

Fresno Language Project

Goal of the Fresno Language Project: Improve professional development and training for early learning educators to better support the needs of young Dual Language Learners (DLLs).

The Fresno Language Project was created as a multi-agency collaborative to ensure all children have a strong foundation in both English and their home language upon entering kindergarten. The project is implementing innovative practices—including Personalized Oral Language(s) Learning (POLL) strategies, which are concrete approaches that support language learning in multiple environments. The POLL strategies were developed by nationally renowned early childhood experts Dr. Linda Espinosa, Dr. Carola Oliva-Olson and Elizabeth Magruder.

The project included 79 participants from Fresno Unified School District's infant and preschool programs, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools infant and preschool child care program, Head Start, Early Head Start and Children Service Network family child care homes.

LET'S CREATE A
BETTER FRESNO
BY INVESTING IN
OUR CHILDREN
TODAY

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Professional Development Sessions

All participants engaged in five three-hour Saturday professional development sessions each year. The training sessions focused on the following topics.

- 1. The Value of Linguistic and Cultural Diversity:** Participants were introduced to current research on how growing up with two or more languages influences development across all domains, on the great capacity of young children to learn more than one language and on the long term benefits of being bilingual. Participants explored many of these myths regarding DLLs and were able to reflect on how these myths may have influenced their approach in supporting children.
- 2. Family Engagement:** Participants received support in deepening their understanding of the importance of building strong partnerships with families to improve outcomes for young DLL children. Emphasis was placed on the need to help families recognize the use of home language as a strength and understand their role in providing rich language interactions throughout the day. Developed by Dr. Linda Espinosa, the *Family Language and Interest Interview* tool was introduced as a foundational family engagement strategy to be employed as part of the Fresno Language Project. The tool allows educators to interact, listen, and create a bond with families around the topic of language and culture.
- 3. Personalized Oral Language(s) Learning (POLL):** Participants received intensive training on the POLL strategies to improve the language and literacy instruction for DLLs in their programs. Drawing upon best practices for young DLLs in literacy instruction, the POLL strategies include specific guidelines on the use of Environmental Supports, Intentional Messages, Anchor Texts/Experiences, Vocabulary Imprinting, Songs/Chants, and Learning Center Extensions.
- 4. Support for Home Language:** Participants in the project were from a variety of sites, some of which were using a Balanced English and Home Language Development approach while the majority were from programs using an English Language Development with Home Language Support approach. For the Balanced programs, guidance was provided on the amount of exposure and quality of instruction in each language. For the Support programs, participants explored multiple strategies for bringing home language into their settings, including targeted use of bilingual staff and deliberate use of families and community resources. For both types of programs, there was a shared commitment to maximize the opportunities for all children to be successful in developing both English and Home Language.

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Ongoing Coaching Support

The project included one coach designated to support the 19 learning settings participating in the Fresno Language Project. In addition to the five Saturday professional development trainings, all educators received a minimum of three coaching contacts a month to support the implementation of POLL strategies.

The coaching format is designed around the following:

- 1. Collaborative Learning:** The coaching model is based on a strength-based approach that honors both the coach and the educator in a collaborative relationship that promotes effective implementation of the POLL strategies as they deepen their learning together. The Fresno Language Project coach participates and learns alongside the educators in all of the professional development trainings.
- 2. Coaching Portfolios:** The coach keeps documentation of learning settings observations which include videos, photographs and narratives. This documentation supports and validates the implementation of the POLL strategies. The shared reflection of this documentation between the coach and the educator provides not only a historical overview of the Fresno Language Project progress but also helps participants identify areas of both strength and need. The tool allows educators to interact, listen, and create a bond with families around the topic of language and culture.

