

FACTS and TIPS

Young Dual Language Learners (Birth through 5 years)



Topic 6.2—Supportive Instructional Practices and Strategies

FACT # 1: *Providing children with comprehensible language input throughout their daily routine is a key instructional practice for dual language learners (ELDStrategies.com, 2009).* It is difficult for children to pay attention much less participate in important learning activities when they don't understand what is being said or asked of them. Providing children with comprehensible input simply means making what you say understandable to children. Language supports are a very important strategy for providing young children with comprehensible language input and consequently more equitable access to the curriculum. *Using language supports gives children the opportunity to focus on understanding the concept being taught or discussed rather than simply struggling to decode the speaker's message.* Young dual language learners benefit from **sensory and interactive language supports** that are tailored to *their* level of English language development (Castro, et al, 2011; Espinosa, 2010; WIDA, 2007). When designing appropriate language supports, a simple but very important question for practitioners to ask themselves is ***“What do I need to do to make what I am saying, reading, or singing more understandable to the children?”*** Ask this question while lesson planning, when giving directions, during interactions with children, when conducting instructional activities or providing therapy. This simple question, as well as carefully observing how children do or do not respond during daily activities, provides information as to the types of language supports that are needed.

FACT #2: *Providing children who are dual language learners with extra opportunities and supports to practice their oral language skills is a key instructional practice.* All young children need multiple opportunities to listen and respond to language in order to develop age-appropriate oral language skills. According to Resnick & Snow (2009), “engaging in stimulating talk is the only way young children can expand their own language skills--learning words, putting sentences together, and practicing the ‘rules’ of talk, such as taking turns in a conversation”. Oral language skills form the basis of most social interactions as well as the foundation for early literacy skills and reading achievement in the later school years (Resnick & Snow, 2009). If young native English-speaking children need many opportunities for talking, children who are dual language learners need even *more* opportunities to practice using their new language while continuing to develop their home language. Unfortunately, statistics show that Spanish-speaking preschoolers often receive *fewer* quality interactions from early childhood practitioners than their English-speaking peers (Chang, F., et al, 2007). Often this happens unintentionally because practitioners don't know *how* to engage children whose home language is other than English. Young dual language learners need language supports consistent with their level of English language development in order to be able to participate in verbal interactions and group discussions. It is our job as practitioners to provide children who are dual language learners with both an emotionally safe learning environment as well as supportive instructional strategies so that they feel safe enough to take verbal risks and practice their oral language skills in both languages.



Instructional Tips

- ❖ *Language supports* include strategies or instructional “tools” that help children access the curriculum for understanding or communication (WIDA, 2007). Following are some simple language supports that practitioners can use during children's daily routine when communicating in English. (Please note that these strategies are useful with *all* children, but are essential for dual language learners.)
 - ✓ Adjust the complexity of your language according to the language development levels of the dual language learners in your program. This is what is meant by “scaffolding” for language. For example, use more open-ended questions during conversations or story time for children who understand and speak more English. Open ended questions usually begin with “why” or “how”. If children do not understand or respond, simplify your language by including a “choice” of two possible responses. If children still do not understand, ask them to simply name or label something. If children do not have enough expressive language to respond by naming an object or person, you might ask them a “yes” or “no” question.
 - ✓ Use sentence frames or sentence starters so that children can more easily access language and participate in conversations or discussions. For example, after reading “Brown Bear, Brown Bear” extend the activity using a grab bag of familiar objects

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with the question "What do you see?" as child pulls out an object. The child responds with the sentence starter "I see _____." Practitioners can ask the question inserting children's names at the beginning of question ("Name, what do you see?") with children responding "I see a _____". Children can take turns asking and answering using these sentence frames practicing both question forms and indicatives.

- ✓ Monitor your speech for clarity and speed. Speak clearly and succinctly using a natural and even pace.
- ✓ Use repetition throughout the day. Repeating what you say as well as restating what you say at different levels of complexity gives children extra time (and support) to process and decode the message you are conveying.
- ✓ Extend on children's language by repeating what they say while adding another word or concept. For example, if the child says "I have car" you might respond "Yes, you have a car. You have a blue car." The first repetition models using the article "a" and the second repetition adds the adjective or descriptive word "blue". Depending on the child's level of language development, you can add more or less complex language to their communication.
- ✓ Model whatever you are asking children to do or say. For example, explicitly demonstrate how to wash hands while verbally stating each step of the process. You might also have photos or pictures of each step in the process and point to each one as you demonstrate.
- ❖ **Sensory language supports** simply mean those types of supports that use children's senses to help them access language and learning (WIDA, 2007). Examples of sensory supports include real-life objects, manipulatives, photos, pictures, drawings, gestures, physical activities, and models (WID, 2007). Sensory language supports can be incorporated throughout learning activities, during transitions, and throughout the environment. Suggested sensory supports include:
 - ✓ During early literacy, math, and science activities--- story puppets, objects from books, felt or magnetic story boards with accompanying story characters, animals, and objects; illustrated songs and fingerplays with accompanying gestures and movements, story sequencing cards, objects for counting, geometric figures, photos or pictures, illustrative posters, etc.
 - ✓ Within the natural environment to support transitions, remind children of behavioral expectations, and support their learning through play--large illustrated schedule of the daily routine, children's picture and name board, family picture board, adult volunteer picture board, illustrated job board, labeled photos of materials and objects in learning centers, signs explaining how to use materials/objects, pictorial hand-washing chart, etc.
 - ✓ During transition times to help all children understand adult expectations--routine songs, routine gestures, adult modeling of desired behavior, role playing, photographs or videotapes of the transition, etc.
- ❖ **Interactive language supports** include interactive activities or tasks that help children make sense of new information and form that understanding into language. Interactive supports also include home language use as well as interactive computer programs (WIDA, 2007). Suggestions for interactive language supports include:
 - ✓ Structure activities that incorporate time for children to verbally interact with each other to clarify and construct meaning and to practice using new vocabulary. For example, after reading a story ask children to talk with a friend about their favorite part or divide into small groups and talk about the story focusing on key vocabulary words.
 - ✓ Intersperse dual language learners who speak more English with those who are just learning English during small group activities so that they can model English as well as freely use their common home language.
 - ✓ Create "buddy" systems and pair children together who speak more English with those who are beginning learners. If possible, pair children who speak the same home language. Buddies might be assigned to do jobs together, to read together, or to do an art project together.
 - ✓ Enlist bilingual elementary or secondary student volunteers to read stories to children or assist during small group activities using their home language. These "big buddies" may help young dual language learners feel more at ease to practice their English as well.
- ❖ Intentionally plan to engage in meaningful interactions with the children who are dual language learners in your program on a daily basis. Focus on specific times of the day such as before naps, during meals, outdoor play, or center time to converse one-on-one. Make a game out of teaching each other new words!



Connecting with Families

- ❖ Parents are often eager to support their children's learning. Let parents know how valuable it is to continue speaking, reading, and singing with their children in the home language to support their continued social-emotional and conceptual development.
- ❖ Ask permission to videotape parents or primary caregivers reading traditional stories, reciting traditional rhymes, singing traditional songs, or demonstrating cooking or making traditional artifacts for use in your early childhood program.
- ❖ Create a lending library of the books commonly read in your early childhood program for parents to read with their children at home in their home language. Let parents know that it is perfectly fine to simply talk about the pictures in the books with their children in case they are unable to read English or their native language.

Topics #6.1 and #6.2 Supportive Instructional Practices and Strategies

References and Resources

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