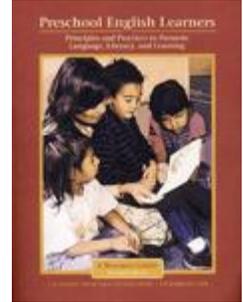


Core Beliefs

Adapted from the *Preschool English Learner Guide* (CDE, 2009, p. 3)

The following list of core beliefs should be considered as information is being presented in this guide. These beliefs stem from research and reflect an understanding of the challenges of educating preschool-age children, particularly English learners. Careful consideration of the beliefs will help preschool teachers focus on each child's experiences and circumstances as that child begins the journey toward the acquisition of academic English. Familiarity with these beliefs will also help teachers implement the information, principles, and practices presented in this guide. It is important to recognize that these beliefs are not mutually exclusive and that, in most instances, they overlap.



- Understanding the English learner requires gathering as much information as possible about the child and his or her family and community. Children grow and learn in the contexts of family, school, and community that often influence one another dynamically and interactively. Preschool educators can learn much from their observations of children's experiences in the multiple contexts of childhood (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Harrison and others 1990).
- There is an important relationship between language, culture, and learning. As children grow older, they become more proficient in the use of language, more culturally knowledgeable, and more competent in learning. Language allows children to learn more about their family's culture and the world. At the same time culture provides children with a lens that influences how they experience the world and how they learn (Gutierrez and Rogoff 2003; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon 1994).
- Language is a tool for learning. Children's language is an essential tool enabling them to learn about the world around them. Home language and English are tools children use to learn everything from the cultural practices within the home to the academic content of the classroom (Gutierrez and Rogoff 2003).
- There are multiple paths to childhood bilingualism. Just as children's everyday experiences may differ from one another, children may follow different paths to developing more than one language. There is not a single best path to bilingualism. This diversity in achieving bilingualism reflects overall development whereby children may develop specific abilities at different times and at different rates (Hakuta 1986).
- Language development and learning are shaped by children's experiences. Children acquire skills and strategies and ways of doing things from the people around them as the children carry out everyday tasks and activities. They learn the appropriate use of language and literacy from experts (adults and other competent children) in their communities.
- Second-language acquisition is a complex process. Children take different paths, go through certain stages at different rates, and use various strategies in acquiring more than one language.
- Acquiring oral language fluency in English differs from acquiring academic English, the formal language of the school. Children use English within different contexts for different purposes. As a result children may use different varieties of English in the home, in the classroom, and on the playground. Academic English used in formal schooling may take longer to acquire than English used with other children in social circumstances, such as on the playground.

Being able to communicate in more than one language empowers children in a multicultural society. Bilingualism is a valuable skill that allows children to use more than one language to experience the world and learn about it (Valdés 2003).