Bilingual Infant/Toddler Environments:

Supporting Language & Learning In Our Youngest Children

A GUIDE FOR MIGRANT & SEASONAL HEAD START PROGRAMS

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A GUIDE FOR MIGRANT & SEASONAL HEAD START PROGRAMS

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Migrant Head Start

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Purpose of this Guide

This Guide is specifically intended for staff in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs, which are funded to provide comprehensive child development services to the children of migrant farm workers from birth through compulsory school age. We attempt to navigate the research on first and second language acquisition and development on infants and toddlers, consistent with the Head Start definition of "infants," (i.e., children younger than 36 months of age) (ACF, 1996). We also identify and attempt to respond to key questions and concerns obtained from MSHS program staff. At its core, this Guide aims to integrate information about children's developmental progress in acquiring one or more languages in infancy with practical considerations of how adult caregivers can best support that development. Our aim is to produce as practical and as meaningful a resource as possible.

Bob Stechuk

Introduction

Infancy is characterized by profound and seemingly rapid changes in all developmental domains. In what seems to be a very short time, children are sitting, crawling and then walking. Toddlers begin to run. Prior to their third birthday, children's little fingers begin to grab and then manipulate toys, foods, and other objects around them. From interacting with people as well as playing with objects, infants and toddlers come to develop understandings about their world.

In the same period of time, children are listening to what people are saying around them, and to them. Before their first birthday, infants begin to produce sounds. In what seems like no time whatsoever babies are saying their first words, then short sentences. This growth seems so natural, so easy — it's almost as if the babies are doing it by themselves. In reality, people around the young child are having a great impact on their growth and development.

Consider a newborn baby — and then imagine that same child three years later, on the verge of entering a preschool classroom. Assuming exposure to language and an absence of a disability, a remarkable progression of development can be observed.

Typically, three year old children have mastered much of the sound system of their first language; are competent in its basic grammar; use a vocabulary of hundreds of words; and often demonstrate sophisticated understandings of the social rules that govern language use in their communities and cultures. Given the apparently rapid progress of children's early language, we are left with the question:

What explains how infants and toddlers acquire and then develop the language of their environments?

When infants and toddlers are raised in monolingual environments, an answer to this question must consider that acquiring a language is very complex; but seems to happen very rapidly and even easily. An attempt to provide a full answer to the question above can include many pieces of relevant information.

When infants and toddlers are raised in environments in which they are exposed to more than one language (Multilingual Environments) there are additional levels of complexity. For example, the sources of children's two languages may differ across environments: children may hear their first language spoken by several family members, and may hear their second language spoken by one of their teachers.

Bilingual ability is often considered to be an asset in older children and adults. However, the idea of exposing infants and toddlers to more than one language is troublesome to many people. Because the vast majority of children under the age of three years enrolled in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS) programs come from families whose first language is Spanish, MSHS program staff must therefore grapple with two additional questions:

What explains how infants and toddlers respond to, and are influenced by, environments in which they are exposed to more than one language? What are the best care and educational experiences for these infants and toddlers?

To better understand how to address these questions, we created and distributed a brief questionnaire to MSHS grantees and delegate agencies. Our specific findings are captured in the Voices From the Field section.

MONOLINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS:
Those in which one language is spoken.

MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS:
Those in which more than one language is spoken.

WHAT IS A FIRST LANGUAGE?
A language used by parents and overheard by the infant.

Voices from the Field

In order to identify the issues and concerns that accompany infant/toddler language development in MSHS programs, we created and received feedback via a brief questionnaire. We asked program staff to identify and describe: 1) the language(s) of families and their children; 2) the language(s) of teaching staff; 3) parents' expressed preferences for the language(s) of their child's classroom; and 4) assessment and curriculum practices.

WHAT DID THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES TELL US?

Our analysis of the questionnaire responses provided us with several key insights into the strengths and challenges of MSHS programs. A summary of the findings is presented below.

1. Languages of Families and Children

According to the questionnaire responses, the vast majority of children enrolled in MSHS programs come from families who speak Spanish. Small numbers of children come from families who speak Haitian Creole, or indigenous languages of Mexico (e.g., Trique). This information is consistent with the data in the 2005 Migrant & Seasonal Head Start Program Information Report (PIR). However, by looking more closely at the questionnaire responses, we were able to identify additional issues related to the languages of infants/toddlers and their families in MSHS.

For example, although most infants and toddlers in MSHS programs are from Spanish-speaking families, there appear to be important differences in the *extent to which children are also exposed to English*. In some cases, it appears that infants and toddlers are truly monolingual — their exposure to (or use of) language is entirely in Spanish. In other cases, however, children are clearly exposed to varying amounts of English in addition to Spanish. Although the questionnaire did not obtain data on the sources, amounts, or types of exposure across languages, responses from some programs referred to toddlers who were *equally capable of using both Spanish and English*. These children were reported to address Spanish- and English-speakers in their own

language. In addition, these programs reported that the developmental progression of both of the children's languages were relatively parallel (i.e., that children were using age-appropriate expressions in both of their languages).

Another issue identified from the questionnaire responses was that of "minority" languages within MSHS programs. Although languages other than Spanish and English are relatively rare in MSHS (i.e., less than 4% of total enrollment) (PIR 2005) these children appear to be concentrated in a relatively small number of programs. Staff from these programs expressed the need to develop more strategies to assess and plan curriculum for children from diverse language backgrounds. Program staff also pointed out that some adults from these communities may not be literate and/or come from first language backgrounds in which there is no written language.

Taken together, the information related to children's first language backgrounds, the variability of exposure to a second language (English), and the presence of additional languages other than Spanish and English present substantial challenges to program planning. However, throughout this Guide we will attempt to show that these challenges can be met with appropriate and effective strategies.

2. Languages of Teaching Staff
A second important issue identified from the questionnaire responses was the language(s) of MSHS teaching staff. Here, fundamental differences emerged between programs regarding the languages of their teachers. Most responses stated that infant/toddler classrooms are staffed with Spanish-speaking teachers. Some programs do this based upon an explicit philosophy and/or set of program policies. In other programs, staff is a combination of Spanish- and English-monolinguals as well as bilingual teachers. In a very few programs, teachers are primarily English monolinguals.

These basic differences appear to exist for a variety of reasons: in some cases, programs appear to choose the type(s) of languages they want in their teachers; in other cases, programs seem to be making do with the available workforce of their rural communities.

3. Parent Preferences for Classroom Language
Information obtained on parents' expressed preferences for language use in MSHS infant/toddler classrooms varied as much as the data on teachers' language backgrounds. Basically, there was evidence for *all possible positions* on the issue.

Some programs reported that parents want their home language (Spanish) to be the language of their child's classroom. Other programs reported that parents often state a

preference for their child to learn English – sometimes to the exclusion of Spanish. Finally, other programs indicated that parents express a preference for a combination of both languages in the classroom. In some cases, this latter perspective is modified by the perspective that exposure to English *should not be at the expense of* children's first language. Given the shared governance mandate of Head Start programs, and the diversity of parent preferences, these are all important considerations for program practices and policies. In Section 5 we address these differences in parent preferences and options for programs in more detail.

4. Developmental Perspectives on Assessment & Curriculum

Several responses presented a clear developmental perspective. Here, program staff articulated the view that children's early development is linked to later achievements. More specifically, these respondents expressed questions and concerns based on the recognition that infant/toddler environments and experiences would have an influence upon the skill levels of children as they enter kindergarten.

As in the preceding sections, program responses regarding assessment and curriculum practices were marked by variety. Individual responses identified a number of "best practices" for infants and toddlers.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

At the local level, program staff may consider replicating all or part of this questionnaire. To this end, we have included a copy of our questionnaire in Appendix A (page 52).

MSHS programs that replicate all or part of this questionnaire may contact the MSHS TAC-12 for assistance in the analysis and interpretation of the data; as well as for technical assistance to respond to issues that arise from the questionnaire.

Terminology

Program staff trying to become familiar with the research on first and second language development for infants and toddlers are quickly confronted with a variety of terms, definitions, and phrases — many of which are highly specialized and technical. While this Guide cannot attempt to provide an explanation of every specialized term and technical phrase that is found within the literature, we do offer this brief list to assist the reader. Many of the definitions are taken from Genesse, Paradis and Crago (2004), some are verbatim from the Head Start Program Performance Standards, while others are definitions of our own choosing.

ACQUISITION: refers to sub-conscious mental processes that are involved in language development.

ASSESSMENT: means the ongoing procedures used by appropriate qualified personnel throughout the period of a child's eligibility to identify: (i) The child's unique strengths and needs and the services appropriate to meet those needs; and (ii) The resources, priorities, and concerns of the family and the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their child **[Head Start Program Performance Standards, 1304. 3 (a) (1) (i – ii)].**

CODE SWITCHING (MIXING): the use of elements from two languages in the same utterance or in the same stretch of conversation (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 91). These elements may include the use of phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic or pragmatic patterns (p. 92).

COMMUNICATION is the sending and receiving of information; a process in which meaning is shared between two or more people.

CURRICULUM: means a written plan that includes: (i) The goals for children's development and learning; (ii) The experiences through which they will achieve these goals; (iii) What staff and parents do to help children achieve these goals; and (iv)The materials needed to support the implementation of the curriculum. The curriculum is consistent with the Head Start Program

Performance Standards and is based on sound child development principles about how children grow and learn [**Head Start Program Performance Standards, 1304.3 (a) (5) (i – iv)].**

DOMINANCE: the condition in which bilingual people have greater grammatical proficiency in, more vocabulary for, or greater fluency in one language, or simply use one language more often (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 80).

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: includes both simultaneous bilinguals and second languages learners in preschool or above (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 4).

ENVIRONMENT(S): For infants and toddlers, "environments" include both physical and human components. Basically, anything beyond the child's skin is part of their "environment" — with family members and other primary caregivers taking on special importance.

EXPOSURE: children who are "exposed" to language are in environments in which they hear (or overhear) language, either by being spoken to directly, or by indirectly listening to the language use of others.

FIRST LANGUAGE: (also Home language): a language used by parents and overheard by the infant, both pre- and post-natally (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 45).

INFANTS: In this document, we use "infants and toddlers" and "very young children" to refer to children from birth through age three. We also use the term "babies" to refer to children younger than three years of age; mostly because we like the way it sounds and feels in conversation.

Bob Stechuk

L1: refers to a child's first language.

L2: refers to a child's second language.

LANGUAGE: is the shared code (symbol system) used to accomplish communication; it may be verbal, non-verbal or written.

LEARNING: refers to conscious mental processes that are involved in language development.

MONOLINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS: Those in which one language is spoken.

MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENTS: Those in which more than one language is spoken.

PROSODY: refers to the tonal features of language — the changes in pitch and stress that occur during talking (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 45). Prosodic features of language are the opposite of a monotone.

REPRESENTATION(S): refers to knowledge stored in the mind (Bialystok, 2001 p. 90).

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS/SEQUENTIAL BILINGUAL DEVELOPMENT: children who begin to learn an additional language after 3 years of age (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 4).

SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT(S): refers to the connected nature of social interactions and language use among humans.

SIMULTANEOUS BILINGUAL DEVELOPMENT: children who learn two or more languages from birth or start within one year after being born (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 4).

SPECIFIC LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT (SLI): a) means a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, which adversely affects a child's learning **[Head Start Program Performance Standards, 1308.9].**

b) a developmental disorder in which children have delayed or deviant language development (however, children have typical intelligence, hearing, and social-emotional behavior, as well as no obvious neurological impairment) (Genesse, Paradis & Crago, 2004, p. 18).

SPEECH: is spoken (oral, verbal) language.

TEACHER: means an adult who has direct responsibility for the care and development of children from birth to 5 years of age **[Head Start Program Performance Standards, 1304.3 (a) (19)].**

TEACHING PRACTICES: any behaviors on the part of teachers that support children's development.

VOCABULARY: Words understood or expressed by the child.

Organization of the Guide

Among the numerous responses to the questionnaire, several questions appeared with such frequency (and/or urgency!) that we selected these as a way of organizing our review of the research literature, and as a basis for suggesting application activities connected to practices. These include:

1. *Since the families of infants and toddlers in our program speak Spanish, do we need to use English in our program or can we do the whole program in Spanish?*

2. *How do infants develop a first language?*

3. *What role do environments play in first language acquisition?*

4. *Does exposure to more than one language in infancy lead children to become confused or delayed in their language development?*

5. *How can we respond to parents' preferences for language use in our infant/toddler classrooms?*

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

To assist programs in their development of effective practices for infants and toddlers exposed to more than one language, we present "Research-to-Practice" sections throughout the Guide. These sections are identified by the  icon.

Debra Drake

QUESTION 1

Since the families of infants and toddlers in our program speak Spanish, do we need to use English in our program or can we do the whole program in Spanish?

Yes, if all the infants and toddlers in your program speak Spanish, and their families are monolingual Spanish speaking, and the program teachers speak Spanish, the whole program can take place using Spanish. In MSHS, a wide variety of classroom scenarios are possible, including:

SCENARIO 1: Spanish-speaking teachers and Spanish-speaking children.
SCENARIO 2: Bilingual teachers and Spanish-speaking children.
SCENARIO 3: Spanish-speaking/English-speaking monolingual teachers and Spanish-speaking children.
SCENARIO 4: English-speaking teachers and Spanish-speaking children.
SCENARIO 5: Teachers speak Spanish and/or English and children speak languages other than Spanish or English.

Some basic considerations for each scenario are presented in the following chart.

QUESTION 1

Since the families of infants and toddlers in our program speak Spanish, do we need to use English in our program or can we do the whole program in Spanish?

CLASSROOM SCENARIOS	COMMENT(S)
1: Spanish-speaking teachers and Spanish-speaking children.	This scenario enables the continued development of children's first (home) language, consistent with the Head Start Program Performance Standards.
2: Bilingual teachers and Spanish-speaking children.	This scenario allows for the implementation of a bilingual classroom. In our view, a bilingual classroom for infants/toddlers must prioritize children's continued **development** of their L1. That is, children should not merely *hear* their first language, but should **continue to learn and develop in that language.** Put another way, L2 can be a part of the learning environment, but should not be provided at the expense of the L1. We urge programs pursuing this option to create, in collaboration with parents, written policies that guide teachers and supervisors in the purposeful use of both languages in the classroom.
3: Spanish-speaking and English-speaking monolingual teachers and Spanish-speaking children.	This scenario allows for the implementation of a dual-language classroom, in which each monolingual teacher uses their own first language. In our view, a dual-language classroom for infants/toddlers must prioritize children's continued **development** of their L1. That is, children should not merely *hear* their first language, but should **continue to learn and develop in that language.** Put another way, L2 can be a part of the learning environment, but should not be provided at the expense of the L1. As in Scenario 2, we urge programs to work with parents to create written policies for language use in the classroom. In addition, programs are urged to carefully consider issues related to assessment, primary caregiving and relationships with families.
4: English-speaking teachers and Spanish-speaking children.	This scenario is inconsistent with both the research base and the Head Start Program Performance Standards which state that "when a majority of children speak the same language, at least one classroom staff member or home visitor instructing regularly with the children must speak their language" **[Head Start Program Performance Standards, 1304.52(9)2].**
5: Teachers speak Spanish and/or English and child/ren speak languages other than Spanish or English.	This scenario entails several possibilities: 1) can the program hire adults who speak the child/ren's first language? 2) can the program recruit and train volunteers who speak the child/ren's first language? 3) can the program collaborate with parents to reach agreement on an approach to supporting their child/ren's development?

Despite the variety of scenarios, there is a common consideration: Developing a first language (whether monolingual Spanish or English) or becoming bilingual or multilingual in infancy is complex. There are important understandings relevant to providing education and care for all infants and toddlers. In the following pages we address two questions related to first language (L1) development:

- How do infants develop a first language?
- What role do environments play in first language acquisition?

We attempt to show that 'language development' includes communication, speaking and listening, as well as mental processes that are internal to the child, and external factors associated with their environment(s).

'LANGUAGE' IS MORE THAN SPEAKING

Since the early childhood classroom may represent a new and unfamiliar environment for an infant or toddler, teachers must be aware that a child will naturally seek to employ their full range of *communicative skills, including any speech they have and, perhaps most frequently, non-verbal behaviors*.

In view of children's developmental progress, it is important to begin with the understanding that "language development" is much more than the child's speech. Teachers of very young children should not conclude that a child's speech (or absence of speech) while in the classroom represents the full measure of their communicative skills. Instead, language development and speech appear to result from participation in acts of communication.

In other words, children first develop communication skills, and then acquire and develop speech and language.

LANGUAGE is the shared code (symbol system) used to accomplish communication; it may be verbal, non-verbal or written.

SPEECH is spoken (oral) language.

COMMUNICATION is the sending and receiving of information; a process in which meaning is shared between two or more people.

QUESTION 2

How do infants develop a first language?

'Language development' can be seen as a progression, or, alternatively, a series of progressions (Camaioni, 2004). First, children begin life capable of unintentional communication, for example, they cry when hungry. This crying might not be intended to communicate that they are hungry — the baby is fussing because they are hungry. However, within a few months, children make the transition to intentional communication. For example, they start to associate that their sounds or fussing is related to a particular outcome (e.g., being fed, changed, talked to) and therefore, children repeat sounds to achieve their intended outcome. Around their first birthday, children make the transition to verbal (single word) language use; and by age two; children use words as symbols that represent objects and events.

With additional experience…
- Communication comes to include speech & language
- Language is used for a variety of purposes
- Language and cognition are mutually supporting

With experience, children…
- develop knowledge of their world
- use this knowledge to communicate their intentions

At birth, children are…
- able to communicate
- ready to acquire language

QUESTION 2

How do infants develop a first language?

Language development is an outcome of children's regular participation in socially and culturally organized activities, concluded Ochs and Schieffelin (1995, in Meadows, 1996.) As children participate in activities that are valued by their families and within their culture, they are exposed to language. Further, as children increase their ability to communicate and use language, they are more able to participate in social activities. Rogoff (1990) uses the term "guided participation" to suggest that children's participation in culturally valued activities is their "apprenticeship in thinking." For intentional communication to happen, we need environments that support it.

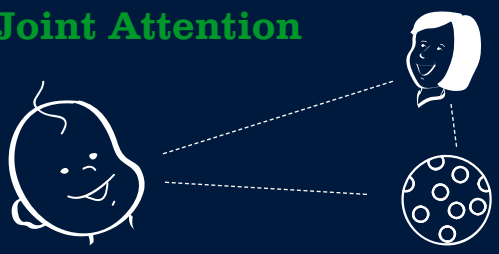
IT ALL DEPENDS ON JOINT ATTENTION!

Imagine a mother feeding pieces of fruit to her 14 month old daughter. During a pause, the child reaches out, picks up a piece of fruit, and offers it to the mother. The mother smiles, says "Thank you!" She takes the piece of fruit, then returns to feeding her daughter. Or, consider a father interacting with his son of 28 months during the completion of a puzzle. Both father and son regard the puzzle board and the un-used pieces. At times, the child insists that he wants to "do it myself"! At times, however, the child asks for help: "Daddy do this one." What do the two interactions have in common? In both examples there is:
1) a shared focus on an activity that is
2) sustained over time.

Joint attention is the term given to these ongoing interactions of shared interest.

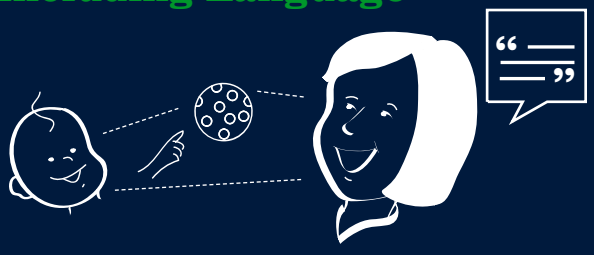
WHY IS JOINT ATTENTION IMPORTANT?

Example of Non-Verbal Joint Attention



A non-mobile infant looks across the room at a ball. The adult walks over to the ball, picks it up, and hands it to the child. When the child drops the ball, the adult retrieves it and returns it to the child's hand. The child then grasps the ball and passes it from one hand to the other. The adult watches the child's actions and smiles.

Example of Joint Attention Including Language



A mobile infant walks across the room to shelf and points to a container of balls. The adult walks over to the container, picks up a ball, and says "Here's a ball" as she/he hands it to the child. The child throws the ball to the adult…

When joint attention occurs, the child is in an "environment" in which they are able to: 1) express what they know and 2) acquire new language and information. Joint attention includes all developmental domains: physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and linguistic. It may include, but does not require, the use of speech. Paul and Shiffer (1991) believe that early, non-verbal joint attention is the foundation for the later development of spoken language.

Accordingly, teachers and parents support infants' 'language development' when they take part in non-verbal joint attention interactions. These interactions can be seen as a process in which very young children construct understandings of how and when to communicate, as well as understandings of objects and other people — long before they actually begin speaking!

Views of Language Development

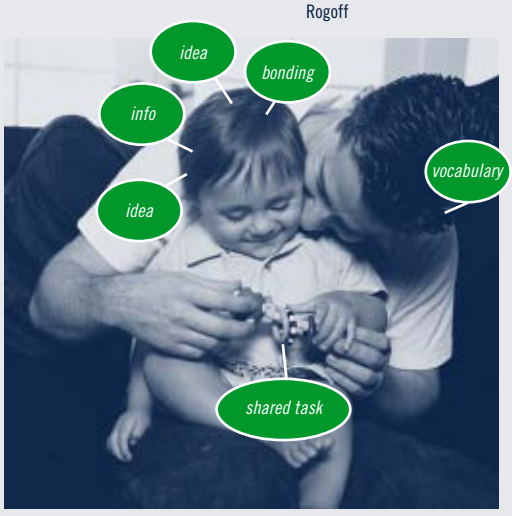
Participation = Communication

Ochs and Schieffelin

Language Acquisition and Development

Learning: Guidance Becomes Internalized

Rogoff



Sequence of Events

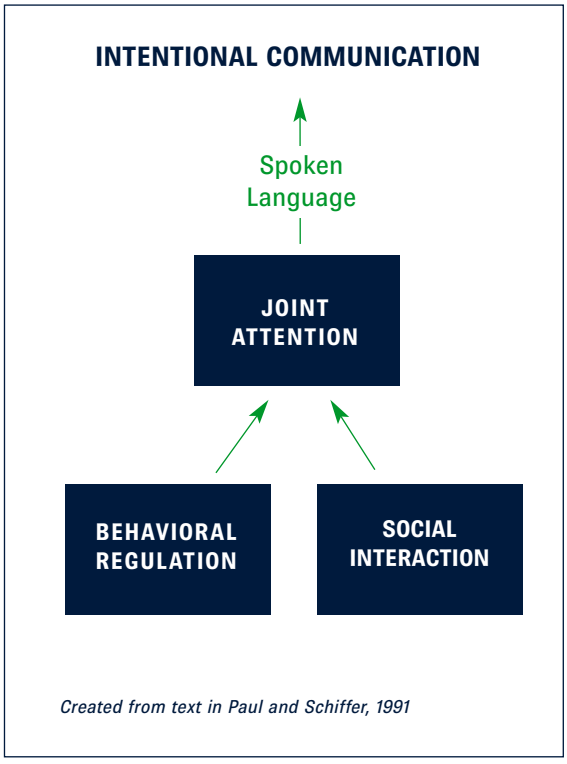
Language Development

Intentional Communication

Paul and Shiffer (1991) studied the early communication behaviors of infants and toddlers. They found that even very young children are capable of intentionally communicating with others.

Initially, a child uses non-verbal communication to express their ideas, feelings and intentions. Paul and Shiffer found that an infant soon develops a wide range of non-verbal communication. In addition, they concluded that the specific types of communication fell into two main groups. One, **behavioral regulation**, was any instance of communication in which a child attempted to control or alter the behaviors of others in their environment. Two, **social interaction**, was any instance in which a child initiated communication with others.

Over time, these two forms of intentional communication developed to a level in which a child is capable of initiating or participating in acts of **joint attention**. Paul and Shiffer concluded that children's early experiences with non-verbal joint attention facilitated their transition into the use of spoken language.



Created from text in Paul and Schiffer, 1991

BEHAVIORAL REGULATION

REQUEST FOR OBJECTS. The child requests an object from the parent.

REQUEST FOR ACTION. The child directs the request to the parent in order to accomplish an action. The child must in some way request the parent to intervene. Simply struggling to do something does not constitute a request for action.

PROTEST. Behavior must be directed to the parent. The child may push away the parent's hand, turn away from the parent, shake the head, whine, fuss, or use verbal protests such as "no" or "don't."

REJECTIONS. The child refuses to take an object or participate in an activity suggested by the parent. Any of the above means could be used.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

REQUEST SOCIAL ROUTINE. The child attempts to engage the parent in a shared, conventional interactional routine such as "patty-cake," itsy bitsy spider, peek-a-boo, and so forth.

GREETING. The child directs conventional greetings, such as "hi," "bye-bye," or "night-night" to the parent. Greetings directed to dolls or toys or involving the play phone or a person not present are not coded.
SHOWING OFF. The child uses behaviors to get or maintain the parent's attention to **him-** or **herself**. Behaviors used to focus attention on an **object**, other than the child, are considered comments.

CALLING. The child attempts to get the parent's attention by using her name, for example, "Mommy!" or "Look, Mom!"

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION. The child directs a request for permission to the parent through alternating gaze (moving gaze from the parent to a desired object, and back to the parent) or through gestures or vocalizations interpreted to ask for permission to engage in some activity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT. The child indicates in some way that he or she has received the message that the parent sent. This is a spontaneous acknowledgment, not one requested by the parent.

JOINT ATTENTION

COMMENT. The child remarks on some aspect of his or her environment or points out an object on which the mother's attention was not previously focused. Comments must be directed to the parent, not to toys or objects.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION. The child directs a request to the parent for information, usually in the form of word combinations such as "What's this?" Requests for information can take the form of pointing or vocalizing when the intent of the action is clearly to elicit the name or some other information about an object, person, or action.

REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION. The child directs a request to the parent for additional information about or repetition of a previous utterance, "What?", "Huh?", or a questioning gesture or expression may be used.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

Joint Attention

Using the checklist below, note examples of each observed behavior:

BEHAVIORAL REGULATION

ITEM	EXAMPLE(S)
Request for objects	
Request for action	
Protest	
Rejections	

SOCIAL INTERACTION

ITEM	EXAMPLE(S)
Request social routine	
Greeting	
Showing off	
Calling	
Request for permission	
Acknowledgement	

How and when does the child use non-verbal communication? How and when does the child use verbal communication? How could you use this information to guide future interactions?

JOINT ATTENTION: *comment; request for information; request for clarification.*

ITEM	EXAMPLE(S)
Comment	
Request for Information	
Request for clarification	

How and when is the child involved in joint attention experiences? What can adults do to add language and/or cognitive complexity to the child's future experiences?

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

Communication

For excellent communication, listening and talking to happen, teachers can keep in mind standards and guidelines such as those presented in the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale* (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2003).

Here is some of their guidance on the informal use of language:

- Caregiver talks to each infant and toddler during play and routines about child's activities.
- Caregiver repeats what toddler says, adding words and ideas when appropriate.
- Caregiver adds to children's understanding of language all day (Ex. gives clear directions, repeats new words often).
- Caregiver maintains a good balance between listening and talking (Ex. Does not overwhelm child with constant talk).

The authors go further in explaining communication during other activities, such as:

MEALS AND SNACKS
- Caregiver sits with children and uses feeding time to help children learn. (Ex. Names foods, encourages toddlers to talk).

DIAPERING AND TOILETING
- Diapering/toileting used as time to talk with and relate warmly to children.

ACTIVE PHYSICAL PLAY
- Caregiver talks to children about their activities (Ex. Explains safety rules, names up/down, in/out).

ART
- Caregiver talks to child about art work.

BLOCKS
- Caregiver talks with children about their block play.

PRETEND PLAY
- Caregiver pretends with children in play. (Ex. Talks to child on toy telephone).

SAND AND WATER PLAY
- Caregiver talks with children about textures, wet/dryness; describes children's activities.

PEER INTERACTION
- Caregiver points out and talks about instances of positive social interaction (Ex. Helps children notice sharing, turn taking, comforting).

DISCIPLINE
- Rules are simple and explained to toddlers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMAL LANGUAGE

Although we have made the point that 'language development' is complex, a striking feature of the examples of informal language is how "easy" many (or all) of them are. Intuitively, it is relatively easy to envision a scenario in which a child uses language while painting a picture in the art area. However, since early childhood classrooms are often very busy places, it may be "easier" for teachers to have a child paint "by themselves" while they attend to other areas of the classroom, or to other tasks.

The challenge, therefore, is for teachers to implement informal uses of language across all areas of the classroom consistently during the day (which, for some MSHS programs, are 12- or 14 hours long) at levels that are individualized for specific children. The motivation (or, rationale) for actively valuing language use this way can be found in the connections between informal language use and children's development of complex cognitive functioning, which is where we turn our discussion next.

HOW DO CHILDREN REPRESENT THE LANGUAGE(S) THEY HEAR?

One of the most challenging aspects of understanding early development is posed by children's abilities to **represent** information. This term refers to the mental processes through which a child's experiences — what children see, hear, smell, taste, and touch, on a daily basis — become processed and stored as *knowledge* (Bilaystok, 2001, p. 90).

Babies have experiences as soon as they are born. They are held, touched, fed, dressed and talked to. As these experiences accumulate, some portion is retained internally; thereby becoming available for use in the future. For example, as the baby becomes more familiar with their family members, with caregiving routines and with mealtimes, they can *use their familiarity* to guide their participation in interactions — even to the point where they predict future events. Although the exact processes by which children's representations occur are not fully understood, at a minimum, we can say that children's early development include processes related to the storage of information related to both language and experience.

Children's representations are internal processes. As such, they cannot be directly observed, but are only understood through inferences based upon children's external behaviors, including their speech. Consider a toddler's talk about farm animals as she visits a farm with her class. She may talk about all four-legged farm animals using the term "dogs" — because she knows about dogs from her home experience (i.e., her family has a dog). With experience, however, and even in a very short time, the toddler learns to say "cow" to refer to that animal. In this instance, we are using observations of her speech to get an idea of what she has represented as farm animals. These processes appear to become increasingly sophisticated and powerful before (and during) the preschool years.

EARLY LANGUAGE SKILLS SUPPORT THE ACQUISITION OF LITERACY

Four or five decades ago, children were thought to acquire literacy skills (the ability to read and write) upon entry into public school. In other words, learning to read and write began with direct instruction initiated in the early elementary years.

More recently, explanations of literacy acquisition have changed profoundly (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). A large body of research has established an alternative view: that young children develop knowledge about reading and writing *well before they enter public school*. A number of specific skills have been repeatedly demonstrated to constitute essential ingredients in children's acquisition of literacy. Simply put, young children use their knowledge of oral language to begin to understand the rules behind written language.

Hart and Risley (1995; 1999) identified *conversations* with infants and toddlers as important and perhaps underappreciated factors in children's literacy development. Of course, conversations provide children with opportunities to hear and use language. However, conversations also appear to provide children with *additional, and highly valuable*, developmental supports.

These 'developmental supports' include forming personal relationships, in which children learn more about their parents and about themselves. Conversations also play a role in the transmission of culture and values: what is important to the parent often becomes important to children. Conversations appear to be powerful windows into the world of knowledge, ideas, and information.

A LEADER IN THIS FIELD: VYGOTSKY ON LANGUAGE

The work of Vygotsky (1978, 1989) provides a window for understanding how language is used for children's learning. Vygotsky studied the role of interactions between adults and children in learning and development. He wrote about how adults provide structure, direction and content to an exchange, so that children develop and learn in a new way that is at a higher learning level. For example, left alone, children might be unable to construct a tower of blocks. However, the same children, working in cooperation with an adult, would be able to arrange the blocks sequentially into a tower. This adult help is given in a manner so that the child does as much as possible and is just pushed to do something a bit more difficult. Adults can model, demonstrate, initiate the first steps of a sequence, correct, ask leading questions, point out alternative solutions and more.

Vygotsky also noted that initially children might be able to do very little, but over time and further interactions, they gain greater abilities to participate. By stretching the level at which children can function, new learning takes place.

For infants and toddlers, early language experiences appear to set long-term literacy learning in "motion." Hart and Risley (1999) reported that the more time parents spent talking with their children from day to day at ages 1 – 2 years was related to higher vocabulary by age 3. In addition, Hart and Risley found that all families demonstrated a basic similarity in the amount of language related to accomplishing family routines and everyday necessities, such as feeding, dressing and maintaining safety. However, some families were better able to support their children "through simplified, stressed speech…gradually increase[ing] the complexity of their language, 'fine tuning' talk to the children's developing abilities" (p. 13). This type of early language experience was, in turn, highly correlated with children's later cognitive and academic outcomes.

VOCABULARY:
Words understood or expressed by the child.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

Very Early Literacy

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR INFANT/TODDLER LITERACY ACTIVITIES

The previously mentioned *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale* also has literacy indicators of excellence.

Here is some of their guidance on **BOOKS AND PICTURES**:

- Each infant/toddler given opportunity daily for a least one language activity using books, pictures, or puppets.
- Cozy book area set up for toddlers to use independently.

DISPLAY FOR CHILDREN

- Scribble pictures done by toddlers displayed in toddler rooms.

▶ For more information on the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, Revised Edition, see: http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ecers/

Debra Drake

FIRST LANGUAGE MILESTONES

Infant communication begins at birth. Although newborns spend much of their time sleeping, they are nonetheless born with abilities to take in and make sense of information from their environments. These communicative abilities become the foundation for the further development of language and speech.

Receptive and Expressive Language

Many researchers distinguish between receptive and expressive language. As the terms imply, receptive language refers to what the child is able to understand; expressive language refers to what the child is able to say. During the infant and toddler periods, children's receptive language begins earlier - and is far more extensive than — their expressive language. For example, a mother may ask her child to "give me your hand" — the child is able to understand and comply with the request even before she begins speaking. That is, although children's language development appears to be a rapid process, understanding language precedes, and overwhelmingly outpaces speaking for children of this age.

Why is this information important for what I do in my classroom?

This aspect of the developmental process is an important consideration for classroom practices. First, classrooms should be organized to provide children with many opportunities to hear and understand language. Equally important, classrooms and learning experiences should be organized to enable children to participate in numerous activities which are fun, real and meaningful to them.

Indeed, participation in play situations is an ideal way to support infant/toddler language development. Through play, young children are able to practice and participate in activities which engage their thinking and reasoning skills, gain exposure to and build understandings of concepts, and initiate and maintain social relationships. Opportunities for play also enable children to take in language that is important to them at a pace which they can control and to use the communication skills – either verbal or non-verbal – that they currently have.

Babbling

Babbling occurs when an infant vocalizes well-formed syllables (think: ba-ba, bu-bu or ma-ma-moooo-ma). Babbling appears to happen very soon after birth (i.e., 3 – 4 months, Oller et al., 1998; Petito et al., 2001) and develops as children vocalize increasingly longer and more complex combinations of syllables (think: bee-bee-boo-boo or boo-ga, boo-ga, boo-ga).

First Words: Acquisition – Development

Children's "first words" have long been of major interest to parents, grandparents, and researchers. First words may appear somewhere around 12 months of age; although a "typical" range extends from about 9 – 14 months (Petito et al., 2001).

A key feature of early language acquisition is the child's ability to understand which combination of sounds in the environment refers to a specific object. Receptively, a child needs to focus their attention on both the spoken language and the "meaning" of the communication (i.e., the intent of the speaker).

Not surprisingly, children's early speech is marked by familiar nouns — most often, food words, such as: apple, banana, cookie, cracker, water, juice. It appears that children's repeated experiences with food make these words a natural part of their early vocabulary. Children also acquire some basic verb forms (e.g., "go" or "hit") and adjectives (e.g., "big" or "little") during this time.

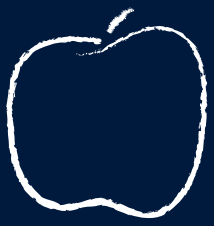
Two-Word Utterances

Once children begin speaking, another developmental milestone is the combination of two words into a single utterance (e.g., "big doggie" or "My ball"). The two-word milestone often occurs at around 18 months of age, with a "typical" range of 17 - 26 months (Petitio et al., 2001). The timing of the two-word milestone is also closely associated with the acquisition of a total vocabulary of around 50 words. Simply put, children appear to require a vocabulary of some size in order to begin combining two words.

Sentences: Simple to Complex

After a period of using two-word utterances, children develop the ability to form simple sentences. Not surprisingly, these early sentences often use a subject-verb-object construction ("He go home."). Children's early sentences are often marked by grammatical "errors" as additional time is needed to acquire understandings of how to express past, present, and future actions involving one or more persons. These "errors" are a natural part of language development for monolinguals, and should not, in themselves, be a cause for concern in very young children exposed to more than one language.

Speech sounds are not random but are organized into patterns.



In English, the spoken word "apple" is the combination of sounds that refers to the specific piece of fruit.

In Spanish, the spoken word "manzana" is the combination of sounds that refers to the specific piece of fruit.

Children need multiple opportunities to hear and then use sound patterns of the language(s) they are learning. Learning experiences that include songs, finger/word play, poems, rhymes and other experiences with sounds are valuable for children's development of both spoken and written language.

Debra Drake

QUESTION 3

What role do environments play in first language acquisition?

Human interactions, accompanied by the use of language, are exceedingly complex. The term 'socio-linguistic environment' (SLE) is used to acknowledge that a multitude of variables influence human communication processes. Although the very nature of the topic is abstract, we believe there is value in examining at least some of the features of this term. This allows us to begin a more practice-oriented discussion of how infants and toddlers are influenced by the SLE dimensions of their Head Start classrooms, their home environments, and the communities in which they reside — and what SLEs in MSHS classrooms could look like.

SOCIAL ASPECTS	LANGUAGE ASPECTS
• relationships between persons: attachment, bonding, familiarity	• type(s) of language
• expectations, beliefs, cultural norms	• purposes/functions of language use
• interests, purposes	• frequency/amount

WHY ARE SLEs IMPORTANT?

Petito el al. (2001) note that even very young infants belong to one or more socio-linguistic environments. One of these may be "primary" based on some combination of: 1) the degree of "bonding" that a child has established with one or more adults; as well as 2) the frequency and amount of language use that that environment provides (p. 483).

Consider the following example of how multiple aspects of culture and language combine within a specific socio-linguistic environment: the family mealtime.

FAMILY MEALTIMES AS SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENTS

During mealtimes, adults purposefully limit some of their children's behaviors (think: "Say please." Or "Use your spoon"!) and promote others (think: "That's a good boy/girl."). These **purposeful interactions**, initiated by parents and other family members, shape the future development of the young child. This process may even begin within the first hours after birth, as decisions about breast feeding or formula use are made (Valsiner, 1997).

In addition, during every mealtime, children are exposed to cultural information as well as to language. Parents use language to transmit cultural information both directly and indirectly. For example, as children eat they are provided with direct instructions (e.g. sit up straight; chew with your mouth closed; eat everything on your plate, etc.). Direct instructions may also convey information related to religious, community, social and other family contexts.

However, children are also *indirectly* exposed to different ways of acting and thinking (p. 226). In these instances, children observe family members (and others). During mealtimes, very young children come to see what is done, how and by whom. Young children may:

- observe food preparation and household tasks;
- take part in conversations and hear their parents express opinions;
- be exposed to stories, humor and grief;
- receive religious instruction;
- be instructed in polite forms of communication and behavior; and
- observe and overhear comments about community events.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

Socio-Linguistic Environments

SLEs: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do you know already about the mealtimes of families enrolled in your program? What types of communication, language use, and speaking take place?
- What could you do to find out more?
- What are other examples of SLEs from the child's home environment that are important to the infants and toddlers enrolled in your program?
- How are mealtimes currently functioning as SLEs in the infant/toddler classrooms of your program? What could you do to support the communication, language use, and speaking taking place?
- What are other examples of SLEs from the classroom environment that are important to the infants and toddlers enrolled in your program?

A key component of this indirect exposure to information is the child's active role in taking the information in. That is, a child does not take in information "verbatim." Instead, a child processes information as it comes to them, actively "making sense" of what they see and hear, and also comparing observations of current experience with those retained from previous experiences.

In summary, SLEs are important influences upon infant/toddler development. Very young children draw upon both **purposeful interactions** and **indirect experiences** in developing ideas, cultural information, and their ability to use and understand language. All infant/toddler environments have socio-linguistic aspects; the "trick" is to be able to identify those aspects which are relevant for practical considerations.

Given the importance and the complexity of these issues, the concept of a "language-rich classroom" offers a highly useful synthesis of much of this information. Although there are various definitions of what a "language-rich" classroom is, we offer a definition based upon the comments of Catherine Snow.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

FOUR KEY FEATURES OF A LANGUAGE-RICH CLASSROOM:

1) daily conversations that are deliberately extended;
2) conversation topics based on children's interests;
3) new vocabulary introduced; and
4) topics are re-visited on different occasions (Catherine Snow, in Walser, 1999).

Debra Drake

SUMMARY

In the preceding pages, we have attempted to show that 'language development' includes: 1) mental processes that are internal to the child, as well as 2) external factors associated with their socio-cultural environment(s). In considering the many and different pieces of relevant information, we believe that it is worthwhile to re-state some of the findings of Hart and Risley (1995, 1999).

Hart and Risley reported that **conversations** between adults and very young children provide children with a sound foundation for future development. Naturally enough, conversations are *social routines* that are also guided by cultural norms (external processes). In addition, during conversations, children actively process sequences of information and language (internal processing). Children naturally look for patterns in speech sounds, language use, words and the rules for communicating; then *represent* information about language that becomes available for future use. Within their growing ability to participate in conversations, children come to integrate both internal and external sources of development.

In infant/toddler environments, *communication* includes *all interactions between children and teachers*, both direct and indirect. When a teacher speaks directly to a child, this is, of course, communication. However, other children who observe this interaction are also exposed — indirectly — to communication.

In infant/toddler environments, "conversations" can be defined in the broadest possible terms, to include all forms of interaction between children and teachers. Teachers can make use of both verbal and non-verbal strategies to promote **optimal** communication, that is, communication that is "as good as it can be."

QUESTION 4

Does exposure to more than one language in infancy lead children to become confused or delayed?

Is exposure to more than one language during infancy too great a challenge for children? Does the presence of more than one language in an infant's environment cause confusion? Is the human mind "wired" to learn only one language? In our review of the research, the short answer to each of these questions is…no. However, such a short answer does little to guide programs to establish infant/toddler environments, train and evaluate teachers, or work with families. In this section we attempt to sort through the major issues involved and to provide programs with research-based guidance.

Although exposure to more than one language in infancy involves many complex and inter-related questions, a focus on two specific factors may prove useful in organizing our thinking on this issue as we begin. Petito and her colleagues (Petito, Katerelos, Levy, Gauna, Tetreault, & Ferraro, 2001) distinguish between two important and contradictory factors in early bilingual development; adult beliefs and children's internal processing.

FACTORS	ON ONE HAND…	ON THE OTHER…
Adult Beliefs	Language (monolingual) acquisition is "effortless"…	…early exposure to two languages is "bad" because it gets in the way of "normal" development.
Children's Internal Processing	We know that children represent language and experiences…	… we cannot identify how representations occur or why some items are represented rather than others.

(Chart created from text in Petito et al., 2001, p. 454).

THE INFLUENCE OF ADULT BELIEFS

If parents worry that their children's exposure to more than one language causes confusion, this may influence their decisions on when and where to migrate, and which family members to include, or what child care arrangements to obtain. Or, parents may try to find ways to limit or withhold their child's exposure to more than one language. For program staff, concerns about language confusion may influence decisions regarding program policies, practices and hiring. Either parents or program staff could worry that they are harming children by exposing them to more than one language. At the most basic level, adults are often concerned because they assume that the human brain is "set" to acquire only one language, and that "more than one" is a source of trouble (Petito et al., p. 457).

INFANT BILINGUAL EXPOSURE – WHAT HAPPENS?

Does exposure to more than one language during infancy present too great a challenge to children? Evidence from several studies that have taken this question as a starting point is reviewed below.

BABBLING AND BILINGUAL EXPOSURE

Oller and her colleagues examined the influence of bilingual exposure on infants' babbling (Oller, Eilers, Urbano, & Cobo-Lewis, 1997) over time. As previously mentioned, babbling occurs when infants vocalize syllables and is regarded as an important milestone in first language acquisition research.

The researchers recruited families with infants whose environments provided regular exposure to two languages and compared their development to monolingual infants. The researchers included children from both

QUESTION 4

Does exposure to more than one language in infancy lead children to become confused or delayed?

The age at which infants who were exposed to two languages began babbling was "remarkably similar" to the age for infants exposed to one language (Oller et al. 1997).

low- and middle socio-economic status (SES) families as well as some children who were born prematurely and others who were delivered full-term.

The researchers examined two aspects of infant babbling: 1) *when* children began to babble; and 2) *how* much babbling they did. In both aspects, the bilingual and monolingual children demonstrated similar patterns of development.

The age at which infants who were exposed to two languages began babbling was "remarkably similar" to the age for infants exposed to one language. Babbling in infants living in bilingual environments did not occur later than for monolingual children, but slightly earlier (26.7 weeks v. 27.3 weeks, p. 417). Likewise, the two groups of infants did not differ in the amount of babbling that was recorded. The analysis showed "no tendency" for bilingual infants to produce fewer vocalizations than monolingual infants (p. 420).

EARLY LANGUAGE AND BILINGUAL DEVELOPMENT

Petito and her colleagues also looked to find evidence of "confusion" in very young children exposed to more than one language (Petito, Katerelos, Levy, Gauna, Tetreault, & Ferraro, 2001). As they put it, statements that presume that bilingual exposure confuses children's language can be tested through research. The following chart presents three types of assumptions about bilingual exposure in infancy and corresponding expectations for the research evidence.

Testing Assumptions About Bilingual Development

IF BILINGUAL EXPOSURE	THEN...
1. delays language acquisition:	we should see evidence of delays when comparing the developmental milestones of each language.
2. causes confusion in language use:	we should see evidence of delays or deviation when comparing measures of vocabulary rate and growth.
3. confuses children's ability to form linguistic representations	we should see only a few examples of **translation equivalents** (i.e., different words in each language that refer to the same object or concept, such as: shoes – *zapatos* or shirt – *camisa*).

Chart created from text in Petito et al., 2002, pp. 468 – 473.

In sum, if the concerns about bilingual exposure were valid, then children would be expected to be "slower" in their attainment of key milestones identified in research on first language development. Further, children would produce language that is unrelated to the language use of their conversation partners. Finally, children would be unable to distinguish which language a particular word belongs to. (For example, whether "zapato" is an English word or a Spanish word). These three assumptions were each tested by Petito and her colleagues.

WHAT DID THE EVIDENCE LOOK LIKE?

1. Language Acquisition

Results for a child acquiring French and English and another child acquiring LSQ (Sign Language – Quebec) and French demonstrated similar timing in their acquisition of the three milestones in each of their languages (p. 468). Furthermore:

> "...the young bilingual children were not delayed in the achievement of the classic early language milestones in each of their respective native languages. *Their milestones were also similar to the established norms for monolingual children's first-word, first two-word combinations, and first 50 words"* (p. 469).

2. Language Use

Findings from the vocabulary analysis of six children showed that "early bilingual language exposure did not cause significant delay or deviance to "the rate and growth of their lexical (vocabulary) development in either language (p. 473). Vocabulary

development was generally equivalent and consistent with what has been reported for monolinguals of similar ages.

In addition, children's language choice was systematically related to the language of the communication partner. Children in the study produced a different pattern of language use with each of their parents, who had different linguistic abilities. Children's language choice changed yet again during interactions with two unknown researchers. The authors concluded:

> "we learned that young infants are fully capable of different but parallel acquisition of two languages from the very first onset of language production (i.e., speech) (as early as eleven months)" (p. 493).

3. Linguistic representations

Here, the evidence obtained was that "young bilingual children demonstrated the ability to acquire translation equivalents as part of their overall development" (p. 475). Translation equivalents were found to be comparable as well as quite sizable in the bilingual children that were studied.

This finding was obtained from children acquiring two spoken languages (French, English) as well as from a child acquiring sign language (LSQ) and French. The authors characterized this as demonstrating that "young bilinguals can differentiate their dual lexicons from their very first words" (p. 475). In other words, although children may mix two languages as they speak, they *know that they are doing so*. More importantly, over time, children develop the ability to fully distinguish their two languages.

SUMMARY

Based upon the research reviewed above, the evidence did not indicate that bilingual exposure produced confusion or delays in the children studied. Instead, the bilingual infants presented similar developmental information when compared with monolingual counterparts. However, it is important to note that the studies involved relatively small numbers of children. As Genesee et al. interpret these data:

> "Clearly, caution must be used when interpreting so few studies with such small sample sizes. It is not possible to interpret these results to represent the typical pattern for bilingual children because the sample sizes are too small, the domains of acquisition examined too limited, and replicability has not been established" (p. 50).

Instead, we can take the research evidence as an initial foundation for reducing fears that bilingual exposure is "bad" for young children. Rather than being anxious about bilingual environments for infants and toddlers, we can use the research base to identify basic guidance for providing effective services, as well as more specific information for how to realize effective environments of infants and toddlers. We can also draw from

the much more extensive research base on first language acquisition. As researchers have extended our understandings of the origins and early workings of L1 acquisition, Genesse at al. summarize these findings as follows:

> "No research of monolingual acquisition leads one to believe that bilingual acquisition is inherently problematic or burdensome" (p. 47).

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

Planning a Parent Agenda

Given the importance of early language development, and the often strong beliefs that adults bring to the topic of second language acquisition, children appear to benefit most when both program staff and parents collaborate to support that development.

Your task is to design an agenda for one or more parent meetings in which you will share information related to first and second language development for infants and toddlers.

INFORMATION TO SHARE: What information would you want to share with parents about early language development? What information would you want to obtain from parents?

SHARE	OBTAIN

WAYS OF SHARING: What methods or activities could you plan to support your presentation of information? What methods or activities could you plan in order to obtain information from parents?

SHARE	OBTAIN

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

Early Language Milestones

MILESTONE	"AVERAGE" AGE OF ONSET	AGE RANGE
First spoken word	12 months	9 – 14 months
First two-word combination is spoken	18 months	15 – 20 months
50-word vocabulary is acquired	18 months	17 – 26 months

(Chart created from text in Petito et al., 2001).

ACTIVITY: Review the developmental histories of children enrolled in your program. Consider any or all of the following questions:

1. How does the data for children enrolled in your program compare to the averages and age ranges presented in the chart? That is: Where are children "at" in their L1 development?

2. Where are children "at" in their L2 development?

3. What implications do you see for classroom practices?

4. Are there implications for professional development?

Debra Drake

QUESTION 5

How can we respond to parents' preferences for language use in our infant/toddler classrooms?

Good relationships and effective collaborations between parents and program staff is a defining characteristic of Head Start. Our questionnaire asked program staff to identify parents' preferences for language use in their children's infant/toddler classrooms.

We found that responses varied widely: some programs reported that parents preferred only children's L1 (Spanish) to be used in the classroom; other programs reported that parents wanted only the L2 (English) to be used. A majority of responses indicated that parent preferences aimed at a balance of both L1 plus L2 in the classroom, with some responses going further to indicate that use of the L2 should not "overpower" children's first language. We discuss each preference below.

QUESTION 5

How can we respond to parents' preferences for language use in our infant/toddler classrooms?

- **WHEN PARENTS PREFER ONLY L1 (SPANISH) IN THE CLASSROOM:**

Programs are required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards to support the continued development of a child's home language. Programs should consider the development of written policies to guide parents' thinking as their children transition into preschool classrooms, in which the acquisition of English is also a goal.

- **WHEN PARENTS PREFER ONLY L2 (ENGLISH) IN THE CLASSROOM:**

There are several potential reasons why migrant farm worker families may express the preference for English to be the language of their child's classroom. One, parents may view the acquisition of English to be necessary for their child's long-term social, academic, and economic success. Two, parents may believe that they can provide support for their child's L1 in the home, and that the preschool setting should support only English. There may be many other reasons for this preference. We encourage program staff to dialogue with families on this issue so that programs can appreciate parents' perspectives.

However, the perspective that infants and toddlers whose L1 is Spanish are best served by classroom environments in which only English (i.e., the child's second language) is used is both contrary to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) and with the existing research base on dual language development. Programs need to develop sensitive and skillful ways of communicating this information.

Program staff can develop the capacity to respond to parents' preferences that their children be taught only in English by: 1) actively listening to, and seeking to understand, how parents view this issue; 2) sharing the relevant sections from the HSPPS and Multicultural Principles; and 3) developing written policies that integrate Head Start regulations with a summary of the research base on infant/toddler bilingual development. Programs can also develop ways of sharing more detailed information strategies with families, so that classroom practices and family interactions are mutually supporting and beneficial for the child.

- **WHEN PARENTS PREFER A COMBINATION OF L1 AND L2 IN THE CLASSROOM:**

This preference is consistent with both the Head Start Program Performance Standards and the existing research base on dual language development. Our starting point for guidance comes directly from the concerns already articulated by MSHS parents and program staff: use of a child's L2 (English) should not "overwhelm" the child's continued development of their first language.

Assuming a bilingual capacity among teaching staff in the classroom, an effective approach can be accomplished through: 1)

planning activities in which Spanish is used more frequently than English; and 2) careful assessment of the child's language capabilities upon entry into the program; and 3) frequent and detailed observations of the child's communication, language use, and speaking — in both languages — during the day. Based on our own personal experiences, the questionnaire responses of MSHS staff, and our review of the research literature, it is indeed possible for very young children to develop in two languages. However, we urge programs to use individual children as the frame of reference. That is, use initial assessment information as well as on-going observations and other information-gathering procedures to "follow" the developmental progress of an individual child in both their languages.

In our review of the research, we do not find evidence to support a separate set of "second language" learning experiences.

Additional Research-to-Practice Considerations

Since our discussion has been based upon the importance of communication, language and speech, we offer suggestions for practices using these three concepts as organizers. In our review of the research, we do not find evidence to support a separate set of "second language" learning experiences. Instead, our view of the research indicates that language development — be it first or second — is supported through social interactions that are supportive, culturally and individually relevant, and cognitively challenging.

FIRST OF ALL...

- Help each child to *feel positive* about their communication, language and speech experiences, including their interactions with teachers, peers and written language.
- Maintain an approach to communication, language, and speech that is always encouraging and never threatening.
- Accept the use of any combination of a child's first and second languages; do not criticize or directly correct a child for code-switching (mixing).

Debra Drake

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

COMMUNICATION

1. **Observe children's non-verbal communication.**
   - Use on-going observations of a child's eye gaze, pointing, reaching and other non-verbal behaviors to create a "picture" of his/her preferences, interests and conceptual knowledge.
   - Share information on a child's use of non-verbal communication with parents, for example, how the child requests food or a specific toy that is out of reach.

2. **Initiate non-verbal communication.**
   - When a child is playing or exploring the environment, position yourself close to the child's area of activity. Observe the child's response(s) and use this as a basis for further communication if possible.
   - When a child is playing or exploring the environment, copy their behaviors. Observe the child's response(s) and use this as a basis for further communication if possible.
   - Play "tape recorder." Mimic the sounds that a child makes and use this to develop an on-going interaction if possible.

3. **Observe and support children's narratives as they arise during play.**
   - Use observations of a child's pretend play activities to create and extend communication. For example, if a child pretends to cook eggs, ask to be served some.
   - Use instances of common actions (running, throwing, picking up) as opportunities to model language to describe a child's actions.
   - Talk to a child about the objects that he/she is using in their play. Join in the play activity to communicate your interest in what the child is doing and/or saying.
   - Have plenty of materials to support pretend play. Rotate them as necessary to sustain and reflect children's interests and background knowledge and to extend the sequence of play activities.

4. **Create opportunities for children to practice and use emerging abilities to recall and remember information.**
   - Ask a child to recall specific experiences or activities from earlier that morning later in the day. If possible, extend the conversation to include additional experiences from the past.
   - Ask a child to point to, go to, or to talk about items or other children that they played with earlier.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

LANGUAGE

1. **Observe a child's receptive language: What does the child understand without needing to speak?**
   - Ask a child to perform a specific action, such as "pick up the red block on the floor" without giving non-verbal cues (e.g., pointing or looking directly at the red block). Observe for the child's ability to understand language that they may not produce in their speech.
   - Use on-the-spot (in-the-moment) labeling language in meaningful contexts. That is, talk about the object(s) that a child is using at that particular moment (e.g., mention the name of the toy the child is play with: "You picked up a horse off the shelf"). Or, talk about the actions that a child is doing (e.g., "You're rolling the play dough on the table."). Conversely, avoid trying to teach words outside of meaningful contexts.

2. **Use the "self-talk" strategy.**
   - In self-talk, teachers describe their own actions. For example: "I'm putting this red block on top of the yellow one."

3. **Use the "parallel talk" strategy.**
   - In parallel-talk, teachers describe the actions of a child. For example: "You're putting a small block on top of the big one."

4. **Create instances of joint attention and use extension (expansion) strategies to support language use (see pages 20-22).**

5. **Introduce new vocabulary on a daily basis, in the context of developmentally appropriate learning experiences.**
   - If a child comes up to you and says: "Look, pancake" you can respond: "Yes, you made a big pancake." If a child says: "I made a big pancake" you could respond "Yes. It's huge!"

6. **Read books and connect story text and/or written language to other learning experiences.**
   - Read with enthusiasm & expression.
   - Vary expression and volume to match interpretation of the text.
   - Read at a conversational level.
   - Point out the meaning of unfamiliar words – **then** provide additional opportunities for use & recall over time.
   - Invite children to create, tell, and then elaborate on their own stories, real or pretend.
   - Refer to environmental print in the classroom as a natural part of daily learning experiences.
   - Demonstrate to children how different print materials work by sharing ordinary texts, such as menus, bills, or flyers with them.
   - Display, write and point out children's names often, by printing it on their artwork. Help them recognize additional words they use frequently such as mom, dad, or stop.
   - Take children's dictation individually and/or in groups.

7. **Use routines to build new vocabulary.**
   - Use mealtimes, waiting in line, hand washing and other routines to build vocabulary.
   - Look for opportunities for labeling games: Verbally label *objects* and *events* in children's lives, such as "Nina is on the *swing*." Labeling games can be done anytime, indoors or outdoors.
   - On outings with children, surround these events with questions and comments. Structure the conversation so that children do more of the talking.
   - Encourage children to take control of conversations.
   - Consider field trips and other special events as opportunities for new vocabulary use.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

SPEECH

1. **Observe for and respond to child-initiated speech.**
   - Consider how a verbal response would encourage the child to say more and/or to feel confident about what they have said.
   - Consider one or more non-verbal responses to the child's speech.

2. **Make deliberate use of prosodic features (melodic) of speech.**
   - Use songs, rhyming games, language play, nursery rhymes and poems on a daily basis to encourage children's awareness of the sounds of language. Young children gradually become sensitive to the *sounds* of spoken words by noticing rhymes, substituting sounds for another, clapping along with syllables, and noticing that the pronunciations of several words all begin the same way.
   - Show children an array of pictures describing similar sounding words (such as socks-fox). Ask children to point to the picture representing the word.
   - Provide poems, rhymes, and word play in both languages on a daily basis.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

First language acquisition and development is complex, involving parent and child characteristics, as well as environmental features. Second language acquisition in infancy is even more complex, and often incorporates well-intentioned concerns for children's well-being and future development. Our analysis of the questionnaire responses from MSHS program staff and a review of research leads us to three basic implications for on-going professional development:

1. Develop and reflect upon a framework (philosophy, written policies) to organize information about SLA in infancy. Share this frame work across all levels of the agency.

2. Develop understandings of the important aspects of first language acquisition, established in studies of monolingual children. Second, carefully compare this general information to the specific situations of children exposed to more than one language. Use these understandings to formulate on-going staff training, as well as to share with families

3. Develop staff training opportunities so that teachers are able to implement thoughtful assessment practices, in order to understand the specific developmental accomplishments of specific children at a particular point in time. In addition, teachers need on-going support in order to individualize learning experiences for children, information about prior learning and language use as a direct guide for planning, implementing, and evaluating curriculum.

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APPENDIX A:
Bilingual Infant/Toddler Environments (BI/TE) MSHS Program Questionnaire

December, 2005

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is being distributed to MSHS program to support the development of a guidebook on bilingual infant/toddler (I/T) development. Many of you responded to a prior questionnaire that informed the development of *Making a Difference…*, a resource developed to address bilingual development in preschool children. Your responses will be used to inform the organization and content of the I/T guidebook.

1. PROGRAM STAFFING

Please enter the number of staff for each category below:

	MONOLINGUAL ENGLISH	MONOLINGUAL SPANISH	SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUAL	OTHER LANGUAGE
Pre-school Teachers				
Infant Toddler Teachers				
Teacher Assistants				
Family Child Care Providers				

2. CLASSROOM PRACTICES

- Describe how I/T teachers in your program are instructed to support communication and language development. Briefly identify the strengths that teachers demonstrate and areas of need you have observed.
- Describe the books and music available in I/T classrooms. What is an average number of books in an I/T classroom? Of the books that have words, what languages are they in what (estimated) percentage of books are in each language?
- What kinds of music are available, and which languages are they in? What (estimated) percentage of music is in each language?

- Describe the use of poems, nursery rhymes or motion songs in I/T classrooms. In what language(s) are these done? Can you give an estimated percentage by language?

3. PARENTS

- Describe examples and/or the extent to which parents express the following preferences: 1) desire that only the home language be used in their child's classroom; 2) desire that only English be used in their child's classroom; 3) desire that a combination of home language and English be used in their child's classroom.
- Has your program ever experienced difficulty enrolling children due to language issues? If so, please explain.
- Of the families enrolled during your most recent program season, what percentage (estimated) are:
  - Spanish monolinguals
  - Spanish/English bilinguals
  - Speak languages other than Spanish or English

4. USE THE SPACE BELOW TO COMMUNICATE ANY QUESTIONS, CONCERNS OR COMMENTS RELATED TO INFANTS AND TODDLERS WHO ARE EXPOSED TO MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE.

Debra Drake

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE

FOUR KEY FEATURES OF A LANGUAGE-RICH CLASSROOM:

1) daily conversations that are deliberately extended;

2) conversation topics based on children's interests;

3) new vocabulary introduced; and

4) topics are re-visited on different occasions (Catherine Snow, in Walser, 1999).

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