# Quick Facts: Professional Development for Teachers of Young Dual Language Learners and Its Connection to Teacher Beliefs and Practices

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High-quality instruction for young dual language learners (DLLs) involves the use of DLL-specific instructional practices, such as strategic use of the home language, that research has shown are effective for young DLLs' learning and development.[1,2] Professional development (PD) can help teachers of DLLs improve their use of such practices in early learning and care settings.[3] California is home to a large population of DLLs, and recent state policies and practices[4] recognize and prioritize the need to effectively prepare the early childhood workforce to support these DLLs. This *Quick Facts* brief presents findings from a survey of teachers in 171 early learning and care programs serving DLLs across the state of California, conducted as part of the First 5 California (F5CA) DLL Pilot Study. We examined whether the amount of DLL-related PD teachers received, as reported by 626 teachers, was related to their beliefs and the practices they reported using with DLL children and their families.[i] **We found that the amount of DLL-related PD teachers received was associated with their attitudes about bilingualism, their confidence in working with DLLs, and their use of supportive, evidence-based practices with DLLs and their families.** These results align with the field's growing understanding of the important role PD can play in enabling early educators to deliver high-quality, effective education for DLLs.[5] **Please see the full brief for a larger set of findings and more detailed discussion.**
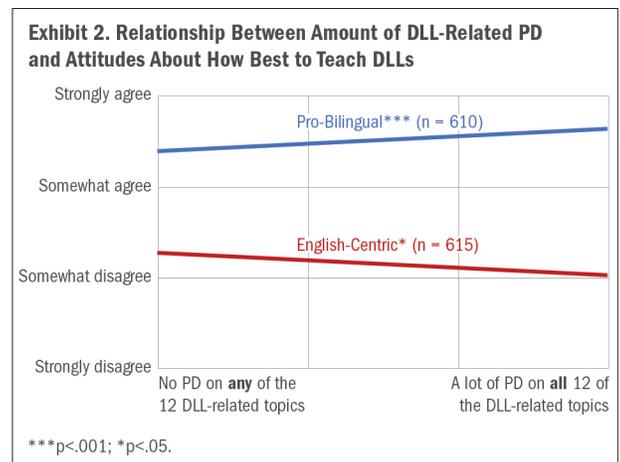
Amount of DLL-Related PD Received

Although most teachers reported receiving at least a *little* DLL-related PD, fewer than one in four reported receiving *a lot* of PD on any given topic, and most teachers still wanted more. The topic on which the highest percentage of teachers reported receiving DLL-related PD was children's general language development (84% of teachers; Exhibit 1). Other topics on which most teachers reported receiving at least a little PD were best practices for teaching DLLs (76%) and helping families support learning at home (75%). The least commonly reported topic was working with DLLs whose home language was not Spanish (59%). Nearly all teachers (92%) still reported a need for additional PD to successfully support DLLs.
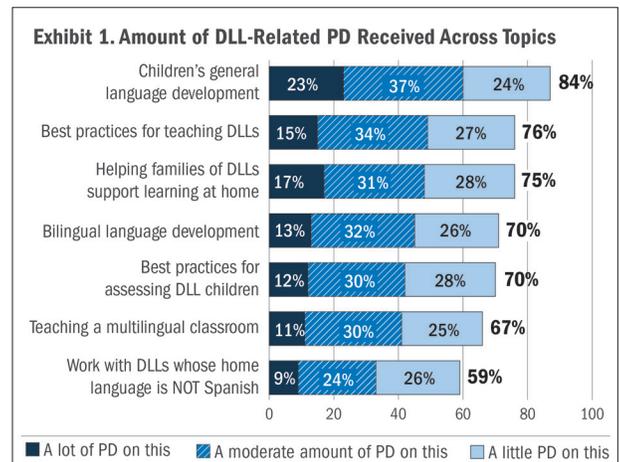
Attitudes and Confidence

Teachers who had received more DLL-related PD had more favorable attitudes about bilingualism and greater confidence in their ability to support DLLs. Teachers who reported more PD on DLL-related topics such as those in Exhibit 1 were more likely to express agreement with pro-bilingual statements such as "Continuing to use their home language promotes a child's future success," as shown by the upward slope of the blue line in Exhibit 2. Similarly, they were *less* likely to agree with English-centric statements (downward slope of red line in Exhibit 2) such as "Teaching DLLs solely in English is the best way to get them ready for kindergarten." In addition, teachers who had more DLL-related PD had higher levels of confidence in their ability to support Spanish-speaking DLLs in domains such as language, literacy, math, and social-emotional development.

Exhibit 1. Amount of DLL-Related PD Received Across Topics

Topic	A lot of PD on this	A moderate amount of PD on this	A little PD on this	Total
Children's general language development	23%	37%	24%	84%
Best practices for teaching DLLs	15%	34%	27%	76%
Helping families of DLLs support learning at home	17%	31%	28%	75%
Bilingual language development	13%	32%	26%	70%
Best practices for assessing DLL children	12%	30%	28%	70%
Teaching a multilingual classroom	11%	30%	25%	67%
Work with DLLs whose home language is NOT Spanish	9%	24%	26%	59%

■ A lot of PD on this   ▨ A moderate amount of PD on this   ▨ A little PD on this

Exhibit 2. Relationship Between Amount of DLL-Related PD and Attitudes About How Best to Teach DLLs

Pro-Bilingual*** (n = 610)
English-Centric* (n = 615)

No PD on **any** of the 12 DLL-related topics — A lot of PD on **all** 12 of the DLL-related topics

***p<.001; *p<.05.

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i Analyses of these relationships controlled for teacher experience, degree, certification, ethnicity, teaching role, and proficiency in English and home language(s); classroom composition characteristics; and setting (center vs. family childcare home). However, the research design does not allow us to determine causality. For instance, it could be that teachers with pro-bilingual beliefs sought out more PD on how to support DLLs, rather than vice versa. In addition, the measure of PD received as well as the practices analyzed as outcomes were based on teachers' self-report and were not independently verified.

Instructional Practices

Teachers who had received more DLL-related PD were more likely to use evidence-based instructional practices for teaching DLLs. For instance, the more DLL-related PD teachers had received, the more often they reported the use of strategies such as using gestures, providing hands-on materials, and engaging in cultural activities. In addition, teachers who had participated in more DLL-related PD more frequently used instructional strategies in Spanish, both generally and specifically for the purpose of building English skills (Exhibit 3); the same was true for instructional strategies in Vietnamese (among teachers with Vietnamese-speaking DLLs in their class). The amount of DLL-related PD received was also positively related to the number of books classrooms had in Spanish, Cantonese, and Vietnamese for each child of that language background. However, DLL-related PD was not associated with the percentage of classroom *time* teachers spent using any of the four home languages studied.
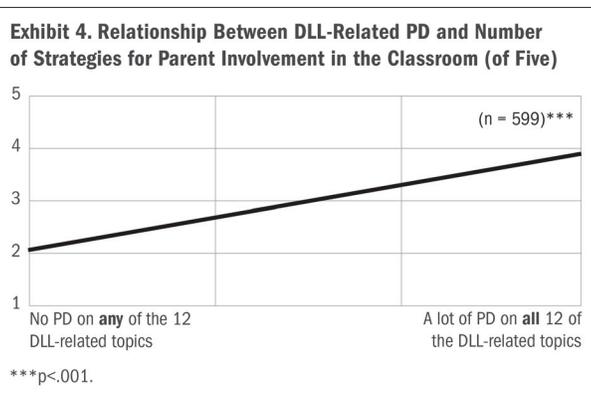
Exhibit 3. Relationships Between DLL-Related PD and Home Language (HL) Support Provided in Each Home Language

Home Language (HL) Support	Relationship Between DLL-Related PD and Support of the Home Language When the Home Language Is...			
	Spanish (n = 518 to 601)	Cantonese (n = 40 to 47)	Mandarin (n = 82 to 97)	Vietnamese (n = 68 to 76)
Percentage of time the HL is used	→	→	→	→
Use of general instructional strategies in the HL	↗***	→	→	↗**
Use of strategies in the HL for purposes of building English	↗***	→	↗†	↗*
Number of books in the HL (per DLL of that HL)	↗**	↗**	↗†	↗**

Note. → indicates nonsignificant relationship; ↗ indicates significant positive relationship; ↘ indicates significant negative relationship. Significance levels: ***$p<.001$; **$p<.01$; *$p<.05$; †$p<0.10$ (marginally significant).

Family Engagement Practices

Teachers who had received more DLL-related PD reported using a larger number of linguistically and culturally responsive family engagement strategies. Specifically, the more DLL-related PD teachers had received, a) the more language-related information they collected from families of DLLs at intake (upward sloping line in Exhibit 4); b) the more strategies they used to involve parents of DLLs in classroom activities, such as inviting them to conduct activities in the home language; and c) the more bilingual-supportive materials they sent home to parents of DLLs.

Exhibit 4. Relationship Between DLL-Related PD and Number of Strategies for Parent Involvement in the Classroom (of Five)

(n = 599)***

No PD on **any** of the 12 DLL-related topics — A lot of PD on **all** 12 of the DLL-related topics

***$p<.001$.

Conclusion

In conclusion, findings suggest that the amount of DLL-related PD teachers receive matters. **We consistently found that the more DLL-related PD teachers reported having received, the more they engaged in evidence-based practices with the DLLs and their families.** Recent policy efforts and initiatives in California call for an increased emphasis on and investment in DLL-related PD to ensure that all teachers are adequately equipped to foster the linguistic and academic development of young DLLs.[6] The findings from this study underscore the importance of PD and the potential benefits of PD for teachers' practice and approaches to working with DLLs and their families.

RELATED RESEARCH

A complementary study conducted by AIR researchers focused on teachers who received DLL-related PD as part of a $5 million investment by the state of California in 2018 to provide DLL PD to early learning and care providers. The study looked at participation in the PD programs of three well-known PD providers: GLAD, LLP, and SEAL. Similar to the findings here from the First 5 California DLL Pilot Study, this complementary study found positive results across outcomes for teachers who received the DLL-focused PD. Click *here* for the full report.

[1] Espinosa, L., & Crandell, J. (2020). Early learning and care for multilingual and dual language learners ages zero to five. Ch. 4 in California Department of Education (Ed.), *Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice.*

[2] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures.* National Academies Press.

[3] Castro, D. C., Gillanders, C., Franco, X., Bryant, D. M., Zepeda, M., Willoughby, M. T., & Méndez, L. I. (2017). Early education of dual language learners: An efficacy study of the Nuestros Niños school readiness professional development program. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 40,* 188–203.

[4] Alcalá, L., Kubinec, J., Atkin, C., Karoly, L., King, C., Muenchow, S., & Stipek, D. (2020). *Master plan for early learning and care: Making California for all kids.* California Health and Human Services Agency.

[5] Zepeda, M., Crolotte, C., Doh, J., & Ramos Harris, V. (2020). The Dual Language Learner Policy Platform. Advancement

[6] Zepeda et al. (2020); Alcalá et al. (2020).