLs.
- Families of young Hispanic DLL students must be engaged in their children's early learning in ways that are responsive to their needs and sensitive to their culture.

The factors presented here represent the complex and intricate problems that affect the academic progress of young Hispanic students. In addition, the information provided exposes both the urgency and the importance with which the problems should be approached as investing in this crucial population will have marked benefits for the economic future of the country.

Given these circumstances, it is imperative that those who are planning and implementing services have accurate, up-to-date information on young children and their language abilities. This will require that states develop databases to report on the language characteristics, such as English proficiency of preschool ELLs, for children enrolled in publicly supported child care and education programs and at kindergarten entry, which is the first point at which information on nearly all young children can be obtained. This information will provide a better basis for planning personnel preparation programs, including those for teachers, and for planning appropriate services that address the needs for children and families to support both English language acquisition and home languages.

In addition to improving access to preschool programs for

Hispanic children, it is imperative that the programs offered strongly support English language development, and it is clear that this can be done with dual language models. Such an approach will promote not just the goal of English language acquisition, but redress a long-standing problem in the United States of poor foreign language preparation. A concerted effort will be required to educate and hire bilingual staff who have expertise in practices supportive of dual language learners.

Increased attention should be paid to fostering family engagement and bridging gaps between home and school for children from family backgrounds where English is not the predominant language in the home. This requires cultural sensitivity and recognition that Hispanics come from diverse backgrounds, as well as outreach in Spanish.

Specialized efforts are needed to inform Hispanic families about access to preschool programs for their children, to locate more programs where Hispanic families can easily participate in them, and to encourage and support more literacy activities in the home. Until more high-quality preschool programs are made accessible to Hispanic children through public provision or subsidy, outreach can be expected to have very limited impacts. Programs to support parents in developing language acquisition in the home can also play a role, but by ages 3 and 4 these should be viewed primarily as components of an overall approach that offers classroom-based education rather than as a substitute for such programs.



Best Practices for Young DLLs

Know what language and countries children and their families consider most important to their cultural heritage.

Build on what children know, their strengths and their interests.

Create a classroom environment that respects and reflects the languages and cultures of the children in an accurate way.

Keep a consistent and predictable sequence of daily events.

Keep the classroom organized and clearly labeled utilizing both pictures and words.

Teach new words and concepts around thematic units accompanied by sophisticated picture books.

Provide explicit vocabulary instruction in English, repeating new vocabulary words often and in context.

Use a combination of gestures, real-life objects, and pictures to support reading aloud and discussions.

Engage children in one-on-one discussions that utilize rich vocabulary as often as possible.

Use children's home language during instruction and for book reading when possible.

Encourage children to share words or phrases in their home language during individual and group settings.

Encourage all children to work together to accomplish a task.

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