Dual Language Learners with Disabilities: Supporting Young Children in the Classroom

Est. Time: 30 Minutes

Objective
Understand the importance of supporting a child’s development in his or her home language as well as in English.

DEC Recommended Practices
This activity addresses the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices topic areas outlined below. (DEC is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children).

Family
F1. Practitioners build trusting and respectful partnerships with the family through interactions that are sensitive and responsive to cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity.
F8. Practitioners provide the family of a young child who has or is at risk for developmental delay/disability, and who is a dual language learner, with information about the benefits of learning in multiple languages for the child’s growth and development.

Instruction
INS11. Practitioners provide instructional support for young children with disabilities who are dual language learners to assist them in learning English and in continuing to develop skills through the use of their home language.
INS12. Practitioners use and adapt specific instructional strategies that are effective for dual language learners when teaching English to children with disabilities.

Overview
Chances are you will have many children in your classroom who are dual language learners (DLLs)—children who are learning two or more languages, either simultaneously or sequentially. The DEC Recommended Practices note the importance and benefits of maintaining children’s home language as they learn English as a way to promote the children’s learning in both.

Activity
Read the handouts below from Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center and then answer the following questions.

- The Benefits of Being Bilingual
- The Gift of Language
- Language at Home and in the Community: For Teachers
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Questions/Discussion Topics

1. Why is it important to maintain young children’s home language?

2. There are a number of things that teachers and programs working with young dual language learners can do to promote the children’s home language. Select the option below that best describes your current situation and answer the question.

   Option 1: I am currently working with young DLLs. Reflect on your current practices. What can you improve upon or do differently regarding maintaining their language? Briefly discuss.

   Option 2: I plan to work with young DLLs in the future. Reflect on what you just learned. Is there anything you had not previously thought about but would like to ensure you do regarding maintaining home language? Briefly discuss.
Questions/Discussion Topics

1. Why is it important to maintain young children’s home language?
   Answers or discussions might include the following:
   - Children learning two or more languages have more opportunities in their future (e.g., employment).
   - When a child’s home language is taken away, his or her cultural identity and skills are lost.
   - Teachers can support a child’s culture by supporting their home language.
   - A child’s sense of who he or she is comes in part from culture and home language.
   - Young children learn social skills when families speak to them in their home language.
   - Children transfer their knowledge of concepts from one language to the new language.

2. There are a number of things that teachers and programs working with young dual language learners can do to promote the children’s home language. Select the option below that best describes your current situation and answer the question.
   
   **Option 1: I am currently working with young DLLs.** Reflect on your current practices. What can you improve upon or do differently regarding maintaining the home language of dual language learners? Briefly discuss.

   **Option 2: I plan to work with young DLLs in the future.** Reflect on what you just learned. Is there anything you had not previously thought about but would like to ensure you do regarding maintaining the home language of dual language learners? Briefly discuss.

   Subjective answer. Accept reasonable responses.