

WIDA Early Years Guiding Principles of Language Development

These Guiding Principles of Language Development exemplify WIDA's overarching and ever-present Can Do Philosophy.

1. Multilingual children are learning more than one language at the same time and adjust the use of their languages to different sociocultural contexts.

(Abell, 2007; Bialystok, 2001; Comeau, Genesee, & Mendelson, 2007; Edelsky & Jilbert, 1985; Genesee, Boivin, & Nicoladis, 1996; Genesee, Nicoladis, & Paradis, 1995; Green, Peña, & Bedore, 2012)

2. Multilingual children learn language and culture through their experiences at home, in the community, and in early care and education.

(Bornstein, 2012; Castro, 2011; Cuéllar & Garcia, 2012; Gillanders, Castro, & Franco, 2014; Magruder, Hayslip, Espinosa, & Matera, 2013; Reyes & Azuara, 2008; Sawyer, Scheffner Hammer, Cycyk, Lopez, Blair, Sandilos & Komaroff, 2016; Scheele, Leseman, & Mayo, 2010; Smith, 2001; Tabors, 2008)

3. The languages and language varieties used by multilingual children and their families are valuable resources to be considered and incorporated into early care and education and into everyday routines and activities.

(Buysse, Castro, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010; Castro, Espinosa, & Paez, 2011; Collins, 2010; Farver, Lonigan, Eppe, 2009; Garcia, 2005; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Heng, 2011; Lugo-Neris, Jackson, & Goldstein, 2010; Michael-Luna, 2013; Michael-Luna, 2015; Naqvi, McKeough, Thorne, & Pfitscher, 2012; Reyes, Da Silva, & Feller, 2016; Rowe & Fain, 2013)

4. Multilingual children benefit from continuous home language development at all levels of English language development.

(Montelongo, Hernandez, & Herter, 2011; Prieto, 2009; Restrepo, Castilla, Schwanenflugel, Neuharth- Pritchett, Hamilton, & Arboleda, 2010; Rodriguez, 2001; Schwartz, 2014; Simon-Cerejido & Gutierrez-Clellen, 2014)

The term **multilingual children** is used to refer to culturally and linguistically diverse children, ages birth to five years, who are learning two or more languages. Multilingual children are exposed to multiple languages in their homes, communities, and/or early care and education settings, and they develop and use language in dynamic ways. In the field, these children are commonly referred to as dual language learners, or DLLs.

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5. Multilingual children follow different paths for language development than monolingual children.

(Andruski, Casielles, & Geoff, 2014; Bialystok, 2007; Davidson, Raschke, & Pervez, 2010; De Houwer, Bornstein, & De Coster, 2006; Dickinson, McCabe, Clark-Chiarelli, & Wolf, 2014; Dodd, So, & Lam, 2008; Fabiano-Smith & Goldstein, 2010; Hammer, Miccio, & Wagstaff, 2003; Hirata-Edds, 2011; Maneva & Genesee, 2002; Nicoladis & Marchak, 2011; Nicoladis, Pika, & Marentette, 2009; Smithson, Paradis, & Nicoladis, 2014; Yelland, Pollard, & Mercuri, 1993)

6. Multilingual children follow unique paths of language development according to their exposure to and opportunities for using their multiple languages.

(Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007; DeHouwer, 2009; Genesee, 2001; Genesee, 2010; Gibson, Peña, & Bedore, 2014; Hammer, Davison, Lawrence, & Miccio, 2009; Jones & Shue, 2013; King & Fogle, 2013; Nicoladis, 2002; Place & Hoff, 2011; Scheele, Leseman, & Mayo, 2010; Soltero-Gonzalez, 2008)

7. Multilingual children approach learning language in different ways, with each child bringing a unique set of attitudes, habits, and preferences for language use.

(Baroody & Diamond, 2013; Chesterfield, Chesterfield, & Chavez, 1982; Chesterfield, Hayes-Latimer, Barrows & Chavez, 1983; McDermott, Rikoon, & Fantuzzo, 2014; Piker, 2013; Rikoon, McDermott, & Fantuzzo, 2012)

8. Multilingual children, like other children, develop language through play-based activities that invite rich language interaction.

(Bell, Greenfield, Bulotsky-Shearer, & Carter, 2016; Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Bulotsky-Shearer, Bell, Romero, & Carter, 2012; Cohen, Kramer-Vida, Frye, & Andreou, 2014; Huerta & Riojas-Cortez, 2014; Konishi, 2007; Piker, 2013; Riojas-Cortez, 2000; Riojas-Cortez, 2001)

9. Multilingual children are developing language and literacy at the same time that they are also developing physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

(Barac, Bialystok, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014; Bialystok, 2009; Bialystok & Martin, 2004; Halle, Whittaker, Zepeda, Rothenberg, Anderson, et al., 2014; Jordan-DeCarbo & Galliford, 2001; Lee, 1996; Oades-Sese & Li, 2011; Okanda, Moriguchi, & Itakura, 2010; Vygotsky, 1986; Winsler, Burchinal, Tien, Peisner-Feinber, Espinos, et al., 2014; Winsler, Fernyhough, & Montero, 2009; Winsler, Kim, & Richard, 2014; Yang, Yag, & Lust, 2011; Yazejian & Peisner-Feinberg, 2009)

10. Multilingual children's development of social and developmentally appropriate academic language is a complex and long-term process.

(Alanis, 2013; Gort & Pontier, 2013; Gort, Pointer, & Sembiente, 2012; Hakuta, Butler, Goto, & Witt, 2000; Lewis, Sandilos, Hammer, Sawyer, & Méndez, 2016; Palmer, Martinez, Mateus, & Henderson, 2014; Scheffner Hammer, Hoff, Uchikoshi, Gillanders, Castro, & Sandilos, 2014; Tsybina, Girolametto, Weitzman, & Greenberg, 2006; van Kleeck, 2014; Walsh, Sanchez, & Burnham, 2016)

Research Highlights

The WIDA Early Years Guiding Principles of Language Development provide practitioners with a broad perspective on key concepts related to the language development of young children learning multiple languages. To further clarify the guiding principles, these research highlights provide practitioners with research-based descriptions and examples of effective practices. The terms used in the research highlights (e.g., DLLs, emergent bilinguals) are the terms used in the studies cited.

| Guiding Principle | Research Highlights |
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| <p>1. Multilingual children are learning more than one language at the same time and adjust the use of their languages to different sociocultural contexts.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children ages two and three years correct language-based miscommunications by switching languages to match the language of their speaking partner (Genesee, Boivin, & Nicoladis, 1996; Comeau, Genesee, & Mendelson, 2007). • Young children follow the lead of adults in their life with regard to language. For example, if their mother speaks one language and their father speaks another, the child’s language choice most often matches that of the interacting parent (Genesee, Nicoladis, & Paradis, 1995). • At the beginning stages of bilingualism, 5-year-old preschoolers switch between their languages to communicate more clearly (Greene, Peña, & Bedore, 2012, p. 27). |
| <p>2. Multilingual children learn language and culture through their experiences at home, in the community and in early care and education.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mothers of Mexican American DLL/ELL preschool children expressed a strong desire to instill a sense of Mexican identity in their children by speaking Spanish at home, listening to Spanish radio, and having <i>pláticas [conversations]</i> on the importance of having Spanish-speaking abilities (Cuéllar & Garcia, 2012). • Teachers should explore children’s experiences outside of school and use this knowledge as a foundation for learning (Gillanders, Castro, & Franco, 2014). Successful out-of-school linguistic funds of knowledge activities include trips to key locations within the neighborhood (i.e., a local market) where children live and the minority language is spoken, reading newspapers in the minority language, and inviting parents and others in the community to read to children in the home language (Smith, 2001). • Research shows that in early care and education settings, DLLs can be supported to learn English via the strategic use of their home language during learning and care routines. This includes gestures, the use of props, realia (real objects), and pictures (Sawyer, Scheffner-Hammer, Cyclic, et al., 2016; Tabors, 2008). |

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| <p>3. The languages and language varieties used by multilingual children and their families are valuable resources to be considered and incorporated into early care and education and every day routines and activities.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The language of the home should be incorporated into early care and education activities. For example, when children’s family members read the home language portion of dual language books (e.g., bilingual books) with practitioners in early care and education settings as a routine activity and not a novelty, children are motivated to learn both languages and improve their awareness of language components (metalinguistics) (Naqvi, McKeough, Thorne, & Pfitscher, 2012). • The funds of knowledge of emergent bilinguals’ (EBs) families include using the home language for conversations, reading, writing, rhyming, and singing. Young children become aware of phonetic (sound), semantic (meaning), syntactic (grammar), morphemic (form), and pragmatic aspects of language. Another key language-rich, culturally based activity in the homes of Spanish-speaking EB’s is sharing oral stories about when the adults were young; “Dime una historia cuando tú eras niño” [<i>Tell me a story about when you were a child</i>] (Reyes, Da Silva, & Feller, 2016). |
| <p>4. Multilingual children benefit from continuous home language development at all levels of English language development.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The continued development of the home language allows young Spanish-speaking English learners to improve their vocabulary by easily recognizing and learning English-Spanish cognates (words that sound similar in both languages such as giraffe and jirafa) (Montelongo, Hernandez, & Herter, 2011). • Highlighting the similarities and differences between the languages of second language learners is an effective literacy learning strategy that teaches young children about their bilingualism. For instance, some languages have similar alphabets, printability, and words. Other languages vary in the language family that they belong to and the number of tones used (Rodriguez, 2001). • Research shows that when young bilingual children use their home language during vocabulary instruction, their depth of vocabulary knowledge improves in both the home language and in English. Key strategies include asking children to extend their description of a target word by answering stimulus questions such as: what is a dog? What does a dog usually look like? What types of dogs do you know? Where can you usually find a dog? (Schwartz, 2014). |

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| <p>5. Multilingual children follow different paths for language development than monolingual children.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is evidence that the babbling of bilingual infants is different from that of monolingual infants, as their babbling is linked to common sounds in the syllables of both of their languages and their languages' overall stress patterns (Maneva & Genesee, 2002; Andruski, Casielles, & Geoff, 2014). • How and when monolingual and bilingual children learn words is different. As early as 13 months, children developing two or more languages can understand words for the same object (translation equivalents) (De Houwer, Bornstein, & De Coster, 2006). • Bilingual children tend to have smaller vocabularies in each of their two languages when compared with children learning one language (monolingual) (Bialystok, 2009). |
| <p>6. Multilingual children follow unique paths of language development according to their exposure to and opportunities for using their multiple languages.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relative amount of exposure to each of their languages is a strong predictor of preschool aged bilingual children's rates of development in each language (Scheele, Leseman, & Mayo, 2010). • The bilingual development of young bilingual children is positively influenced by their exposure to native speakers of the native language and English (Place & Hoff, 2011). • In a 3-year longitudinal study of language practices of mothers of preschool bilingual children, it was found that their increased usage of English did not impact children's English vocabulary or emergent literacy development. However, increased usage of English slowed the growth of children's Spanish vocabulary (Hammer, Davison, Lawrence, & Miccio, 2009). |
| <p>7. Multilingual children approach learning language in different ways with each child bringing a unique set of attitudes, habits and preferences for language use.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "English development is influenced by DLLs' personal preference for playing with peers who speak the same home language and who also play well with English speaking children" (Piker, 2013). • Key learning behaviors in preschoolers associated with better learning outcomes in elementary school include child motivation to learn, persistence in learning tasks, and cooperation with other children (Rikoon, McDermott, & Fantuzzo, 2012). |

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| <p>8. Multilingual children, like other children, develop language through play-based activities that invite rich language interaction.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dramatic play provides preschool Mexican American children with an opportunity to develop their language skills while interacting in culturally relevant activities that showcase their funds of knowledge. The funds of knowledge include the use of the home language and representation of their families’ values, beliefs, and traditions (Riojas-Cortez, 2001). • Story reenactment is a play-based, language-rich activity that improves preschool DLLs’ English language development and story recall (Cohen, Kramer-Vida, Frye, & Andreou, 2014). • In Head Start the following peer play behaviors improved literacy for DLLs: sharing toys, helping settle peer conflicts, encouraging others to join play, showing positive emotions and verbalizing and making up stories during play (Bell, Greenfield, Bulotsky-Shearer & Carter, 2016). |
| <p>9. Multilingual Children are developing language and literacy as they also develop physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dual language learners in early childhood have been found to show higher cognitive performance than monolingual children specific to executive function. This is because thinking in two languages promotes focused attention and inhibition, as well as working memory and theory of mind (Barac, Bialystok, Castro, & Sanchez, 2014; Bialystok, & Martin, 2004). • The social-emotional development of young DLLs has been found to be equal to that of their monolingual counterparts. Additionally, the use of the home language in early childhood classrooms allows for the strong familial ties between young DLL children and their parents, which is considered an important base for social emotional development (Halle, Whittaker, Zepeda, Rothenberg, et. al., 2014). • Close teacher-child relationships (e.g., teachers display affection, warmth, and open communication) significantly predicted preschoolers’ English and Spanish language competence (Oades-Sese & Li, 2011). |

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| <p>10. Multilingual children’s development of social and developmentally appropriate academic language is a complex and long-term process.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research suggests that it takes between 4 and 7 years for DLLs/ELs to achieve proficiency in English (Hakuta, Butler, Goto, & Witt, 2000).• Preschool children, particularly those from linguistically diverse backgrounds, need to have access to academic talk, defined as “the broad pattern of language (use)... allowing children to develop and display ideas and knowledge. This register usually includes lots of talk, sentence complexity, long utterances, elaborated language, discussion of concepts, and decontextualized knowledge (van Kleeck, 2014).• In dual language preschool classrooms, pairing children who vary in language skill to work together creates a zone of proximal development where children can practice language skills in a safe and relaxed environment (Alanis, 2013).• The vocabulary development of Spanish-speaking, preschool, dual language learners is positively impacted by read aloud questions that require children to make inferences, predictions, hypotheses, and explanations (Walsh, Sanchez, & Burnham, 2016). |

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