



UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES

Supplement to Support Diverse Learners



JUNE 2014



Funding for printing is provided by the Virgin Islands Office of the Governor, through a contract with the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands.





UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS EARLY LEARNING GUIDELINES

Supplement to Support Diverse Learners

The Governor's Children and Families Council, Early Childhood Advisory Committee and the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands would like to recognize the dedicated work of the members of the Quality Education Work Group whose contributions were instrumental in completing this document. Their expertise is greatly appreciated.

- Antoinette Boissiere - Quality Improvement Specialist, Office of Child Care and Regulatory Services, Department of Human Services
- Anne Bramble-Johnson - Quality Improvement Specialist, Office of Child Care and Regulatory Services, Department of Human Services
- Ana C. Browne - Educational Outreach Consultant, Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands and Director, Kids R Us Group Day Care Home
- Angeli Ferdschneider - Special Assistant to the Governor, Education Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor
- Eleanor Hirsh - ECAC Coordinator and Consultant to the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands
- Dr. Beulah Goines Lateef - Associate Professor, Inclusive Early Childhood and Special Education, University of the Virgin Islands
- Dr. Sarah Mahurt - Assistant Commissioner, Department of Education
- Beth Marshall - Early Childhood Education Specialist for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, State Training and Technical Assistance Center, Office of Head Start
- Kathleen Merchant - Data Manager, State Office of Special Education
- Miguelina Neptune - Education Manager, Head Start, Department of Human Services
- Derval Petersen - Assistant Director, Maternal Child Health and Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, Department of Health
- April Munroe Phillips - VI State Manager with Florida and the Islands Regional Comprehensive Center at the Educational Testing Service



**The Early Childhood Advisory Committee of the
Governor's Children and Families Council and the
Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands**



Guidelines for Diverse Learners: A Supplement to the Virgin Islands Early Learning Guidelines

Early childhood care and education programs in the Virgin Islands must address the individual needs of a diverse population of children. This includes children with special needs, children from diverse cultural backgrounds, children from all socio-economic groups, and children whose first language is not English. Children with disabilities and children who do not speak English develop best in inclusive environments, those in which early childhood teachers and caregivers welcome all children and provide flexible programming that can meet individual needs and include children with a wide range of backgrounds and abilities.

Dual Language Learners

The term Dual Language Learners (DLLs) refers to children, particularly young children, who are learning more than one language - children who are acquiring two or more languages simultaneously and learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language. The term “dual language learners” encompasses other terms frequently used, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), bilingual, English Language Learners (ELLs), English Learners (ELs), Non-English Speaking, and children who speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE) or English as a Second Language (ESL), but more appropriately for young children, who are becoming proficient in their home language while learning English.

Families transmit values, beliefs, and a sense of belonging to their children. Because they do so primarily through their language, support of the development of home language is strongly encouraged by all involved with the child and his/her family. Many families speak languages other than English at home. Preschoolers need to continue learning and speaking their family's language as they learn English. This helps them stay close to all the important people in their lives.



The home language is the first language learned and the primary language used at home. Research shows that children who are strong in their home language will be able to develop fluency in speaking and reading a second language such as English. The ability to communicate in more than one language supports children's cognitive flexibility and an awareness of their own cognitive processes.

Preschoolers exposed to two languages, at home or in an early childhood program, have the opportunity to develop basic language ability in two languages simultaneously. Parents need to be reassured and informed that learning two languages does not come at the expense of either language; and that preschoolers are capable of learning two languages early in life. Learning and maintaining the home language lays the foundation for learning English.

The research literature on second language acquisition identifies the following four developmental stages:¹

- 1. Home language use** - Young children who have established basic oral communication ability in their home language naturally enter the early childhood setting using their familiar home language. The degree to which these children experience being understood by others depends on whether any of the adults or children speak their home language.
- 2. Nonverbal/observational period** - When young children speaking their home language are frequently not understood, they begin speaking less and turn their attention to observing, listening, and using non-verbal means of communication. This developmental stage is very important as the child is actively learning the sounds, words, and rules of the new language. These children are building their receptive understanding of the new language – connecting the sounds and words to people, objects, and experiences. There can be a wide variance in the amount of time any child operates at this stage of development.
- 3. Telegraphic and formulaic speech** - Children begin trying out their new language, using simple words or phrases to express thoughts, requests, and directions. Although the child may not know the specific meaning of these words and phrases, dual language learners are focused on results – do they work for social interactions or to achieve the desired response from an adult? This form of early language production also enables these children to begin participating in group singing or reciting rhymes.

¹ Tabors, 2008; Espinosa, 2010

4. **Productive language** - Dual language learners begin building their own original sentences using words and phrases they have been hearing and practicing. This is a gradual phase as children test what works and experiment with applying grammar rules of their new language. Each child's productive language is closely related to their expansion of receptive language.



Adults who successfully work with young dual language learners understand that although each of the developmental stages build on others, in some circumstances, a child will revert to nonverbal observation and listening. Effective teachers are sensitive to numerous factors that influence the rate and proficiency of each child's acquisition of a new language, including the quality of exposure to English; age and culture; motivation and interest in the new language; personality; and whether or not relationships support the child in trying the new language.² Understanding that there will be individual differences among children is essential to providing the best possible support for dual language learners.

Child-focused strategies for working with Dual Language Learners³

- Adults are knowledgeable about and respectful of each child's family, culture, and home language.
 - Seek information about the language spoken at home and the child's proficiency in the home language.
 - Ask parents for a few words in the home language that can be used to welcome the child in the classroom.
- Adults establish responsive and accepting relationships to help the child feel confident to engage in receptive and verbal communication in either language – home language or English.
 - Build positive, warm, nurturing relationships with children who are DLLs so that they feel safe and less anxious. Speak English in ways that help them understand: use simple sentences, repeat what is said, use gestures and facial expressions, point to objects, and use everyday vocabulary.

² Tabors, 2008

³ *The Child Development Associated National Credentialing Program and CDA Competency Standards: Infant/Toddler Edition.* (2013).

- Speak English clearly and slowly, but not loudly, simplifying language when needed.
- Adults provide numerous experiences to help children gain understanding of the new language – specifically, hear the sounds of the new language and connect them to people, objects, and experiences.
 - Use predictable, comfortable classroom routines so DLLs know what to expect and use consistent language when referring to activities and objects.
 - Provide pictures to accompany the daily schedule, classroom rules, and other print in the classroom to help children know the expectations even though they may not yet understand the language.
- Adults provide experiences to encourage and help children practice the sounds and words of the new language and serve as appropriate role models. They consider the stages and patterns of home language and English acquisition, as well as, information about each child's progress in cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development.
 - Encourage the child to repeat words as he/she demonstrates what objects or pictures they refer to.
 - Give the child lots of time to think about what he/she want to say. Wait to offer words or phrases when help is needed.
 - Notice words the child says (ex. "me" or "more") and help the child expand on those words.
- Adults design environments and conduct activities so that children learn about or are exposed to multiple cultures and languages. They provide opportunities for children and families to share their cultures and languages.
 - Books that reflect multiple cultures and languages are available and children are read to in their home language, if possible.
 - Puzzles, dolls, dramatic play props, musical instruments and songs, kitchen utensils and menus, and decorations in the classroom reflect the variety of languages and cultures of the families in the program.



Children with Special Needs

The *VI Early Learning Guidelines* apply for *all* children, including children with disabilities and/or developmental delays. Children may meet the guidelines at different times and in different ways. A primary function of early intervention and early childhood education is to promote children's learning and development. "Children with disabilities and other special needs are, first of all, children."⁴ Therefore, first and foremost in the care and education of children, developmentally appropriate practices should be implemented for *all* children. Developmentally appropriate practices are defined as "...those that result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information or knowledge: (1) what is known about child development and learning...; (2) what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child...; (3) and knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live"⁵ Practices that promote development and learning for young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays build on and extend this foundation to meet their individual and unique needs.



Child-Focused Strategies for Working with Children with Special Needs⁶

Adults design environments to promote children's safety, active engagement, learning, participation, and membership.

- Physical space and materials are structured and adapted to promote engagement, play, interaction, and learning. Adults attend to children's preferences and interests, using novelty, using responsive toys, providing adequate amounts of materials, and using defined spaces (i.e., learning centers).
 - Most toys are accessible to children so that they can get them without adult help, although some toys should be visible and require that the child ask an adult for access.
 - The classroom has clearly defined learning centers. Visual cues in the flooring (e.g., area rugs, vinyl flooring, and masking tape) or low pieces of furniture (ex: shelves) define the learning centers.

⁴ Sandal, S., Hemmeter, M. L., Smith, B. J., & McLean, M. E. (2006).

⁵ Copple & Bredekamp, 2009.

⁶ Sandal, S., Hemmeter, M. L., Smith, B. J., & McLean, M. E. (2006).

- Adults help children build social skills and promote engagement, interaction, communication, and learning by providing peer models, responsive adults, and adult models and by expanding children's play.
 - Small groups are arranged so children have peer models and can see one another and interact.
 - Assignment of teachers or caregivers to children or groups of children remains consistent.
- Routines and transitions are structured to promote interaction, communication, and learning.
 - Clear visual cues, including gestures, photographs, written labels, or objects are used to support children during transitions, to help children understand the routine, and to help children manage their time.
 - Adults give children time to respond before they intervene and do things for them.
 - Transition times are minimal and are used as learning times by embedding interesting and instructional activities within them (ex: counting the number of children who are lined up).
- Play routines are structured to promote interaction, communication, and learning by encouraging children to take on roles for dramatic play, prompting group friendship activities and interaction, and using specialized props.
 - Individual picture cues (ex: photographs of the activities) are used to provide support and structure during free choice time for all children.
 - Adults assist and encourage children to give toys to one another and to take offered toys from one another to teach social exchanges and sharing.
- A variety of appropriate settings and naturally occurring activities are used to facilitate children's learning and development.
 - Adults use children's daily routines and activities as learning opportunities (ex. Teachers, parents, and caregivers can prompt children to use new words while driving in the car, eating dinner, taking a bath, or playing at the beach.)
 - "Intervention" is provided in settings that families identify as routine and as possible teaching and learning opportunities.
- Services are provided in natural learning environments as appropriate. These include places in which typical children participate, such as home or community settings.
 - Supports are provided for children in their community child care setting, such as: regular visits from the child's therapists or early childhood special education providers, training of staff in how to include children with disabilities in typical activities, providing specialized equipment loaned to the program by the early intervention system, and integration of intervention recommendations into activities and routines in the child care setting.

- Specialists facilitate children's engagement with their environment to encourage child-initiated learning that is not dependent on the adult's presence.
 - Interesting toys, materials, and activities are provided that encourage children to make independent choices.
 - The curriculum and environment are modified and adapted to increase the children's meaningful participation. This includes partial participation with support, materials and people (ex. structuring the physical and social environments; adapting materials; simplifying activities; encouraging peers to support the child; using specialized equipment; using children's preferences).
- Environments are provided that foster positive relationships.
 - Parents, teachers, and caregivers model positive interactions by commenting on children's positive behaviors, particularly when they share with, help, and listen to others.
 - Home visitors begin their visits with parents by sharing thoughts, ideas, and updates.
 - Home visitors interact with the adults in the family and listen to and respond to their questions honestly and with accurate information.



Adults use ongoing data to individualize and adapt practices to meet each child's changing needs.

- Practices and goals are individualized for each child based on:
 - The child's current behavior and abilities across domains instead of the child's diagnostic classification
 - The family's views of what the child needs to learn
 - Specialists' views of what the child needs to learn
 - The demands, expectations, and requirements of the child's current environments.
- Practices target meaningful outcomes for the child that build upon the child's current skills and behavior and promote membership with others.
- Child performance is monitored and information is collected to determine the impact of the practices on the child's progress and modifications are made as needed.
- Recommended practices are used to teach/promote whatever skills are necessary for children to function more completely, competently, and independently in the child's natural environment.
- Children's behavior is observed, interpreted in context, and responded to. Opportunities are provided for expansion or elaboration of the child's behavior by imitating the behavior, waiting for the child's responses, modeling and prompting. (Ex. A parent imitates her child's sounds and actions, and then stops and waits for the child to request her to continue.)



References

- *Child development associate national credentialing program and CDA competency standards: Preschool edition.* (2013). Washington, DC: Council for Professional Recognition.
- Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs, serving children from birth through age 8.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Espinosa, L. M. (2010). Assessment of young English language learners. In E. E. Garcia & E. C. Frede (Eds.), *Young English language lLearners: Current research and emerging directions for practice and policy* (pp. 119-42). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Sandall, S., McLean, Hemmeter, M. E., & Smith, B. J. (2000). *DEC Recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education.* Denver, CO: Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children.
- Tabors, P. (2008). *One child, two languages: a guide for early childhood educators of children learning English as a second language (2nd edition).* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing, Co.

Books

- Howes, C., Downer, J., & Pianta, R. (Eds.). (2011). *Dual language learners in the early childhood classroom (NCRECE).* Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.
- Nemeth, K. N. (2012). *Basics of supporting dual language learner: An introduction for educators of children from birth through age 8.* Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.
- Nemeth, K. N. (2012). *Many languages, building connections: Supporting infants and toddlers who are dual language learners.* Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.

Other Resources

- **Special Quest Group** - resources to support inclusion of children with disabilities and/or developmental delays at: <http://www.specialquest.org/>
- **Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center** offers information and resources for the Head Start and Early Head Start, as well as, for anyone involved in early childhood education. Includes information about dual language learners and disabilities, development, health, family and community partnerships, professional development for teachers and staff, and more. <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic>.
- **Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children** <http://www.dec-sped.org/>
- **Starting Points** (2009) - video training program to teach Dual Language and English Language Learners from Teaching Strategies, Inc.
- **Language Castle** is a site by Karen Nemeth. It provides information for preschool educators, including teaching tips and Nemeth's blog on issues related to educating dual language learners. <http://www.languagecastle.com>
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children.** <http://www.naeyc.org>.
- **The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs** site presents a broad range of research and resources to support an inclusive approach to high-quality education for dual language learners. Search for "early years" or "preschool" for resources relevant for teaching young children. <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/>