

Getting it RIGHT for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds. Applying Research to Improve Practice.

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The Changing Face of Early Childhood in the United States

“Clearly, we need more early childhood teachers and staff who are fluent in multiple languages, but that staffing need may take decades to achieve.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 15)

“When early childhood teachers are recruiting family support, it is important to include all family members, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and so on, as part of the child’s support system.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 17)

“While adding English to the home language does not appear to weaken family ties, replacing home language with English is associated with a decreased commitment to familia.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 17)

“Children who are “bien educado” are seen as honest, polite, responsible, and deferential to authority. (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 18)

“In many East and Southeast Asian cultures, Confucian ideals, which include respect for elders, deferred gratification, and discipline, are a strong influence.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 19)

Self-effacement, the avoidance of drawing attention to oneself combined with personal modesty, is a trait traditionally valued in many Asian cultures.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 19)

“African Americans are often raised in extended families that provide many opportunities for social interaction (Hale, 1983; McLoyd et al., 2005).” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 21)

“Support for the home language is critical. These include language interactions, literacy activities, and to the maximum extent possible, some instruction in the child’s dominant language.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 25)

What Research Tells Us About the Needs and Abilities of All Young Children

“Patricia Kuhl and her colleagues at the Center for Mind, Brain, and Learning at the University of Washington have also found evidence that when infants are exposed to more than one language (which is typical in most parts of the world), the learning occurs in separate neural pathways.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 32)

Research Findings and Recommendations for Children Living in Poverty

“Children’s home language and culture are respected, appreciated, and incorporated into the curriculum and the classroom.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 50)

“Results also indicate that Head Start has different impacts based on the age of the child and the language spoken in the home.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 52)

Head Start in English: “Among children in this age group whose primary language was Spanish, impacts were found only in the area of health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 52)

“By incorporating what families know, what they value, and how they communicate their cultural knowledge, programs can increase home-school congruence and build on what young children already know.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 59)

Research on the Development, Learning, and Teaching of Young English Language Learners

“Unintelligible noise is all that my cousin and I heard when we first heard English spoken to us. We clung together as we approached our school on the first day. I knew that we would be all right as long as we stayed together. It never occurred to me that we would be separated and placed in different classes. (as cited in Alvarez et al., 1993, p. 3)” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 63)

Myth: “Learning two languages during the early childhood years will overwhelm, confuse, and/or delay a child’s acquisition of English.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 65)

“Others have concluded that, all things being equal, children have no difficulty acquiring two languages during the preschool years – and will benefit from becoming bilingual (Genesee et al., 2004).” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 67)

“There is wide scientific consensus that bilingual infants develop two separate but connected linguistic systems during the first year of life.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 68)

Silent Period: “After young children realize that speaking their home language will not work, they enter a period where they rarely speak and use nonverbal means to communicate.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 69)

“Erasing a child’s language or cultural patterns of language use is a great loss for the child. Children’s identities and senses of self are inextricably linked to the language they speak and the culture to which they have been socialized.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 73)

“There are the years of rapid language development and children can acquire a language in a year or two simply by being in a setting where the language is in daily use. However, it is equally true that languages can be lost with equal ease during this period, especially when the language they are learning is more highly valued than the language they already speak.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 73)

“Research on preschool- aged ELL children has shown that they can successfully learn two languages and experience multiple cognitive benefits when English acquisition is not at the expense of continued home language development (Bialystok, 2001; Espinosa & Burns, 2003; Winsler, Diaz, Espinosa, & Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, Duran, Diaz, & Espinosa, 1995).” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 74)

“The important point to keep in mind for young ELL children is that their home language and cultural practices are fragile and susceptible to dominance by the English language and

mainstream culture. Children who have the opportunity to speak two languages should be encouraged to maintain both, so they can enjoy the linguistic and cultural benefits that accompany bilingual status and cultivate their home language as well as English.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 75)

“When a young child is taught to be silent in the company of adults and that it is disrespectful to draw attention to oneself, it is difficult for that child to enthusiastically raise his or her hand and make contributions to group discussions when that is the expectation of the school.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 76)

Parent comments: “They stated that they were raising Maria to be respectful, not aggressive. They wanted Maria to be obedient and not challenging. To them, having a child who talked a lot in class and asserted herself with her peers and teachers was not suitable.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 76)

Submersion programs: “However, the primary goal of these programs is the rapid acquisition of English. In practice, there is much variability in how much support and attention is paid to the home language in English-dominant preschool programs (Chang et al., 2007).” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 79)

“Research indicates that instructional programs work when they provide opportunities for students to develop proficiency in their first language. Studies that compare bilingual instruction with English-only instruction demonstrate that language-minority students instructed in their native-language as well as English perform better, on average, on measures of English reading proficiency than language-minority students instructed only in English. (August & Shanaban, 2006, p. 5).” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 80)

Research on Dual Language approaches

“The children in the dual language approach were advancing toward balanced bilingualism while gaining increasing mastery over the linguistic structures of both English and Spanish.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 81)

“All the ELL children in the dual language program made greater gains in their Spanish vocabulary while their peers in the English immersion program lost ground in their native language.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 81)

“Rather than confusing children, as some have feared, reading in a familiar language may serve as a bridge to success in English because decoding, sound blending, and generic comprehension strategies clearly transfer between languages that use phonetic

orthographies, such as Spanish, French, and English (August 2002; August & Hakuta, 1997; Fitzgerald, 1995a, 1995b; Garcia, 2000).” (Espinosa, 2010, pp. 81-82)

“Educators need to attend to the social-emotional development of ELL children as well as their cognitive development.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 84)

Promising curriculum, instructional, and assessment strategies for young English Language Learners

“All children in ABC program will learn two languages. The native English speakers will learn Spanish (or Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, and so on) and the non-native English speakers will learn English. Our goal is for all children to eventually become bilingual and biliterate and to function competently in a multicultural setting.” (Espinosa, 2010, pp. 90-91)

“Unless you believe “in your bones” that having a second language in addition to English is a gift and not a disadvantage, and that diversity is a resource, not a problem to be solved, you are likely to respond to ELL children in ways that discourage the continued use of their home language – especially if you are not fluent in the child’s home language.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 91)

“To have complex, extended conversations in a linguistically rich classroom environment, all staff need to commit to improving their pedagogy skills as well as their ability to use multiple languages fluently and correctly.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 92)

“To focus only on the acquisition of English and not to explicitly prioritize the ongoing development of each child’s home language will most likely lead to the fading of home language abilities over time.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 96)

“The child must be assessed in the home language as well as English.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 101)

Meeting the future challenges of early childhood education

“Another board member jumped in, “I know what this means. We need to have preschool for all – and make them all bilingual preschools. She is convincing me that all children will benefit from bilingual preschools.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 109)

“Many of the children were in the early stages of English development and needed to communicate in their dominant language. She stressed the importance of learning the math concepts in any language.” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 110)

Bibliography

Espinosa, L. (2010). *Getting It Right for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds*. Boston: Pearson Learning Solutions.