

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE SUMMARY

The Availability of Head Start Services to Dual Language Learners and Their Families

Christine Meng
Edgewood College

Extant research on Head Start programs lacks knowledge and guidance to provide services to support dual language learners (DLLs) and their families at the program level. This study analyzed data from the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES, 2009) to classify Head Start services provided for dual language learners and their families and whether Head Start's DLL services would be related to the Head Start program goals, DLL parents' involvement, and family-school partnership. The analysis revealed two types of Head Start services for the DLL children and their families: family/adult focus (DLL family workshops, adult ESL (English as a Second Language), interpreters, and translation) and child ESL focus. Services with the family/adult focus were related to the program goals of providing the families with more language and educational support and greater parent involvement and family-school partnership than services with child ESL focus. Research and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Dual language learners, Head Start

The influx of immigrants to the United States results in an increased number of children who come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Some of these children, referred to as dual language learners (DLLs), speak their native languages at home and learn English either simultaneously or sequentially (California Department of Education, 2008; Office of Head Start, 2008). The DLL children who are developing their English skills are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of poverty during the early years. Because the DLL families from low-income backgrounds often experience barriers to access and enroll their children in high-quality child care services, a lack of access to high-quality child care services can have implications for the DLL children's early learning and development (Magnuson & Waldfoge, 2005).

Head Start supports the DLL children and their families in several ways. For example, it is recommended to support the DLL families' native languages and encourage home literacy activities in the DLL families' native languages (Office of Head Start, 2009). Because the local communities have resources to support the DLL families, Head Start often uses the resources available in the surrounding communities to provide language and educational support for the DLL children and their families. Another way to support the DLL children and their families is through recruiting bilingual staff. Although there is a shortage of bilingual staff members across the United

States, Head Start actively recruits bilingual staff members who are familiar with the cultural backgrounds of the DLL children and their families because it is important to understand the cultural backgrounds of the DLL children and their families when staff members work with this population. Staff members who share similar linguistic backgrounds with the DLL children and their families can also act as interpreters and translators, so the information and resources can be more accessible to the DLL families.

Providing services and resources to the DLL children and their families helps Head Start programs achieve several multifaceted goals. For example, because the parents of the DLL children are often foreign-born, providing language and education training to the DLL families can not only support the parents' English skills but also familiarize the parents with the education system in the United States. Providing inclusive curriculum and classroom teaching can validate the DLL children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Connecting the DLL children and their families to the resources in the surrounding communities can help establish social network for these families (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Head Start teachers who encourage family literacy activities in the DLL children's native languages can not only help preserve the DLL families' native languages but also promote the DLL children's English skills due to the process of cross-linguistic transfer (Dickinson, McCabe, Clark-Chiarelli, & Wolf, 2004; Reese, Garnier, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 2000).

Head Start has a dual focus on serving the DLL children and providing direct services to the DLL families (Office of Head Start, 2009). Depending on the resources available in the surrounding communities and the particular need of a Head Start program, generally speaking, the services that Head Start provides to the DLL children and their families tend to focus on facilitating the DLL children's English acquisition, respecting and supporting the DLL families' native languages, and providing the parents of the DLL children with educational and language support. Consistent with the goal of serving the DLL children, Head Start can connect the DLL children with ESL services. Supporting the DLL families' native languages is also aligned with the goal of building a partnership with the DLL families to support the DLL children.

Because Head Start values its partnership with the DLL families, providing direct services to the DLL families can encourage school involvement and participation of the parents with the DLL children. Head Start builds a partnership with the DLL families in several ways. One way is to provide written communication in the DLL families' native language or their preferred language, so the information can be more accessible for the DLL families (Office of Head Start, 2009). Another way involves providing interpretation during meetings (e.g., Parent Policy Council meetings) and workshops for the DLL families. Other ways to facilitate the family-school partnership include seeking input from the DLL families regarding the curriculum and creating opportunities for the DLL families to volunteer in the classrooms. Finally, depending on the available services, Head Start may provide educational training and resources, or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, for the foreign-born parents who need educational and language support.

STUDY DESCRIPTION

The first goal of the present study was to examine whether the Head Start services could be empirically classified into typologies or subgroups. The present study focused on seven types of the Head Start services provided for the DLL children and their families: two types of services

provided for the DLL children (English language assessments and connecting the child with ESL services) and five types of services provided for the DLL families (English assessments, activities and workshops for the parents, adult ESL or education resources, interpreters, and translation services). Second, the present study tested whether the typologies of Head Start's DLL services would be related to Head Start's program goals and to what extent would the typologies of Head Start's DLL services be related to greater parent involvement and family-school partnership for the DLL families.

To address the research questions, the present study analyzed the data from the 2009 cohort of the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES, 2009). FACES (2009) was selected for analysis because this data set paid particular attention to the DLL children and their families to understand the DLL children's Head Start experiences, the characteristics of the DLL families, and the services that Head Start provided to the DLL children and their families.

The parents, teachers, program directors, and center directors completed the questionnaires. The parents completed the questionnaires that asked them about the extent of their involvement with their children at home. The teachers provided data on the extent of inviting and encouraging the DLL parents' family-school partnership. The program and center directors provided data on the types of Head Start's DLL services and the goals that their particular Head Start program hoped to achieve in providing the DLL services.

The present study analyzed a total of 955 DLL children and their parents enrolled in 60 Head Start programs and 129 Head Start centers. Approximately 51.6% of the DLL children was male; approximately 97.4% of the DLL children had non-White racial/ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Hispanic, Asian). Approximately 88.9% of the parents were born outside the U.S., had less than high school education, and identified as low-income.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Typologies of Head Start's DLL Services

Two typologies of Head Start's DLL services emerged from the analysis. The first typology included providing the following services: providing activities and/or workshops for the parents of DLL children, providing information about adult ESL or other education resources, providing interpreters, and translating written materials. Because these services appeared to target the adults and families, the first typology was named as family/adult focus. The second typology only included the service of connecting the DLL children with ESL services. The second typology was named as child ESL focus. Approximately 69.4% of Head Start's DLL services was classified as the family/adult focus. In contrast, approximately 30.6% of Head Start's DLL services was classified as the child ESL focus.

Connections with Head Start Program Goals

It is important to understand whether Head Start's DLL services were aligned with Head Start's program goals of supporting the DLL children and their families. Head Start's DLL services with the family/adult focus were aligned with the following program goals: supporting the DLL families' English acquisition, helping the parents and families acculturate, respecting the DLL families' native languages, involving the DLL parents in Head Start activities, using inclusive curriculum materials and teaching strategies that represented the DLL families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and working with the DLL parents. Head Start's DLL services with the child ESL

focus were aligned with the program goal of connecting the families with ESL-related resources and services in the surrounding communities.

Connections with parent involvement and family-school partnership

Results showed that Head Start's DLL services with the family/adult focus were related to greater parent involvement and family-school partnership than Head Start's DLL services with the child ESL focus. These findings demonstrated that providing language and educational support, interpreters, and translation services that targeted the DLL parents could effectively increase the DLL parents' involvement at home and build the family-school partnership.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Low-income DLL families often have limited access to language and educational resources. As such, early education programs, such as Head Start, play an important role to fill this void for low-income DLL families. Findings of the present study have the potential to identify Head Start services that can better support the DLL children and their families.

It is recommended to provide language and educational services for the DLL children and their families. Although the present study examined a limited number of Head Start's DLL services, these services are needed for the DLL population. Head Start programs are encouraged to provide services that target both the DLL children and their parents. Connecting the DLL children with ESL services in the surrounding communities can help support the DLL children's English acquisition. Providing adult ESL classes, interpreters, and translation services can help the DLL parents better understand the role that they play in their children's early education. The types of DLL services examined in the present study are consistent with Head Start's dual focus on the children and their families.

It is noteworthy for Head Start program and center directors and teachers to understand that Head Start's DLL services are related to DLL parents' greater involvement at home and greater family-school partnership. It is recommended to establish language services (e.g., interpreters, translation) when Head Start staff members work with the DLL parents. For example, translating written materials to communicate with the DLL parents about ways to support their children's homework at home. Offering adult ESL classes can also help the DLL parents acquire English skills and become better advocates for their children.

In sum, identifying Head Start's DLL services can help Head Start programs streamline the services provided to the DLL children and their families. The present study identifies several DLL services that can promote parent involvement and family-school partnership. Ultimately, these services can help the DLL parents to better support their children.

REFERENCES

- Arias, M. B., & Morillo-Campbell, M. (2008). *Promoting ELL parental involvement: Challenges in contested times (Policy brief)*. East Lansing, MI: Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506652.pdf>
- California Department of Education (2008). *California preschool learning foundations (Vol. 1)*. Sacramento, CA: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/preschoollf.pdf>

- Dickinson, D. K., McCabe, A., Clark-Chiarelli, N., & Wolf, A. (2004). Cross-language transfer of phonological awareness in low-income Spanish and English bilingual preschool children. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 25, 323-347. DOI: 10.1017.S0142716404001158
- Magnuson, K. A., & Waldfogel, J. (2005). Early childhood care and education: Effects on ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness. *Future of Children*, 15(1), 169-96.
- Office of Head Start. (2008). *Dual language learning: What does it take?* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families.
- Office of Head Start. (2009). *Program preparedness checklist: Serving dual language learners and their families*. Washington DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/resource-center/community-systems-development/3D%203%20Program%20Assessment%20Dual%20Language%20HS%20tool.pdf>
- Reese, L., Garnier, H., Gallimore, R. & Goldenberg, C. (2000). Longitudinal analysis of the antecedents of emergent Spanish literacy and middle-school English reading achievement of Spanish-speaking students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), 633-662.
- United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. Office of Planning, R. and E. (2018). *Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES): 2009 Cohort [United States]*. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR34558.v3>