

Myths about Dual Language Learning

Assessing a dual language learner only in English gives an accurate picture of what the child knows or can do.

MYTH

If dual language learners experience language delays in English, their families should no longer speak with them in their first language.

MYTH

You have to be gifted in linguistic abilities in order to learn two or more languages at once.

MYTH

Babies who are growing up learning two languages will experience a delay in when they say their first words, put together first sentences, and reach other language development milestones.

MYTH

Total immersion in English from Pre-K to 3rd grade is the best way for a dual language learner to learn English.

MYTH

Learning two languages during the early childhood years will overwhelm, confuse, and significantly delay acquisition of English.

MYTH

If a dual language learner mixes two languages in a sentence, it means that they cannot tell the two languages apart.

MYTH

Concepts and skills learned in one language will not transfer to another.

MYTH

If instruction is delivered only in English, teachers do not need to worry about supporting dual language learners' progress in their first language.

MYTH

Let's Unpack these Myths. . .

MYTH	FACT
Assessing a dual language learner only in English gives an accurate picture of what the child knows or can do.	To have a full picture of what a dual language learner knows and can do, assessment must be done in both English and the child's first language.
If dual language learners experience language delays in English, their families should no longer speak with them in their first language.	Language delays should always be diagnosed by a bilingual speech and language professional. In most cases, if there is a language delay, it is present in both of the languages the child speaks. Families should always be encouraged to talk, sing, and read with their child in their first language.
You have to be gifted in linguistic abilities in order to learn two or more languages at once.	More than half of the world's population is bilingual. You do not need to be particularly gifted in linguistic abilities to learn more than one language.
Babies who are growing up learning two languages will say their first words, put together first sentences, and attain other language development milestones later than babies who are exposed to only one language.	Babies growing up learning more than one language experience the same developmental milestones as babies who are learning only one language. They begin saying one or two words around their first birthday, just like all babies.
Total immersion in English from Pre-K to 3rd grade is the best way for a dual language learner to learn English.	Dual language learners learn best in environments where they can use all the languages they know. If balanced instruction in both languages is not possible, the strategic inclusion of the child's first language, making frequent connections between the first language and English, and other strategies will all support learning.
Learning two languages during the early childhood years will overwhelm, confuse, and significantly delay acquisition of English.	All children are more than capable of learning two or more languages during their early years and this will not significantly delay the acquisition of English.
If instruction is delivered only in English, teachers do not need to worry about supporting dual language learners' progress in their first language.	Even when instruction is primarily in English, teachers should always support a child's first language for cognitive, linguistic, and socioemotional reasons, and to support a DLL's path toward bilingualism.
Concepts and skills learned in one language will not transfer to another.	Concepts and skills learned in one language DO transfer to another, particularly when the languages are similar. For example, children may learn how to rhyme in their first language and apply this understanding to successfully rhyme in English. Or, a child may know a lot about animals and later learn to express this conceptual understanding in English when they build the vocabulary to do so.
If a dual language learner mixes two languages in a sentence, it means that they cannot tell the two languages apart.	Mixing languages, or <i>code switching</i> , is a highly sophisticated skill. The child uses what they know to communicate and express themselves. They are not confused and do know that the two languages are distinct.