



A RESEARCH REVIEW:
Effective Approaches to
Language Development
and Academic Achievement
for Young English Language Learners

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English Language Learners (ELL) are fast becoming the largest “minority” demographic group in U.S. schools. Students whose home language is other than English comprise approximately over 20% of the nation’s young children (Miller and Garcia, 2008) and are projected by the U.S. Census Bureau to be 40 percent of the school-age population by the 2030s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and possibly sooner if present demographic trends continue. This dramatic increase has spurred educators and policymakers to revisit research and evidence-based practices that support long term student achievement and success for this specific population of children. Recent national student achievement data highlight the need to identify instructional models and teaching strategies that will benefit young ELLs and result in improved academic performance at every educational level.

The purpose of this report is to inform the design of an approach to the early education of English Language Learners (ELLs) by examining the research on best practices and program models for children ages 3-5. This report provides an overview of ELL achievement patterns by reviewing current national achievement data, then discusses research on how young children cognitively experience and acquire languages and examines the current statewide programs provided for our nation’s ELLs. Finally, the report identifies and recommends practices that support and promote sustained progress in young children whose native language is other than English.¹

Achievement and English Language Learners-Rapid Changes and Growing Needs

What is the urgency around finding best approaches to support ELLs?

The “achievement gap” in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap is analyzed in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, high school completion, and college-completion rates, among other indicators of academic performance. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), closing achievement gaps among various student groups (e.g. Hispanic, White, Black, and Asian; low and high SES students) became a focus of federal education accountability, and school districts were required to disaggregate student test scores and other performance data by student characteristics to enable better comparisons among groups (Sparks, 2011, U.S. Department of Education, 2011,). This resulted in both greater awareness of racial and socio-economic disparities and rising concern about other kinds of achievement gaps. This focus led to more targeted interventions for different groups of students, but has not closed much of the achievement gap for ELLs since the passage of the law (August & Shanahan, 2006; Garcia and Frede, 2010).

¹ *A note on terminology:* For the purpose of this report, the term, **English Language Learners (ELLs)**, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education is used; **English Language Learners** refers to students whose first or primary language is not English, and encompasses both students who are just beginning to learn English and those who have already developed considerable proficiency. “ELLs” encompasses other terms frequently used, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), bilingual, English learners, dual language learners, and language minority students. (OHS Definition of English Language Learners, HHS/ACF/OHS. 2009)

ELLs are heavily overrepresented among low-achieving students, that is, students within the bottom 5% - 25% of the achievement distribution, and are heavily underrepresented among the nation's high achievers, those in the top 5% - 25% of the achievement distribution at all grade levels (Garcia & Frede, 2010; Lee, Grigg, & Donahue, 2007). Although English Language Learners come from a variety of linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, and some ELLs achieve high levels of school success (Espinosa, 2010), as a group, their academic performance lags behind their English-speaking peers.

Hispanic children identified as ELLs at the beginning of Kindergarten (Garcia and Frede, 2010) merit particular attention as they comprise a substantial majority (~70-80%) of all ELL students (Garcia and Frede, 2010, Hernandez, 2010). Data from the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP), the Nation's Report Card (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007a & 2007b), and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K) clearly indicate that young Hispanic ELLs start kindergarten academically behind their English speaking peers and continue to perform at lower levels through elementary and high school. Although Hispanic students have shown some progress in improving performance in reading and mathematics, the evidence shows that Hispanic students lag behind white students in both fourth and eighth-grade math and reading proficiencies, in high school graduation rates, and in college enrollment and college completion. Supporting data come from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K). This national, longitudinal study clearly demonstrates that Hispanic children who entered kindergarten without English language skills are in the lowest performing group in all academic content areas by fifth grade, and that a very small proportion of these children achieve at advanced levels (Miller & Garcia, 2008, see especially pp. 13-14). However, these achievement patterns are strongly influenced by the socioeconomic status of the families. Children from low SES families have been shown to experience much less rich language exposure and to have learned significantly fewer vocabulary words at kindergarten entry than their more economically advantaged peers (Hart & Risley, 2003). Since the majority of Spanish-speaking ELLs cluster in the two bottom SES quintiles (Espinosa et al., 2007), much of the achievement gap at K entry can be explained by a combination of reduced exposure to language learning and the cumulative effects of growing up in economic distress.

A recent Rand report (2007) of student achievement in California has also shown that despite rising achievement levels in recent years, there are still vast disparities among student groups. Although the data for all children indicate substantial percentages falling short of proficiency or readiness criteria, English Language Learners have the highest proportion of students who do not meet basic or proficient benchmarks. When tested at grade level, nearly 70 percent of these students do not meet second-grade proficiency standards in English-language arts, and about 85 percent do not meet third-grade standards, while between 53 and 58 percent do not meet math proficiency standards in those grades (Rand, 2007).

The past 20 years of educational research has clearly demonstrated the importance of early educational experiences in the long-term achievement and life-adjustment of young children from diverse backgrounds (Espinosa, 2010). Most children, however, do not attend high-quality preschool and many do not enter kindergarten fully prepared for formal schooling (Rand, 2008), providing further evidence that enriched learning environments are necessary for future academic achievement and school success. Behind these disparities in school-related performance lie dramatic differences in children's early experiences, access to quality programs, and socioeconomic and cultural factors. A prime difference in children's early experience is in their exposure to rich language, which is fundamental in literacy development and across all cognitive domains (Rand, 2007). On average, children growing up in low-income families have dramatically less rich experience with language in their homes than do middle-class children (Galindo, 2010; Hart & Risley, 1995). When they start kindergarten, children in the lowest socioeconomic group have average cognitive scores that are 60 percent below

those of the most affluent group (Lee & Burkam, 2002). Although studies indicate that issues of poverty, language barriers, cultural perspectives, familial values, and limited educational backgrounds are factors that contribute to a lower Hispanic and ELL enrollment rate in preschool programs, overwhelming research suggests that all children, particularly those with low family incomes and limited English proficiency, will benefit greatly from early education programs (Hernandez, 2010; Gormley & Gayer, 2005; Takanishi, 2004). In fact, those young children who are the most disadvantaged have been shown to benefit the most from participation in high quality early education programs.

Neuroscience: Brain Architecture and Early Childhood Language Development

Children's early language skills predict future reading abilities, and skills not developed during the first years of life are difficult to remediate as children's brains mature. Early experiences create a foundation for lifelong learning. A strong foundation with rich learning experiences and warm and nurturing relationships in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes throughout life. It is important to better understand the role of early language experiences on cognition and the brain by examining and integrating the rapidly growing body of knowledge from neuroscience and molecular biology with our extant literature from child development research.

Critical aspects of brain architecture begin to be shaped by experience before and soon after birth, and many fundamental aspects of that architecture are established well before a child enters school (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). Current brain studies show that infants learn to encode and distinguish the sounds and patterns of language during the earliest months of life. All infants are born with innate abilities to easily identify every sound of every language; however, by the end of the first year of life, infants show a perceptual narrowing of their language skills. Their ability to discern differences in the sounds that make up words in languages they do not regularly hear diminishes rapidly during the first year of life (Kuhl, 2011). By the time a child is 3 years old, a baby's brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections — about twice as many as adults. A baby's brain is super dense and will remain so throughout the first ten years of life. Studies now show continuity from the earliest phases of language learning in infancy to the complex processing evidenced at the age of three when all typically developing children show the ability to carry on a sophisticated conversation (Shonkoff, 2010). Every new competency is built upon competencies that were previously mastered.

Early brain wiring appears to be different for monolinguals and bilinguals within the first year of life, emphasizing the importance of high quality interactions and input from the start (Garcia-Sierra, et al., 2011). Patricia Kuhl, professor of early childhood learning and co-director of the Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences at the University of Washington, and her team of researchers are currently investigating the brain mechanisms that contribute to infants' ability to learn languages. Their recent study, *Bilingual language learning: An ERP study relating early brain responses to speech, language input, and later word production*, (Garcia-Sierra, et al., 2011), is the first to measure brain activity with a Magnetoencephalography (MEG). MEG is a non-invasive technique for investigating human brain activity. It allows the measurement of ongoing brain activity on a millisecond-by-millisecond basis, and it shows what parts of the brain are activated by language exposure and how the brain requires connectivity for the development of early language skills. The study goes beyond language learning and investigates the capacity of very young brains to process and absorb new information. The research team investigated the brains of babies being raised in bilingual (English and Spanish) households compared to babies in monolingual (English or Spanish) homes. Babies heard background speech sounds in one language, and then a contrasting sound in the other language occurred occasionally. For example, a sound that is used in both Spanish and English served as the background sound and then a

Spanish "da" and an English "ta" each randomly occurred 10 percent of the time as contrasting sounds. If the brain can detect the contrasting sound, there is a signature pattern called "the mismatch response" that can be detected with the MEG. Monolingual babies at 6-9 months of age showed the mismatch response for both the Spanish and English contrasting sounds, indicating that they noticed the change in both languages. But at 10-12 months of age, monolingual babies only responded to the English contrasting sound. Bilingual babies showed a different pattern. At 6-9 months, bilinguals did not show the mismatch response, but at 10-12 months they showed the mismatch for both sounds. The findings revealed that the brains of the bilingual infants seemed to remain "open" to learning diverse phonemes for a longer period of time compared to monolingual infants (Garcia-Sierra, et al., 2011).

The results of these studies also confirmed earlier research findings that the more language the children heard as infants, the larger their vocabulary was later. To determine if the recorded brain responses at 10-12 months related to later speaking skills, the researchers followed up with the parents when the babies were about 15 months old to see how many Spanish and English words the children knew. They found that early brain responses to language could predict infants' word learning ability. That is, the size of the bilingual children's vocabulary was associated with the strength of their brain responses in discriminating languages at 10-12 months of age.

The study concluded that early exposure to languages also makes a difference. Bilingual babies exposed to more English at home, including from their parents, other relatives and family friends, subsequently produced more words in English. The pattern held true for Spanish. Adrian Garcia-Sierra, lead author of the study and a postdoctoral researcher at UW's Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences states that while this difference in development suggests that the bilingual babies "may have a different timetable for neurally committing to a language" compared with monolingual babies, all children have the natural capacity and cognitive flexibility to learn language(s) if exposed early on and consistently. This longitudinal study suggests that young children can learn multiple languages without delay, as long as they hear native speakers and have adequate experience with both languages. When children start to "mix" both languages in the same sentence, they are not confused. Rather, mixing languages indicates that the child is developing strong language skills (Garcia-Sierra, et al., 2011). The critical contributions of neuroscience research deepen our understanding of how young ELLs develop and acquire language from infancy and highlight the interactive nature of the development of home or first language (L1) and the acquisition of English or second language (L2) during the preschool years.

The Interdependency of First Language Development and Second Language Acquisition

How does research broaden our understanding of how children acquire languages?

By kindergarten, most children have developed an intricate linguistic system and their language is learned primarily through interaction with adult caregivers in the home language, second language, or both. The following findings illustrate how research conducted over the past 30 years on first and second language acquisition can inform our understanding of how to design effective educational interventions for young ELLs.

- First, research indicates that academic knowledge and skills acquired through one language pave the way for acquisition of related knowledge and skills in another language (Genesee, 2010). When instruction through the first language (L1) is provided to ELLs along with balanced second language (L2) support, these students attain higher levels of academic achievement than if they had been taught in the second language only. Research indicates that there is a positive transfer between L1 and L2 in phonemic awareness, reading phonics, word recognition, word

strategies, use of cognates, and monitoring comprehension. However, many students need direct instruction that helps them transfer knowledge from L1 to L2 before they can utilize the similarities. A challenge for ELLs as they acquire English is learning vocabulary in L2. Background knowledge for specific content is essential to comprehension. Some reading strategies are common to both languages; others are specific to the phonetic and grapheme systems between English and Spanish. Explicit instruction in these contrasts is vital (Genesee, 2008).

- Second, research indicates that English is best acquired by students with limited or no proficiency in English after their first language is firmly established. Specifically, strong oral and literacy skills developed in the first language provide a solid basis for the acquisition of literacy and other academic language skills in English (Edelsky, 1982; Eisterhold-Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehn, 1990; Lanauze & Snow, 1989; Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999). Moreover, as described above, many common skills that underlie the acquisition and use of both languages transfer from the first to the second language, thereby facilitating second language acquisition.
- Third, language is learned best by all students when it is the medium of instruction rather than the exclusive focus of instruction. Teaching students early literacy skills in their first language, embedded within meaningful content, while also teaching them English fundamentals, promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English (Thomas & Collier, 1997; 2009).
- Finally, standardized reading achievement scores of ELLs in English significantly decline over time when there are no home language supports provided to help bridge language and learning from L1 to L2.

Literacy in English is essential to achievement in every academic subject—and to educational and economic opportunities beyond schooling (August & Shanahan, 2006). Dozens of studies and evaluations have been conducted and reported over the past 35 years comparing reading instruction that uses students' first and second languages with second language immersion. The National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (NLP, 2006) was created by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to identify, assess, and synthesize research on the education of language-minority children and youth with regard to literacy attainment and to produce a comprehensive report on this literature. The NLP meta-analysis with 15 related studies concluded that teaching ELLs to read in their first language and then in their second language (sequentially), or in their first and second languages (simultaneously) (Garcia & Frede, 2010, Genesee, 2010, Hernandez, 2010), compared with teaching them to read in their second language only, boosts their reading achievement in the second language. And the higher-quality, more rigorous studies showed the strongest effects.

Five of the studies that the NLP reviewed found positive effects of home language support on students' reading achievement on various measures of reading in English. The Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, (CREDE), a national research and development center funded by the U.S. Department of Education identifies and examines the most effective forms of education for students at-risk of educational failure due to linguistic and cultural diversity, poverty, or geographical isolation. The NLP and CREDE studies were the latest of five meta-analyses that reached the same significant conclusion: learning to read in the home language promotes reading achievement in the second language. When ELLs initially exit into the English mainstream, those schooled all in English outperform those schooled bilingually when tested in English. But the bilingually schooled students reach the same levels of achievement as those schooled all in English by the middle school years, and during the high school years the bilingual students outperform monolingual students (August & Shanahan, 2006; CREDE, 2006; Garcia & Frede, 2010; Genesee, 2010).

The convergence of these analyses suggests these importance findings:

- (1) Primary language instruction enhances ELLs' long-term academic achievement;
- (2) In many important respects ELLs learn in much the same way as non-ELLs; and
- (3) Specific accommodations must be made when ELLs are instructed in English, primarily (although not exclusively) because of the students' language limitations (August & Shanahan, 2006; CREDE, 2006; Garcia & Frede, 2010; Genesee, 2010; Hernandez, 2010). These accommodations might be utilized over many years, at least for some students, until sufficient familiarity with academic English is reached to permit them to be successful in mainstream instruction.

The Relevance of Home Language Maintenance in Developing English Proficiency

Fluency in English is crucial to future economic and social success in the U.S. It is also recognized, however, that English Language Learners are connected to their culture through their home language. As research shows, human beings have the capacity to acquire language quite readily during the earliest years of life. They also have the capacity to lose language if it is not used or needed. The loss of language skills occurs through the lack of a linguistically appropriate and social environment that values and supports the use of a particular language. Studies have shown that the younger the child, the more susceptible he or she is to social pressures that lead them to abandon their first language (Puig, 2010). In the United States, once American-born children of immigrant parents learn English, they tend to not maintain or develop the language spoken at home, even if it is the only one their parents know. This abandonment of the home language often results in a loss of important connections to family and community (Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Wong-Fillmore (1991) in an ethnographic study, described what occurs in homes where parents use their weaker language (for example, English) to communicate. Parents are less able to elaborate and extend the language and thinking of their children. They may not be able to communicate complex ideas. Their relatively weaker ability to speak English may cause them to speak less to their children. Some may avoid interaction entirely. If older children and adolescents cannot communicate well with their parents or grandparents, the cost to the family can be great (i.e. loss of respect for the parents and relatives who speak the home language). Consequently, children will enter kindergarten with inadequate development in both their first language and English, which sets them further behind the academic trajectory to proficiency in English.

Parents and family members play a critical role in preventing the loss of a child's home language. Numerous research studies have found that when parents understand the importance of supporting both the maintenance of their dominant language and the acquisition of English, children can sustain close ties with the family's culture and history while also enjoying the cognitive and linguistic benefits of becoming bilingual (Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

Current Instructional Approaches to Language Learning: The Diversity and Impact of Programs that Support English Language Learners

New findings hold promise for reducing learning gaps and barriers and increasing the achievement of all children. With the focus on English acquisition and proficiency for all ELLs, research continues to confirm the greater efficacy of early intervention as compared with remediation and other "too little" or "too late" approaches. For English Learners in particular, enhancing their early experiences can substantially shape their development and improve their chances for academic success, especially when intervention starts early in life and is not an isolated action but part of a continuous, coherent, and well-articulated series of educational opportunities.

Traditional Program Models: English Immersion, Bilingual, Dual Language

The nation's goal in supporting ELLs is to help students acquire strong levels of English proficiency and competency for long-term success; how best to accomplish that goal has been the topic of considerable academic debate for nearly three decades. In practice, schools generally opt for an instructional approach based on pragmatic considerations, such as the number of ELL students in the school, the number of different languages represented, levels of language knowledge in L1 and L2, and the availability of trained staff and resources to support their success. The three most common instructional approaches are English Immersion, Bilingual (Transitional or Developmental), and Dual Language (One Way or Two Way models).

In *English immersion programs*, English language learners are expected to learn in English from the beginning, and their native language plays little or no role in daily reading or other lessons. Formal or informal support is likely to be given to ELLs to help them cope in an all-English classroom, which, depending on resources, might include help from a bilingual aide who provides occasional translation or explanation. The goal is to mainstream students within one or two years. Immersion programs are typically combined with an English-as-a-second-language (ESL) pull-out component. These variations may well have importance in the outcomes of immersion strategies, but their key common feature is the exclusive use of English texts, with instruction overwhelmingly or entirely in English (Slavin & Cheung, 2003).

Bilingual programs can be transitional, or developmental (maintenance of home language). In all bilingual programs, instruction is given in both the home language and English. The aim of transitional programs is to use home language as a bridge to English where children are provided with English language instruction, and academic instruction in their native language for some portion of the day. The goal of transitional programs is to prepare students for mainstream English classes without letting them fall behind in subject areas. In theory, children transition out of these programs within a few years into English mainstream classes. Developmental bilingual programs are designed to provide more extensive home language instruction and support and to intentionally promote bilingualism.

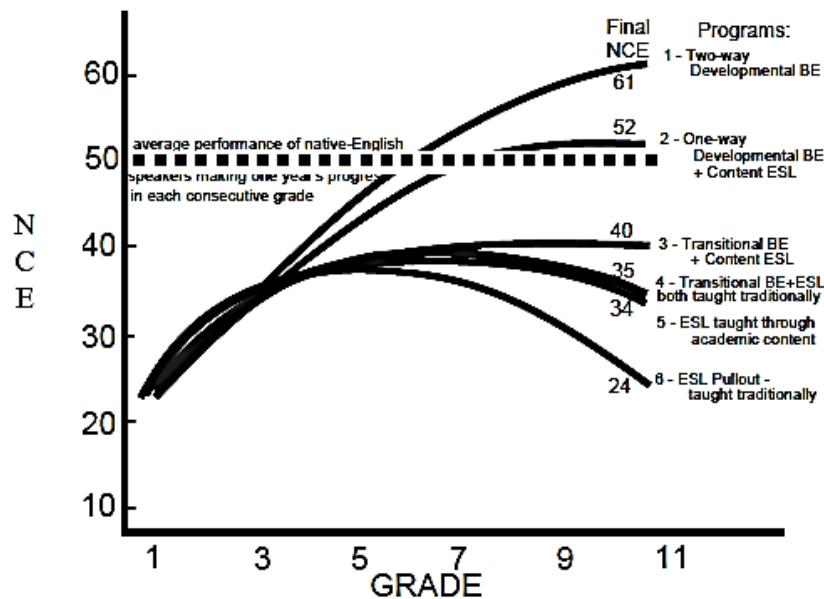
One version of developmental bilingual programs is a *dual language approach*. In two-way dual language program models there is a balance of native English speakers and ELLs and bilingualism and biliteracy are the expected outcomes; for ELL students, it is English, and for native English speakers, it is most often Spanish (Espinosa, 2010), although there is a growing interest in other languages such as Mandarin Chinese in some parts of the country. One way dual language programs usually include only ELL students, although they share the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy for all students. A significant difference between bilingual programs is the amount of instructional time spent in English and the home language, most commonly referred to as 90-10 and 50-50 models. In a 90-10 model, 90% of instruction is given in the home language (most often Spanish) while 10% of instruction is in English, gradually increasing the amount of English over several years. In a 50-50 model, instructional time is divided between English and the home language throughout the length of the program (Espinosa, 2010; Center for Applied Linguistics, 2003).

A large national study (Thomas & Collier, 2002) examined the type of instruction and program models English Language Learners (primarily Spanish-speaking students) received in five school districts over five years (1996–2001), as well as the achievement of these students on English and Spanish assessments. Two program types in this study are of particular interest because they result in the highest student outcomes in the long term when following students through their elementary school years and throughout their secondary years when possible. The five districts encompassed more than 210,000 students and included an inner-city district, a large and a medium urban district, and two rural districts. Students were tracked as they progressed through the programs from kindergarten or 1st grade through 4th or 5th grade. This rigorous and comprehensive study had both qualitative and quantitative components. Researchers identified eight types of ELL programs: One-way and two-way

dual language programs with both 90-10 and 50-50 instructional models, transitional bilingual programs, and English immersion models. Student achievement within these programs was measured by looking at the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs and the degree to which each intervention narrowed that gap. In reviewing the general findings regarding the effect on long-term student academic achievement in bilingual and English immersion programs, it was clear that those ELL students mainstreamed without bilingual support showed large decreases in achievement (three-fourths of a standard deviation by grade) when compared to their peers in bilingual programs. The English immersion group had the lowest achievement results, scoring at the 12th percentile on standardized reading tests and the largest number of high school dropouts. It was found that those ELL students who receive at least 50% of their instruction in their native language for at least 4 years were the most likely of all ELL students to fully reach the 50th percentile on nationally normed achievement tests in both their home language and English in all subjects (Thomas & Collier, 2002; Espinosa, 2010). While this longitudinal study did not include preschool-aged children but focused on the elementary grades and tracked school performance through the high school years, it none-the-less clearly demonstrates the importance of support for ELL students' home language while learning English.

PATTERNS OF K-12 ENGLISH LEARNERS' LONG-TERM ACHIEVEMENT IN NCEs ON STANDARDIZED TESTS IN ENGLISH READING COMPARED ACROSS SIX PROGRAM MODELS

(Results aggregated from a series of 4-8 year longitudinal studies from well-implemented, mature programs in five school districts)



Thomas & Collier, 2002

This chart represents a study conducted by Thomas and Collier comparing the effectiveness of programs for English learners. It shows that two way bilingual immersion programs and late exit transitional bilingual programs with content ESL were the only programs where ELs reached the 50% in English reading and maintained it through 12th grade.

Program 1: Two-way developmental bilingual education (BE)

Program 2: One-way developmental BE, including ESL taught through academic content

Program 3: Transitional BE, including ESL taught through academic content

Program 4: Transitional BE, including ESL, both taught traditionally

Program 5: ESL taught through academic content using current approaches

Program 6: ESL pullout--taught traditionally

*ESL=English as a Second Language

While there exists a substantial body of evidence supporting the long-term benefits of a well-designed preschool on children's development and achievement (Espinosa, 2008, Barnett, 2008), there are few empirical, experimental, or quasi-experimental studies that address the issue of how to best instruct young ELL children (August & Shanahan, 2006, Genesee et al., 2006, Espinosa, 2010). Recent research comparing the effects of L1 instruction to that of English immersion on preschool children's growth in literacy led the National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics (2007) to recommend an English-plus-Spanish (EPS) model in early childhood programs. This model refers to a wide range of formal and informal approaches to using both English and Spanish in the classroom. Instruction is mainly in English, but teachers explicitly use Spanish to scaffold concepts when the students' knowledge of English is too limited for the exchange (National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2007); a transitional bilingual program is an example of a formal EPS model.

A longitudinal, experimental-control design was used to test the hypothesis that native language instruction enhances ELL's native language and literacy development without significant cost to English development (Duran, et al., 2010). In this study, 31 Spanish-speaking preschoolers (aged 38-48 months) were randomly assigned to two Head Start classrooms differing only in the language of instruction (English and Spanish). Results showed that Spanish language instruction resulted in significantly higher growth on both Spanish oral vocabulary and letter-word identification measures. There were no significant differences between classrooms on these same measures in English. Results extend previous work by showing that EPS may be a viable alternative to traditional English-only models.

There have been several recent research efforts examining the relative effectiveness of different types of instructional environments on the achievement of English Language Learners, (Genesee et al., 2006; Slavin & Cheung, 2005, Thomas & Collier, 2002,), one meta-analysis (August & Shanahan, 2006), and one preschool policy analysis (National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2007). Significantly, they have all reached similar conclusions and made consistent recommendations for ELL children (Espinosa, 2010); when educators implement high quality instructional practices, all children benefit academically (August & Shanahan, 2006). Research reveals that like their English-speaking peers, young ELL students benefit academically from active engagement, small group interactions, opportunities to practice and apply new information, frequent reviews and practice, and direct instruction on certain aspects of literacy (Espinosa, 2010). Program effectiveness and educational barriers of each instructional model clearly indicate that there is no single best program model that is appropriate for all ELLs in all contexts. Research does, however, confirm that successful language learning depends on the quality of the learning environment and instructional approaches (Genesee, 2010). The debate over the role that home language instruction plays - whether it should be used and for how long - is ongoing. Regardless of varying program models and services, the goal to support English Language Learners in becoming proficient and successful in English remains clear.

In addition, reviewers of research on programs for English language learners (e.g., August & Hakuta, 1997; Brisk, 1998; Christian & Genesee, 2001; Goldenberg, 1996; Secada et al., 1998) have concluded that focus must be placed more on the quality of instruction for English language learners, rather than continuing to debate about language of instruction. Currently, there are no data to suggest the amount of support students receive or, most critically, the quality of instruction and its correlation to student achievement, however, what can be concluded is that well-designed and carefully implemented programs that support home language can have a significant positive effect on student achievement both in English literacy and in other academic core courses when compared to English immersion (August & Shanahan, 2006; Espinosa, 2010; Goldenberg, 2008; Thomas & Collier, 2002). The design of programs for English language learners should be responsive to the needs and strengths of local communities, student populations, and available resources. Conventional program labels (such as

first-language immersion; transitional; sheltered and content instruction in English; or English as a Second Language) are not terribly useful in predicting school success. However, all effective programs share crucial features: 1) understanding students' language knowledge and needs, 2) planning and delivering instruction that meets those needs, and 3) assessing whether students comprehended the instruction (August & Shanahan, 2006; Duran, et. al., 2010; Goldenberg, 2008).

Assessments: Current Efforts to Capture Data on Young English Language Learners

Gathering key information on students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds is essential in providing appropriate and targeted learning opportunities for all children. This is especially true for English Language Learners. The development of English Learners, like all children, depends on a number of factors and influences that exist within their home and learning settings. For English Learners in particular, these include the status given to their home language and the level of support provided for language development in both the home language and English. Some important information that teachers need to know: the age of exposure to each language and the type of or extent of the exposure to each language (simultaneous or sequential learning), home language proficiency, home language education level, general educational experiences, English language proficiency, level of content knowledge, social-emotional needs, and cultural assets. Most programs nationwide assess for the achievement of one goal only: academic growth, and this is typically measured in English only. Spanish language proficiency and cross-cultural understanding are assessed in some states as an entrance and exit type of measure, but rarely in any ongoing way that might inform instructional decisions. The NLP found that most existing assessments do a poor job of providing high-quality information about the individual strengths and weaknesses of ELLs (August & Shanahan, 2006). Thus, it is important to consider assessments that are reliable and valid for ELLs.

Research findings suggest that academic achievement measures that are normed for native English speakers have lower validity and reliability for ELLs. Assessment results may underestimate the level of ELLs' content knowledge because although students may understand the concept, they might not understand the English language in the assessment item about that concept. In fact, the test might be measuring students' language proficiency more than their content knowledge. L1 testing in languages other than Spanish is usually not feasible, but reliable tests are available in Spanish. Because Spanish speakers are the majority among ELLs in the U.S. and one of the groups most inconsistently served by schools (as measured by academic achievement and high school completion), quality instructional support and testing in Spanish can be a crucial step towards closing the achievement gap in English. The results, as previously mentioned, of data analyses of student outcomes in dual language programs demonstrate this very powerfully.

Current approaches for capturing data on our nation's young children vary by state and program. A combination of informal and formal measures is most commonly used to assess students. Informal assessments (also called authentic or alternative) allow teachers to track the ongoing progress of their students. Informal assessments are conducted regularly and often, providing continual and curriculum-embedded information about students' developing skills and abilities throughout the school year. By using informal assessments, teachers can target students' specific challenges, adapt instruction, and intervene earlier rather than later. Ongoing assessments are particularly important for English language learners (ELLs). There are two commonly used informal methods: performance-based assessment and portfolio assessment. Both methods utilize typical classroom activities to measure progress toward curricular goals and objectives. These activities are monitored and recorded by teacher observation. Some additional informal methods may include interviews with student and family, recorded observations, and basic conversation to capture real life use of language.

Less frequent standardized tests measure students at a particular point in the year, providing snapshots at a moment in time. Standardized tests in English do not usually reflect ELLs' true content knowledge or abilities. Today's No Child Left Behind legislation requires that meticulous records be kept on the progress of ELLs. Spanish Language Assessments for English Language Learners are identified in Appendix A.

Current Nationwide Approaches: How are states responding to the needs of English Language Learners during the Preschool Years?

As the number of young ELLs in our nation's schools continues to rise, guidance for school districts, administrators, and teachers on how to address their unique educational needs is inadequate and inconsistent. A review of federal and state standards and staff requirements clearly demonstrates this urgent need; schools need guidance on how to understand and capitalize on the linguistic and cultural strengths of ELL children, while also providing effective instruction and English Language Development (ELD). The Office of Head Start has repeatedly stressed the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive practices for ELL children and families. The document, *Multicultural Principles for Head Start Programs*, (2010) outlines the expectations for programs and clearly states the need to support children's home languages while also introducing English. In addition, the new Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework explicitly address the various stages of English language development. Some states are beginning to focus on the needs of young ELL children by providing frameworks for the instruction and support of young English Learners (e.g., California). Those that are doing so are employing a variety of strategies across multiple programs to focus on the early learning needs of ELLs. Still, a high degree of variability is apparent across states, making it difficult to gauge the effectiveness and quality of different practices and level of implementation.

**The Landscape of Early Childhood Programs:
State Approaches to Education of Young ELL Students Vary Dramatically**

MEASURES/PROVISIONS	# of States /# of Programs	States / Programs
No State ELL Standards	13 states	Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania (Educational Accountability Block Grants), Tennessee, Vermont (Act 62 and Early Education Initiative), and Virginia.
Systematic Written Plan for Supporting ELLs Required	8 states, 10 Programs	Georgia, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey (Abbott, ECPA and ELLI), Oklahoma, Pennsylvania (HSSAP), Wisconsin (4K), DC (Charter).
Provision of ESL Services Required	10 states, 11 programs	Kansas (At-Risk and Pre-K Pilot), Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey (Abbott), Oklahoma, Pennsylvania (K4), Texas, Washington , the District of Columbia (PEEP).
Home Language Survey Required	3 states	Iowa (Shared Vision and Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program), Nevada, Rhode Island.
Screening & Assessment Required	17 states, 19 programs in those states	Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey (Abbott and ELLI), New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania (HSSAP and K4/SBPK), Rhode Island, South Carolina (4K and CDEPP), Texas, Washington, Wisconsin (4K), DC (PEEP).
Children Must be Screened in Primary	1 state	Delaware

Language		
Information Must be Presented to Parents in their Primary Language	17 states, 21 programs in those states	Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas (At-Risk and Pre-K Pilot), Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey (Abbott and ECPA), New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania (HSSAP and K4/SBPK), South Carolina (4K and CDEPP), Texas, Wisconsin (4K), DC (PEEP).
Bilingual Instructional Programs Permitted in Preschool	28 states, 21 programs	Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey (Abbott, ECPA and ELLI), New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania (K4), Texas, Wisconsin (4K).
Monolingual Non-English Classes Permitted in Preschool	15 states, 21 programs	Illinois, Louisiana (8(g), LA4, and NSECD), Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey (Abbott, ECPA and ELLI), New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania (HSSAP, K4/SBPK and Pre-K Counts), South Carolina (4K), Texas, Washington, Wisconsin (4K), DC (PEEP).
Translators or Bilingual Staff Made Available	14 states, 16 programs	Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey (Abbott, ECPA and ELLI), New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania (K4), Texas, Wisconsin (4K).
Professional Development Provided for Teachers	13 states, 17 programs	Georgia, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey (Abbott, ECPA and ELLI), New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania (HSSAP/K4 and Pre-K Counts), South Carolina (4K), Texas, Wisconsin (4K), DC (PEEP and Charter).

Source: Center for American Progress, data captured from state standards websites, August, 2011.

Summary

The confluence of a swift increase in young English Language Learners in our nation’s schools, the rising concern around long term student achievement, and the increased pressure to promote and sustain student progress together creates a critical urgency to better provide strategic support that will benefit young ELLs and result in improved academic performance at every educational level. As the field of early childhood education evolves, an ongoing and extensive body of research informs policy and continues to shape effective practices for preschool-age children who are learning through two languages. This review of research literature and practices for English language learners reveals that academic trajectories from multiple studies show that, to date, little progress has been made in reducing academic divides and that ELLs remain heavily overrepresented among low achieving students beginning in Kindergarten and throughout their academic lives. Behind these disparities in school-related performance lie dramatic differences in children’s early experiences and access to quality programs.

New findings from several extensive research studies and meta-analyses focused on program models that serve ELLs have reached similar conclusions and recommendations: well-designed and thoughtfully implemented first language support in conjunction with English language development can have a significant positive effect on student achievement both in English literacy and in other content areas when compared to English immersion programs. Furthermore, recent neuroscience studies and research on first and second language acquisition during the past 30 years can inform our understanding of how to design effective educational interventions for young ELLs. Strong oral and literacy skills developed in the first language provide a solid foundation for the acquisition of literacy and other academic language skills in English, and a comprehensive meta-analysis further concludes that regardless of whether a transitional bilingual or dual language model is implemented, reading achievement in the second language increases when these models are compared to second language instruction only. This further underscores the value of the first language in supporting the acquisition of the second language.

The quality of education young children receive in their first years of schooling is often a key indicator of their long-term academic success. While there is little empirical evidence to date on how to best instruct young ELL children, research indicates that young ELL students benefit academically from general features of high quality: interactive learning, caring and responsive relationships, child engagement, and direct instruction on certain aspects of literacy. Because local communities, families, and programs vary widely, there is no single best program approach that is appropriate for all ELLs in all contexts. However, it is clear that successful language learning approaches depend on multiple factors, most critically, the quality of instruction and the appropriateness of the learning environment. In general, high quality literacy instruction for monolingual English speaking children also benefits English Language Learners, however young English language learners require classroom and instructional enhancements and extended opportunities to learn in order to thrive and develop high levels of literacy and achievement (Espinosa, 2010).

Research clearly shows that early literacy and language development are linked with social and cognitive development and are vital elements in the education of young children. While ELL children in preschool and Kindergarten may show great capacity and an increased rate of English acquisition in English immersion programs, research shows that long-term achievement in all content areas decreases significantly over time. Cognitive, social, and linguistic development begin in the first language, and it is in this language that children begin to construct their knowledge of the world and form powerful relationships that prepare them for future academic demands. It is the role of early childhood programs to build upon the linguistic, cultural and cognitive knowledge that young learners bring and to provide instruction that is based on warm, respectful, responsive relationships while being attentive to the developmental, linguistic, and cultural dimensions of each child. This is especially critical for English Language Learners.

The variety of program models for ELLs all share the common goal of supporting ELLs in their acquisition of English, although, clearly, there is no one “best” approach to effectively support all English language learners in all contexts. Overwhelming evidence concludes that supporting home language in conjunction with English acquisition has positive effects on student achievement over time. Clearly, language of instruction and high quality instructional models are not mutually exclusive issues. Effective instructional models can be applied in English, in the home language, and ideally in both languages.

Recommendations for Language Learning Approaches for 3-5 year olds

Research emphasizes that ELLs need instructional accommodations to keep pace with their native English-speaking peers (Espinosa, 2010). Goldenberg (2007), based on his review of three national data sets, suggests that instructional supports should include the strategic use of primary language, building on home (L1) language skills while also systematically teaching children English. The neuroscience research suggest that the first few years of life are ideal for learning languages and the longer we wait to expose children to second languages, the harder it will be. The review of research on the effectiveness of language program models consistently concludes that ELLs need help to transfer knowledge gained in L1 to the application in L2. Building on linguistic, cultural, and cognitive knowledge of young learners is essential in promoting not only academic achievement over time, but prepares them for future endeavors in a global workforce while valuing and embracing their family heritage and cultural perspectives.

Evidence-based Instructional Considerations and Approaches:

1. **Learning two languages from the start shapes brain architecture and enhances cognitive flexibility.** The brain can flexibly shift between L1 and L2 as language and meaning are

developed and assimilated. The window for cognitive flexibility is narrow and best developed at an early age and with consistent exposure to L1 and L2.

2. **High quality experiences for young children will promote long term academic success.** High quality experiences develop cognitive, emotional, language, physical and social skills of children that take into account individual children's developmental stages, learning styles, language levels and educational needs. Rich language and literacy development is the result of real-life experiences both in and out of school that give children concrete opportunities to engage, manipulate, and articulate their learning. Multisensory and physical experiences are crucial: children should be able to see, hear, and touch the topic of exploration.
3. **Strategic use of home language enhances comprehension and English learning.** Much empirical research documents the importance of providing some level of support for continued home language development, but the exact instructional strategies that best accomplish this goal are still under investigation. Most studies conclude that building comprehension in English for ELLs begins with understanding the concept in L1. By reviewing or developing vocabulary and concepts in L1, children can, with adult scaffolding, transfer knowledge to English more rapidly, thus constructing meaning on deeper level.
4. **Frequent assessment plays an important role in the education of English language learners.** Ongoing assessment of student learning provides continuous feedback on the effectiveness of instruction and indicates areas where a change in instructional strategy may be advised. Such assessments may range from planned assessment to informal observations of student language and literacy behaviors. Ongoing, performance-based assessments may reveal strengths and growth increments not detectable by annual high-stakes testing.
5. **Assessments in home language and English provide valuable information about linguistic strengths and challenges.** When receptive and expressive language is captured in home language and English, instructional decisions can be made to capitalize on linguistic strengths and provide focused attention to scaffolding language for L1 and L2 transfer. By assessing in L1 and L2, a natural support system can be embedded in daily instruction that utilizes home language as a bridge to English.
6. **Engaging families in literacy provides children with a foundation for the development of school literacy skills.** Research has also proven that family literacy can greatly enhance students' chances for academic success. It is very common for programs to encourage and in some cases require that children participate in family literacy experiences with their parents or other family members. With current technology, public libraries, and school resources, families have greater opportunities to support their children at home. Families should be encouraged to participate in shared reading experiences at home and to continue to use the home language for both literacy activities as well as everyday interactions.

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Appendix A

Spanish Language Assessments for English Language Learners

Table 1: Assessment and Publishers

Abbreviation	Spanish Test Name	Equivalent Assessment in English or Other Languages	Developer/Publisher
Batería III	Batería III Woodcock- Muñoz	Woodcock Johnson III (WJ-III)	Riverside Publishing
BSM	BSM- Medida de sintaxis bilingüe	Bilingual Syntax Measure I (BSM I)	Harcourt Assessment
ELLOPA	Early Language and Listening Oral Proficiency Assessment	May be adapted to any language	Center for Applied Linguistics
FLOSEM	Stanford Foreign Language Oral Skills Evaluation Matrix	May be adapted to any language	California Foreign Language Project, Stanford, CA; adapted from SOLOM
IPT-O	IDEA-Oral Language Proficiency Test	Parallel form in English	Ballard & Tighe
MN-SOLOM	Minnesota Modified Student Language Observation Matrix	May be adapted to any language	SOLOM revised by the Minnesota Department of Education
PLS-4	Preschool Language Scale, 4 th edition	Available in English	Harcourt Assessment
Pre-LAS	Pre-Language Assessment Scales, 2000	Available in English	CTB-McGraw Hill
SLP	Stanford Spanish Language Proficiency Test	Stanford English Language Proficiency Test (ELP)	Harcourt Assessment
SOLOM	Student Oral Language Observation Matrix	May be adapted to any language	San Jose Area Bilingual Consortium, revised by CA Dept. of Education
SOPR	Student Oral Proficiency Rating	May be adapted to any language	Development Associates, adapted from SOLOM
TPAS	Test of Phonological Awareness in Spanish	No English Equivalents	Pearson Assessments
TVIP	Test de vocabulario en imagines Peabody	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-4)	Pearson Assessments
WMLS-R	Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey, revised	Available in English	Riverside Publishing

Table 2: Assessment Domains and Administration Information

Abbreviation	Oral Language	Reading/ Writing	Academic Subjects	Vocabulary	Grades or Age Group	Administration Format	Standardized
Batería III	✓	✓	✓	✓	Age 2 to adult	Individual	✓
BSM	✓				Grades PK-2 (BSM 1)	Individual	✓
ELLOPA	✓			✓	Grades PK-2	Paired Interview	
FLOSEM	✓			✓	Grades PK-12	Informal	
IPT-O	✓			✓	Age 3-5 (Pre-IPT)	Individual	✓
MN-SOLOM	✓			✓	Grades PK-12	Informal	
PLS-4	✓			✓	Birth – 7	Individual	✓
Pre-LAS	✓	✓		✓	Grades PK-1	Individual	✓
SLP	✓	✓		✓	Grades PK-12	Group and Individual	✓
SOLOM	✓			✓	Grades PK-12	Informal	
SOPR	✓			✓	Grades PK=12	Informal	
TPAS	✓				Age 4-11	Individual	✓
TVIP				✓	Age 2-18	Individual	✓
WMLS-R	✓	✓		✓	Age 2-adult	Individual	✓

Adapted from Center for Applied Linguistics, 2012