

Chapter 1

Foundational Processes, Home–School Partnerships, and Culturally Responsive Practices for Dual Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the current empirical studies on foundational processes, home-school partnerships, and culturally responsive practices in regard to Dual Language Learners (DLLs) for early childhood education in order to inform teacher education programs (TEPs).

INTRODUCTION

With the continued growth of the young Dual Language Learner (DLL) population in US schools, all educators must be prepared to teach in linguistically diverse classrooms. It is critical to provide high quality teacher education programs in order to prepare teachers for the changing demographics in today's classrooms. The term dual language learner refers to students who develop and continue to use two or more languages (Genesee, 2010). While there is substantial evidence supporting the advantages of bilingual education, our public schools remain primarily monolingual instructional settings. This mismatch between best practice and the current state of education, poses a challenge for teacher education programs (TEPs) regarding how to prepare teachers to support students' native languages and create the best school environments that are culturally responsive.

Young DLLs range in age from birth through eight (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2010). An estimated 25 percent—one-in-four—children in America are from immigrant families and live in households where

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a language other than English is spoken (Mather, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau (2008) projects that the now ethnic and racial minority groups will become the majority by 2050. According to Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008), most mainstream teachers currently have at least one DLL in their classroom. However, only 29.5 percent of those teachers have opportunities for professional preparation in working with their DLL population. The U.S. Department of Education released a policy statement citing a number of recommendations for early childhood programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Among them were suggestions about promoting the learning and development of DLLs by creating a climate that is based on their strengths, recognizing the benefits of bilingualism, embracing diversity, and recognizing the importance of fostering connections with families as children's first and most important teachers.

The number of bilingual young children continues to rise in the United States and it is necessary for TEPs to provide the knowledge, skills, and best practices to teacher candidates about how to work with DLLs. Since most states do not require general education teachers to complete courses specific to the instruction of DLLs, most preservice training programs are lacking in their preparation programs. Many teachers are underprepared to work with DLLs and report feeling unequipped to teach DLLs (Baird, 2015; Daniel & Friedman, 2005). In addition, they desire to promote home-school partnerships with DLLs, yet are unsure how to do so. The Latina/o population may be outpacing the African American population; however, combined, they will constitute 44% of the student population by 2025 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Because all teachers are responsible for teaching in a diverse society, it is critical that our TEPs provide the highest quality instructional approaches to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse early childhood population. Although there are guidelines for K-5 TEPs, there are no consistent policies and regulations in place for the caregivers and teachers responsible for those in the early childhood field (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In the early childhood field, most teachers and caregivers of young children do not have four-year college degrees (Neugebauer, 2004). Also, state requirements for people caring for young children differ dramatically from state to state; the requirements to take classes beyond high school generally are fulfilled through courses provided by a state agency or community college. Additionally, because 97% of early childhood teachers are female, and because pay and benefits are so poor, a disproportionate percentage of childcare teachers and providers are women of color (Neugebauer, 1999). However, the content these teachers are taught about child development and learning, and the program best practices and regulations they must follow are based on White American and European theorists and researchers. The contention is that there is a mismatch between early childhood practices and the needs of minority children, which ultimately dooms these children to failure (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). This review seeks to address these mismatches by offering the most current empirical research studies addressing foundational processes, home-school partnerships, and culturally responsive practices for young DLLs, and includes implications for TEPs in each of the three focus areas.

FOUNDATIONAL PROCESSES

Child Development

A large percentage of children living in the United States come from homes in which a language other than English is spoken. The number of these students has dramatically increased in American elementary

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