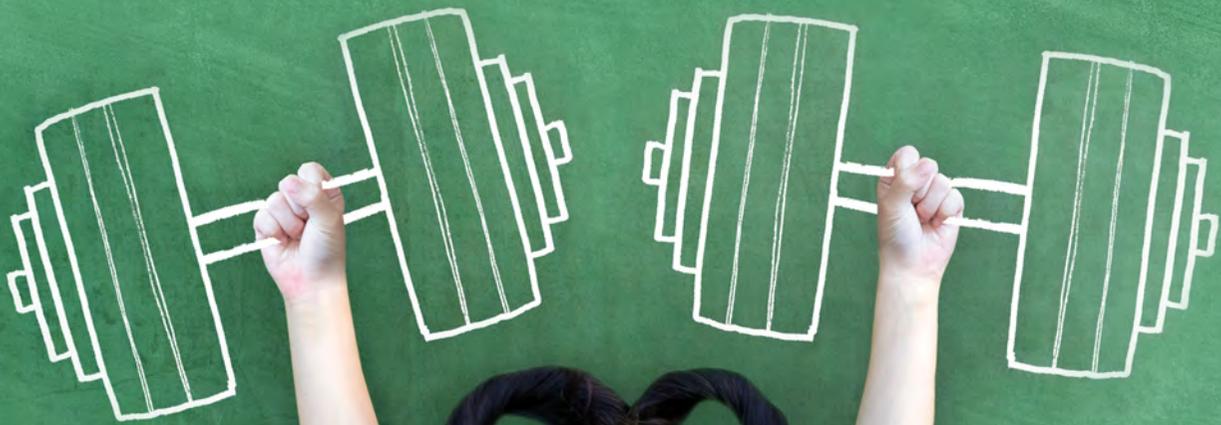


# STRENGTH in DIVERSITY

A Positive Approach to Teaching  
**DUAL-LANGUAGE LEARNERS**  
in Early Childhood



Lea Ann  
Christenson,  
PhD

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DUAL-LANGUAGE LEARNERS  
in Early Childhood**

**Lea Ann Christenson, PhD**

  
**Gryphon House**

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# Introduction

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The weather is crisp outside and cozy inside on this late October day in Ms. Lara's kindergarten class. Ms. Lara has twenty-one children in her class, nine of them English language learners (ELLs) from El Salvador, Mexico, China, Ethiopia, and India. Cutouts of autumn leaves and pumpkins adorn the room. A few key common classroom items, such as scissors, desk, a whiteboard, window, door, sink, soap, and so on, have labels that include a picture, the word in English, and the name of the item in the languages of the ELL students. Near the carpet area where the children gather as a whole class is a display of books, both informational and fictional, on the topic of fall celebrations. Ms. Lara has been reading them to the children over the past two weeks. A careful inspection reveals that the books reflect the countries and cultures of all the children in her class, including a child who speaks only English and who just moved from the state of Hawaii. Included in the book selections are the cultural celebrations of Sukkot (Jewish), Nuakhai (Indian), Oktoberfest (Germany), Día de Los Muertos (Mexico), the Dragon Boat Festival (China), as well as a few books on the American version of Halloween. Ms. Lara focuses on the common themes of family and community across the celebrations.

While reading the books, the children notice that many of the celebrations include food. Following the children's interests, Ms. Lara focuses the science unit she is required to teach—the five senses—on the investigation of various types of fruit, both those traditionally available in the local area (three types of apples and pumpkins) and those she was able to obtain from the places the children's families are from: pineapples, guavas, lychees, and plantains. Under the supervision and direction of Ms. Lara, the children investigate the fruit by cutting them open and describing the sound of them being cut open and the colors, smell, texture, and taste of each. The children then record, analyze, and display their data on charts and graphs created as part of a shared writing lesson directed by Ms. Lara.

She used this lesson as an authentic opportunity to teach and reinforce writing the numbers 1–10 and recognizing words with short and long vowel sounds (part of her required math and language arts curriculum). All the children, including the new arrivals who do not yet speak or understand English and two children who have

individualized education programs (IEPs), are able to fully participate because Ms. Lara models what to do every step of the way.

During center time Ms. Lara has the students apply and extend their knowledge of the five senses and fruits. She leaves the opened fruits in the science center for the children to continue investigating with magnifying glasses. Ms. Lara has created and provided copies of graphs with the pictures and the words for the colors and textures, and the children record their own data to indicate the color and texture of each fruit. In the writing center the new vocabulary words for the week—*pineapple, guava, pumpkin, lychee, apple, and plantain*—are posted on cards along with photographs of the fruit. The children refer to these word cards as they work on their daily independent journal entries. Next week, the focus will be textures and color words.

The block center has been converted into an agricultural warehouse where the children are learning how to move large pumpkins from one area to another using cooperation and an inclined plane. To aid understanding, Ms. Lara had interactively shown the children a video the week before and then modeled how to move large items with the help of an inclined plane. Photographs showing the process, along with simple text in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Hindi, are displayed in the block area. Greg, an English-only student who sometimes struggles to focus during circle time, is patiently explaining to Juan, an ELL student in the preproduction stage of English, how to best move the pumpkins from one area to another using an inclined plane. Juan listens intently to Greg, and they cooperate to move a large pumpkin. In the art center, the children are painting with red, yellow, orange, brown, and black, traditional autumn colors in North America. Photographs of landscapes painted by the artist of the week, Georgia O'Keefe, and works by last week's featured artist, José María Velasco, hang in the center to provide inspiration. Ms. Lara reads a short biography and describes the style and techniques of each artist during circle time each week.

The teacher of English speakers of other languages (ESOL) pulls a group of three students at the speech-emergence stage of English acquisition to reteach them the concepts they were learning (the five senses) and to reinforce their learning of English words and meanings of school routines. The Mandarin translator provided by the school system arrives to confer with Ms. Lara as they prepare for the conference with Biyu's mother later in the day. Ms. Lara and the ESOL teacher have noticed that Biyu is still very nervous at school, and they want to discuss this situation with her mother to better understand how to meet Biyu's needs.

A paper copy of the weekly class newsletter, distributed each Monday in print and electronic formats, hangs on the parent resource bulletin board near the door. Ms. Lara is able to use the district's resources to have the letter translated into Spanish and Chinese. For the other languages, she uses Google Translate (with a disclaimer apologizing for any errors Google may have made). The newsletter includes the curriculum to be covered for the week, class events such as birthdays and the birth of siblings, upcoming school-wide events with descriptions of each, as well as tips for how families can assist their children at home.

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If you are picking up this book, chances are you did so because you are a teacher or administrator who has at least one young English language learner (ELL) (also referred to as a dual-language learner (DLL)) in your classroom or program. You may think the scenario on the previous pages is a work of fiction and not a description of a real classroom and that you have no idea how to achieve the same results Ms. Lara did. This book is designed to provide you with the tools you need to enhance, not reinvent, your classroom to support ALL the children, including ELLs.

**The term *ELL* is gradually being replaced by *DLL*. In this book, we will use the terms interchangeably.**

## **Working with Dual-Language Learners: A Welcome Opportunity**

For many early childhood professionals, the prospect of having an ELL/DLL in their classroom may seem overwhelming because their university coursework did not include how to serve these children. You may have taken one or two classes on how to serve ELLs, or the most likely case, none! Even if you have taken coursework on this topic, you might still feel uneasy when you teach DLLs in practice. It is natural to wonder how, with all the demands you have on you as an early childhood educator, you can meet the needs of young DLLs while also meeting the needs of the rest of your students. You cannot rely on the fact that your prekindergarten through third-grade classes will have ESOL teachers to help you serve your DLL students; these teachers usually work with DLLs no more than thirty to sixty minutes per day. If you are teaching in a setting that serves children from birth to four years old or in a private preschool setting, it is very likely that your school does not have an ESOL specialist.

In that case, you are likely responsible for the DLLs for the majority of the instructional day, and it is your primary responsibility that all your students' needs—both those of DLLs and those of English-only students—are met in your classroom.

Having a DLL in your class is actually an asset. No matter your prior training or experience with young DLLs, this book will help you meet the needs of all your students and discover why having DLLs/ELLs in your class is constructive. In reading this book, you will understand the theories and strategies necessary to meet the needs of young ELLs are, for the most part, the skills you need to optimize instruction for all children. To serve ELLs, you do not have to create a new curriculum or implement different strategies; you simply need to shift what you are doing to maximize the effectiveness of your lesson plans for benefit for your ELLs. This book will provide you with a conceptual understanding of how to support ELLs in your classroom by building off what you already know about teaching. Then, you will be able to integrate this foundational knowledge into your current practice and make it your own, just as Ms. Lara did. For early childhood administrators, this book provides you the background in early childhood and second-language acquisition that you need to best support your staff and the children and families they serve.

So then, this book is for you, whoever you are and whatever role in early childhood education you play and wherever you live in the United States. No new or expensive materials are needed. You just need to know how to leverage what you probably are already doing so you can meet the unique needs of DLLs and maximize instruction for all the children you teach.

## **Overview of This Book**

This book is designed to be an easy-to-use guide to help those in early childhood settings (pre-K through third grade) plan and deliver inclusive and effective lessons for all their students. The following is an overview of the rest of this book. In many cases, you will find that effective strategies for ELLs are equally powerful strategies for all the children in your class.

In chapter 1, we will take a look at current statistics of ELLs. We will investigate some of the backgrounds of young ELL students and dispel certain myths and misunderstandings about ELLs. In particular, we will investigate learning theory and how both English-only and ELL students acquire language.

Chapter 2 identifies research-based strategies across all disciplines and analyzes how these strategies are specifically beneficial for children who are English-only speakers as well as for children who speak a language other than English. In chapter 3, we will see those strategies in action as we read about a sample unit that illuminates the previous chapters. Chapter 4 explores ways to work with all families in general, with specific tips on how to support families of our ELLs. In chapter 5, we will see these strategies and approaches in action in a kindergarten classroom.

## Terms Used in This Book

Before we delve into this book, let's take a look at the different terms used to describe children (and adults) who are learning a second language. The alphabet soup of second- (and first-) language learning can be confusing. Become familiar with these terms and refer to this list as you move through the rest of the book to reinforce your growing knowledge.

- **BICS:** Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills; the level of language for basic communication, such as that used for simple greetings, purchasing items at a store, and for occupations, such as gardener, construction worker, and so on
- **Bilingual:** the ability to communicate (understand, speak, read, and write) at a CALP level in two or more languages
- **CALP:** Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency; the level of language (understand, speak, read, and write) it takes to communicate and engage successfully in academic settings and for occupations, such as accountants, teachers, scientists, and business
- **Code switch:** the ability to switch seamlessly from one language or dialect to another, depending on the contexts (and sometimes within a single sentence or conversation)
- **DLL:** Dual-language learner, a person who is learning two languages (L1 and L2) at once. This is the case for many ELLs; they learn English at school and continue to learn their L1 at home. This term gaining in popularity and is used interchangeably with ELL.
- **ELL:** English language learner (see DLL above)
- **Emergent bilingual:** another term for DLL/ELL; a person in the process of learning a second language with the potential of becoming bilingual

- **E0:** English only; a person who knows how to use only English to speak, read, and/or write
- **L1:** language one; the language a person learns to speak from birth, also known as native language, mother tongue, or home language
- **L2:** language two; the second language a person learns to understand, speak, read, and write (Some people are very lucky and learn an L3, L4, and more!)
- **Monolingual:** the ability to speak, read, and write in only one language
- **Translingual:** the ability to use L1 and L2 as an integrated communication system to switch between an L1 and L2 and leverage commonalities in order to learn L2

# DOUBLE-DUTY LEARNING

## in DLLs

Spanish, Arabic, Korean, Pashtu, Mandarin, French, Swahili, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Turkish, Vietnamese, Somali. In the United States, the number of children who come from homes where they speak languages other than English is rising. Despite the common misperception that dual-language learners are slower learners or have special needs, research shows that they have better executive function and cognitive skills. Their brains are doing double duty!

*Strength in Diversity: A Positive Approach to Teaching Dual-Language Learners in Early Childhood* offers teachers context, practical advice, and strategies to help young dual-language learners thrive. Teaching dual-language learners isn't just about classroom methods. It's about empathy, perspective, patience, and high expectations. In this book, you'll learn:

- Who young dual-language learners are
- The basics of second-language acquisition
- Effective teaching strategies and principles of instruction
- How to honor a home language as you support English learning
- Ways to engage the families of dual-language learners

This easy-to-use guide will help early childhood educators plan and deliver inclusive and effective lessons for all children. And, importantly, it will position dual-language learners in a new light, giving them double credit for their double-duty learning.



**Lea Ann Christenson, PhD**, is an associate professor in the department of early childhood education at Towson State University. She earned her PhD in curriculum and instruction from the University of Maryland, College Park. Her work focuses on early literacy acquisition, English as a second language instruction, and STEAM teaching and learning.

  
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