

## Literacy How-To: Teaching Dual Language Learners



### **Dual Language Learners (DLLs)**

#### **US Office of Health & Human Services (OHS) Definition**

Children who are Dual Language Learners acquire two or more languages simultaneously, and learn a second language while continuing to develop their first language. The term "dual language learners" encompasses other terms frequently used, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), bilingual, English language learners (ELL), English learners, and children who speak a Language Other Than English (LOTE).

### **Big Ideas for Teaching DLLs**

- Teachers need to attend to both English **oral language** proficiency and word reading as these are the strongest predictors of English reading comprehension (Gottardo & Mueller, 2009).
- DLL students can catch up with their monolingual peers by second grade in the areas of **phonemic awareness** and **phonics**.
- For young children, invented **spelling** is a window to how they are perceiving non-native English sounds.
- Children learning English follow a predictable path to acquiring English **syntax** and **morphemes** (i.e., verb endings). Generally speaking, children learning English as an additional language will follow a similar path. The child's first language will determine some of the individual differences. Each language has a unique sound (i.e., phonemic) system.
- The most important determiner of text comprehension in DLLs who can decode is often the amount of **vocabulary** a student knows. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to examine the text before the student reads it, in order to choose specific vocabulary vital for understanding the text—especially in science, math, social studies, or language arts content (August, Carlo, Dressler & Snow, 2005).
- When teaching **comprehension** skills, don't assume that all children come with the same knowledge of story structure. When teaching narrative text structure, teachers should keep in mind that the storytelling form differs from culture to culture.
- **Writing** instruction may require more work at the academic sentence level. Contextually embedded grammar instruction is effective for DLLs, especially if teachers understand and can contrast the differences between the two languages.
- **Fluency** alone does not predict reading comprehension for DLLs. Appropriate fluency along with developed oral language comprehension is necessary to predict reading comprehension in DLLs (Crosson & Lesaux, 2010).

To learn more, explore the Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and Research sections under each component of the Literacy How Reading Wheel. Toggle between components (e.g., phonics and spelling) by clicking on the terms within the wheel or above the definition to the right.

### **Important Considerations**

- Bilingualism should be considered an important resource for the student's education.
- Each DLL is an individual. Teachers should be sure to determine the student's native language, when they began learning English, and the language of previous instruction.
- Any assessment for possible special education placement must be done by a bilingual assessor trained in second language acquisition. CSDE has provided a list of

translation services ([English Language Learners and Special Education: A Resource Handbook](#)).

- Dyslexia manifests differently in different languages. For languages with simple sound-symbol relationships, reading difficulties may lie more with fluency than with decoding. Dyslexia in English, which has a more complex sound-symbol relationship, is often characterized by difficulties with decoding and spelling (Serrano & Defior, 2008).



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