

## Chapter 2

# Preparing Teachers to Effectively Engage With Young English Language Learners and Immigrant Families: A Research Review

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to examine the current empirical studies of the socio-emotional development of young English language learners (ELLs), effective educational strategies for preservice teachers, and practices of immigrant family engagement in order to inform educator preparation providers (EPPs).*

### INTRODUCTION

“English Language Learners (ELLs), students whose primary language is other than English, are the fastest growing student population in the U.S” (Kreck, 2014, p.1). With the continued growth of young ELLs in U.S. schools, it is critical to prepare high quality teachers who are competent in understanding the needs of today’s diverse classrooms. Even with the growing population of young ELLs and more attention given to preparing teachers, there is still a need for core knowledge and practical strategies for teacher educators who are responsible for training the teachers of young ELLs and engaging with immigrant families. As of 2012, children under age 8 from immigrant families comprised more than 25% of the total U.S. population and live in households where a language other than English is spoken (Foruny, Hernandez, & Chaudry, 2010). Many theorists (Piaget, 1936; Vygotsky, 1978; Erikson, 1993) state that

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early childhood experiences shape the development of children, so it is crucial for teacher candidates to be prepared to work with young ELLs in high quality EPPs (Educator Preparation Providers).

Across EPPs, there is no consistency regarding which courses related to teaching ELLs are mandatory for teacher candidates, therefore, teacher quality varies considerably from program to program resulting in a lack of clarity about the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions for preservice teachers (Turkan, de Oliveira, Lee, & Phelps, 2014). Additionally, there are no standard or exemplary models of required coursework for how preservice teachers can engage immigrant families in helping to strengthen their children's emotional, social, and educational development. This lack of quality ESOL integration into EPPs is troubling because the recent increase in immigration accounts for rapid and substantial demographic changes in the United States' school-aged population. This rapid growth in the ELL population has not matched the growth models for required ELL curriculum for teacher candidates. Gaining the necessary knowledge, skills, and experiences to teach diverse populations must begin during robust teacher/educator preparation provider (Lucas, 2010; Wessels, Trainin, Reeves, Catalano, & Deng, 2017).

According to Harper and Pelletier (2010), ELLs perform between 40 and 60 points below native English speakers on achievement tests, and it is typical that low achieving students are unable to perform academically due to basic literacy skills. To acquire social English, ELLs require 1 to 2 years, but academic proficiency requires 5 to 10 years (Collier & Auerbach, 2011). Even though the achievement gap exists and ELLs are behind in comparison to native English language speakers, immigrant parents of young ELLs have high levels of commitment to educational opportunities for their children, which may act as a protective factor in their children's early learning and future success in school (Crosby & Dunbar, 2012).

Studies indicate that most general education teachers have at least one ELL in their classrooms, but few of those teachers have opportunities for professional development focused on working with this subpopulation (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008; Franco-Fuenmayor, Padrón, & Waxman, 2015). Research indicates that to reach young ELLs and their families academically, teachers must first understand their unique socio-emotional development. Because all teachers are responsible for teaching in a diverse society, it is critical that our EPPs provide the highest quality instructional approaches to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse early childhood population (Espinosa, 2007; Han, 2010; Niehaus & Adelson, 2014; Winsler, Kim, & Richard, 2014). This chapter will address what research states about the socio-emotional development of young ELLs, the key principles to educate these children, and the strategies for engagement with immigrant families. The authors will make recommendations on how to address this growing need through high-quality teacher education.

## **PREPARING TEACHERS TO UNDERSTAND THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ELLS**

For the purposes of this chapter, we define social and emotional development as the developing ability of young children to “form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn — all in the context of family, community, and culture” (Yates et al., 2008, p. 2). There are many foundational social and emotional skills necessary to successfully navigate childhood, however researchers consistently include the management and expression of emotion, ability to apply perspective, empathetic thought and behavior, inhibitory control, self-confidence, and the ability to cultivate and nurture relationships

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