



**June 2014:
Meeting the Needs of Dual Language Learners**

Background

In recent years, the United States has seen a shift towards greater diversity. In fact, children born in the last twenty-five years make up the most diverse generation in US history - and this trend is continuing. By 2018 children of color will represent a majority of the population of children in the United States. This movement is evident in many Head Start programs that already serve diverse populations. For example, in St. Paul, MN, the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties has an average of 6 different languages and dialects spoken in each Head Start classroom.

Access to high quality early child education is [limited for children from diverse immigrant populations](#). Factors that can limit access include lack of dual language programs available, inadequate outreach in a family's home language, and a disconnect between the family culture and school culture. Nevertheless, through the federal to local funding stream Head Start has the ability to tailor services to fit the needs of the communities that we serve. In the articles below you will find examples of what other early child education programs are doing to increase access for diverse immigrant families.

For many children, preschool represents the first time that they encounter dominant socio-cultural values that they are expected to assimilate to and personify. Research has found that children of diverse backgrounds (cultural, linguistic, and racial) often encounter barriers in assimilating to the dominant culture, since the dominant culture conflicts with their home culture. If not acknowledged, these barriers can hinder a child's development. For example, many early child developmental assessments are not suitable for assessing dual language learners (DLL), and children may be misdiagnosed with learning problems.

There is a growing body of research on diversity in early child education classrooms that promote the importance of dual-language and culturally relevant pedagogy, and we see in [Georgia](#), [Tennessee](#), and elsewhere that DLLs can benefit most from high-quality early learning opportunities. As a [research-driven](#) program, Head Start strives to meet the needs of the diverse families that we serve. Since the beginning, the Head Start model has focused on the parent as the first and most important educator for their children. In this Research Blast, you will learn how to take the challenges of a diverse classroom and turn them into strengths by bringing the culture of a child and their family into the classroom and building on the strengths and experiences they bring.

Resources

[Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices - Ideas from the Field](#)

Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) is one of Minnesota's largest school districts with a diverse student population who speak over 125 languages and dialects. This collection of activities was shared by teachers, coaches, assistants and parent educators. The categories include Celebrating Me and My Family, Using Technology to Bring Families into the Classroom, School-Home Exchange, and References.

[Solving the Puzzle: Dual Language Learners with Challenging Behaviors](#)

Children who are new to English may have difficulty communicating, and their frustration may translate into challenging behaviors in the classroom. Created by Karen Nemeth and Pamela Brillante for NAEYC, this article provides useful strategies for teachers who work with dual language learners exhibiting challenging behaviors.

[National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness](#)

This three-volume resource provides extensive descriptive listings of research- and evidence-based articles, books, videos, curricula, websites, and other resources useful to families, staff, Head Start partners, and T/TA providers. Download and print the volumes on Dual Language Learning; Native and Heritage Language Preservation, Revitalization, and Maintenance; and Cultural Responsiveness for your staff or partners!

Research

Urban Institute

[Supporting Immigrant Families' Access to Prekindergarten](#)

By Julia Gelatt, Gina Adams, and Sandra Huerta

Many policymakers have taken note of evidence on the return on investment of high quality education programs that enhance children's development and prepare them for success in school and eventually in the workforce. Studies also show that children who are second language learners make the most gains in these programs when compared to their peers. Nevertheless, research has found that children of immigrant and second language learning families tend to have lower preschool enrollment rates.

Children of immigrant and second language families are a growing share of the US population. This article focuses on the growing need to increase access to high quality early child education for diverse immigrant families. The authors highlight the different strategies certain programs have used for increasing access. The strategies fall into four main categories: outreach, enrollment assistance, building relationships with parents, and building immigrant-friendly

preschool programs. While many of these activities are likely familiar to Head Start programs, the suggestions are worth reviewing for new ideas.

Early Childhood Education Journal

[**The Role of Action Research in Fostering Culturally-Responsive Practices in a Preschool Classroom**](#)

by Mariana Souto-Manning and Christina Hanson Mitchell

Early child educators have a vital role in helping children navigate between home cultures and socially-dominant cultures, which at times can conflict with one another. In turn, this creates barriers for a child's healthy development. As the demographic makeup of many Head Start classrooms begin to change, it is important to remain flexible in the classroom.

This study was conducted by an early childhood teacher in her classroom over several years as she investigated and explored teaching practices in a diverse preschool classroom. This informative study is also an excellent guide for early child educators who want to challenge their teaching style to incorporate the cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity of their children into the classroom.

Early Childhood Education Journal

[**What linguistically diverse parents know and how it can help early childhood Educators: A case study of a dual language preschool community**](#)

by Sara Michael-Luna

The rise in a diverse child population also represents a rise in dual language learners. Although there is growing research that supports dual language programs, teachers are often concerned with the lack of knowledge of best practices to support their multilingual students' development. Adding to this frustration is the push for formal assessments in English which lack the ability to measure a child's full knowledge, rather only measuring their ability in the language of the test.

This two year case study explores how diverse families can help educators understand the language development of their bilingual children. Most importantly, the article focuses on how this information can help guide formal and informal assessment data, and create a supportive environment for bilingual children and their families. This study demonstrates how knowledge of a child's use of language outside the classroom can enhance a teacher's knowledge of bilingual development.

Child Development Perspectives

[**Assessing Preschool Dual Language Learners: Traveling a Multi-forked Road**](#)

by Elizabeth D. Pena and Tamara G. Halle

The Head Start field is dedicated to the healthy development of each vulnerable child that it

serves. Head Start staff conduct on-going formal and informal developmental assessments for all enrolled children throughout the year to determine a child's progress and help guide program activities. With a growing dual language population, it is imperative to consider the validity of certain assessments in determining the developmental skills of a child. For example, research has shown that a higher percentage of dual language learners (DLL) are often misdiagnosed as developmentally impaired.

This article explores how linguistic, cultural, and other home life factors may present considerable challenges in the accurate assessment of preschool DLL. In addition, the article focuses on how the difference between a child's home culture and school culture may pose a problem in correctly assessing the child's development. Recommendations are discussed in the conclusion.

Discussion Questions

1. What initiatives has your program carried out to support culturally relevant teaching? What has been most successful? What strategies or resources from this month's Research Blast can help support this effort?
2. In the article by Michael-Luna, the author emphasizes the importance of working with families to help educators understand the depth of a bilingual child's language development. Was this a new idea for you or one that you have used often? For dual language learners, how can you give their families a bigger voice in their language development?
3. Souto-Manning and Mitchell also stress the significance of incorporating a child's family in the classroom setting to facilitate culturally-relevant teaching. How is this different from the model that you use now? How is it similar? What is one area that you can grow in?

Do you know of other recent research that may be of interest to the Head Start field? Do you have other questions, comments or concerns? E-mail Emmalie Dropkin (edropkin@nhsa.org).