



Childhood Multilingualism: Challenge or Opportunity?

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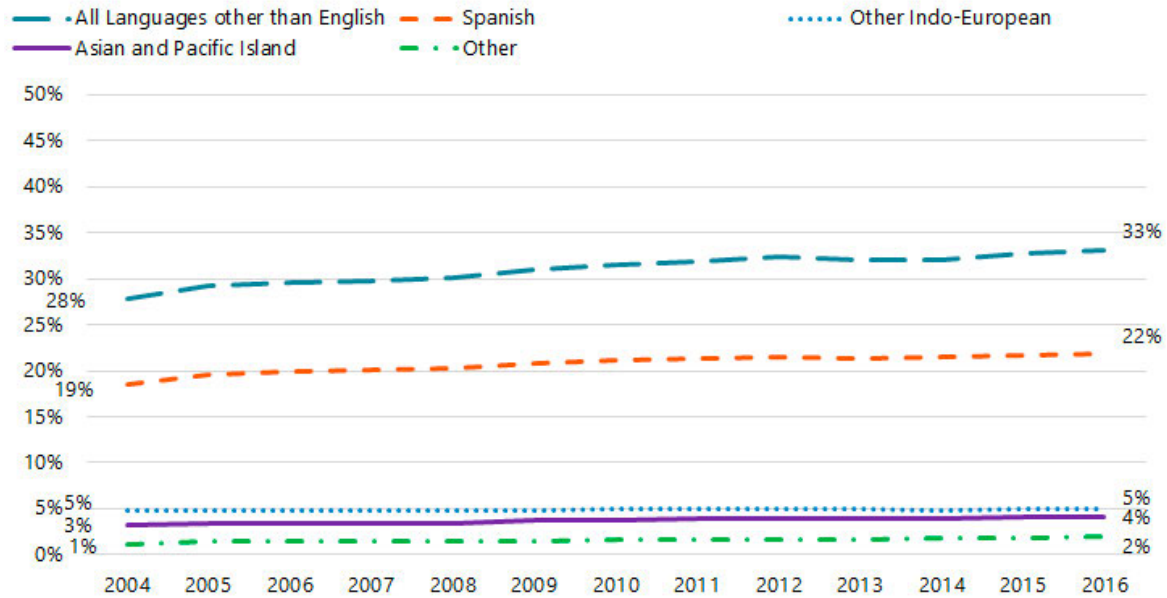
Communication Disorders and Sciences

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Multilingualism in young US children

Of all U.S. Children (ages birth to 17), Percentage Living in a Non-English-Language Household*: 2004-2016

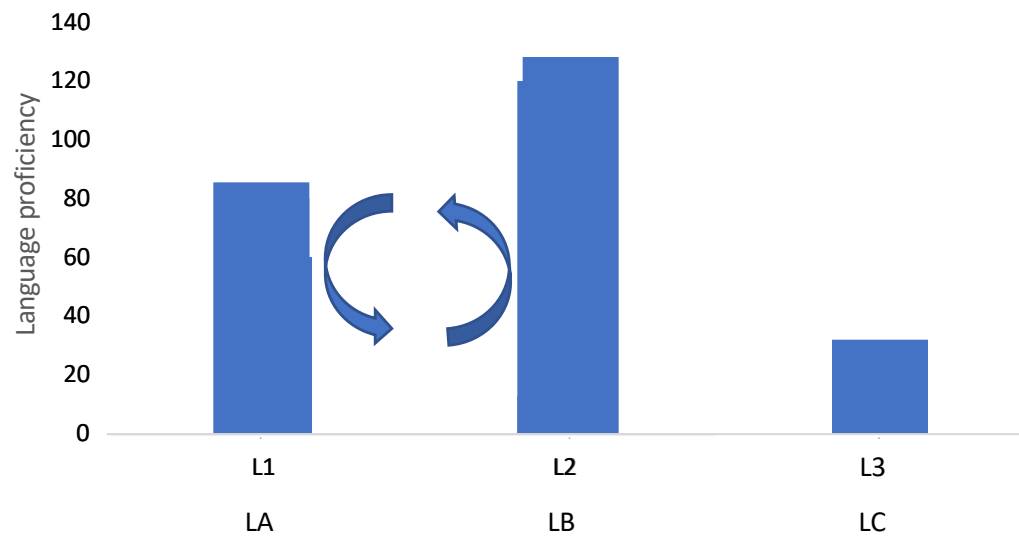


*Households where one or more people speak a language other than English.

childtrends.org



Multilingualism is complex and dynamic



A challenge, or an opportunity?

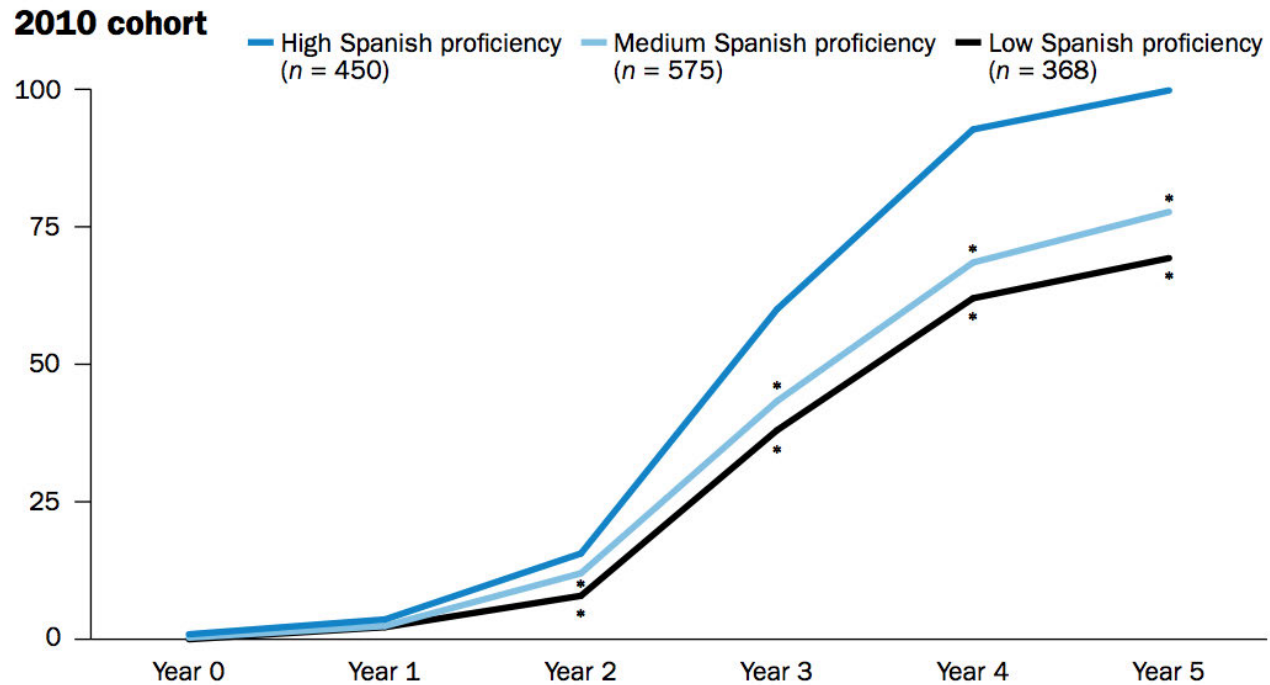


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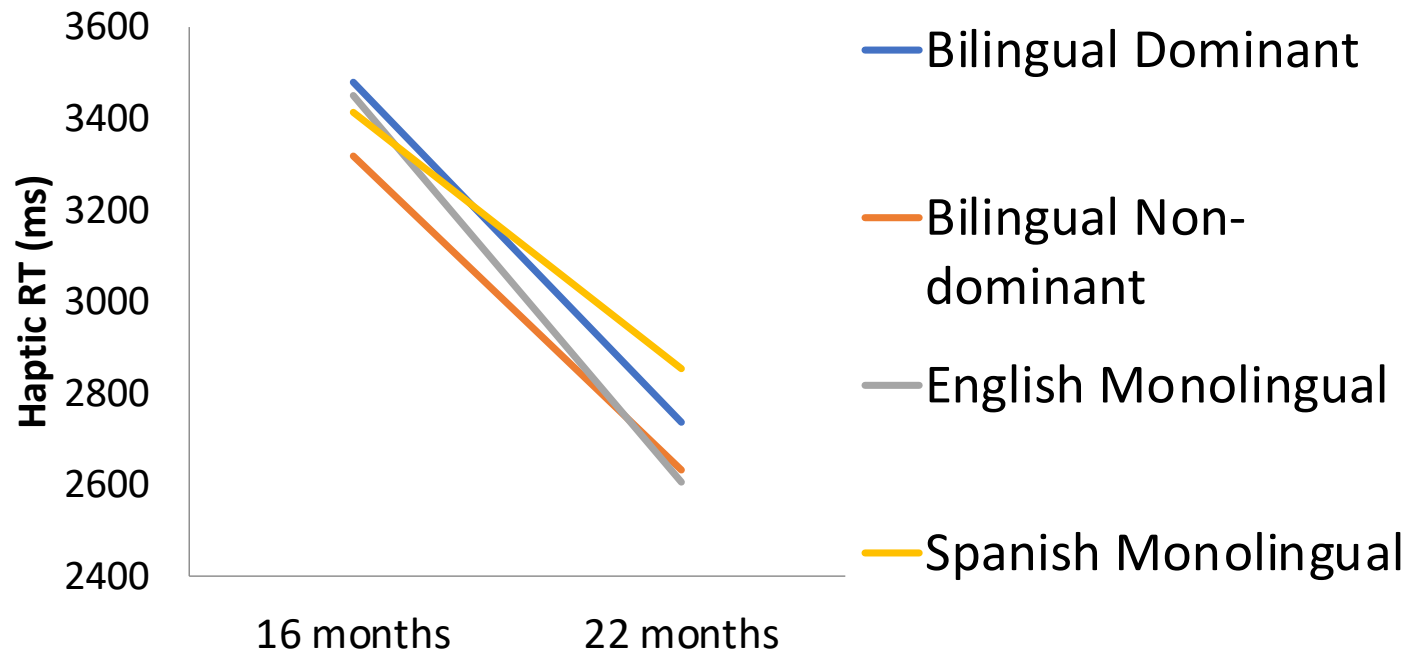
Myth:
Childhood multilingualism
limits children's development.

Language(s) are not in competition in development

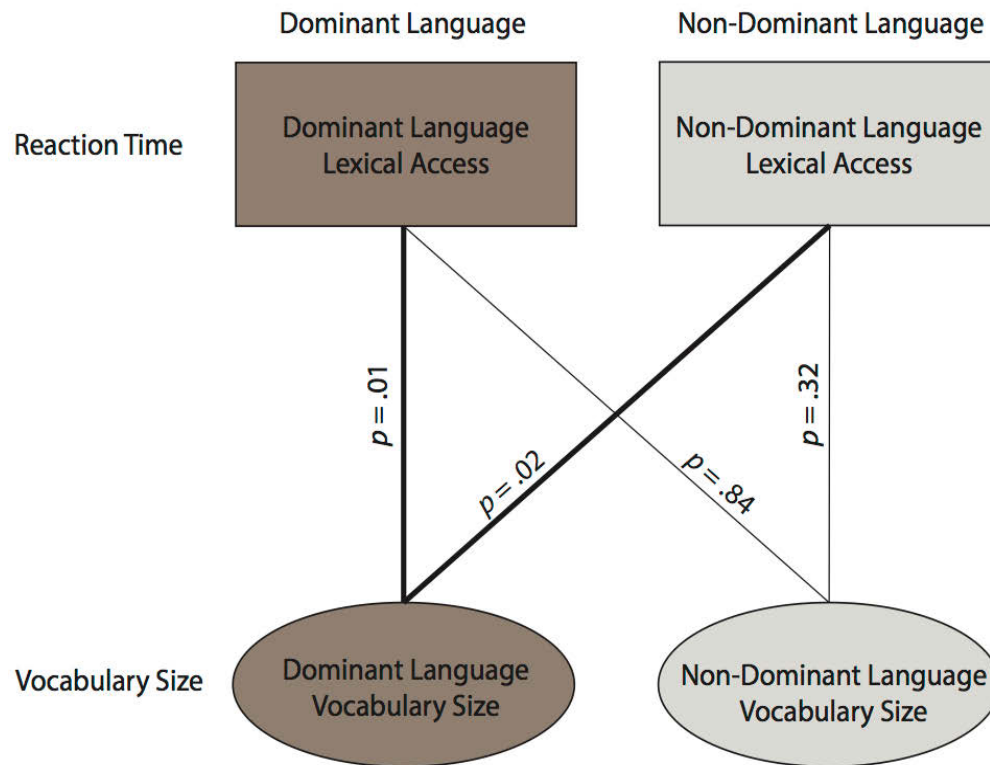
Percent of Spanish-speaking English learner students reclassified as fluent English proficient



Learning more than one language does not delay speed of lexical retrieval



Skills in one language support the other



Multilingualism provides many benefits

- Individuals who speak the home language in addition to the majority language have...
 - Higher self esteem (Portes & Hao, 2002)
 - Stronger identity (Phinney et al., 2001)
 - Higher community engagement (Zhou & Bankston, 1994)
 - Lower drop out rate (Feliciano, 2001)
 - Better English outcomes (Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005)
 - Closer family ties (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000)
 - Potentially varied cognitive advantages (e.g., Gordon, 2016)





“There is no evidence to indicate that use of two languages at home [or in the community] during the birth to 5 period poses a risk to children’s development of one or both languages”

(p. 120, 2017)



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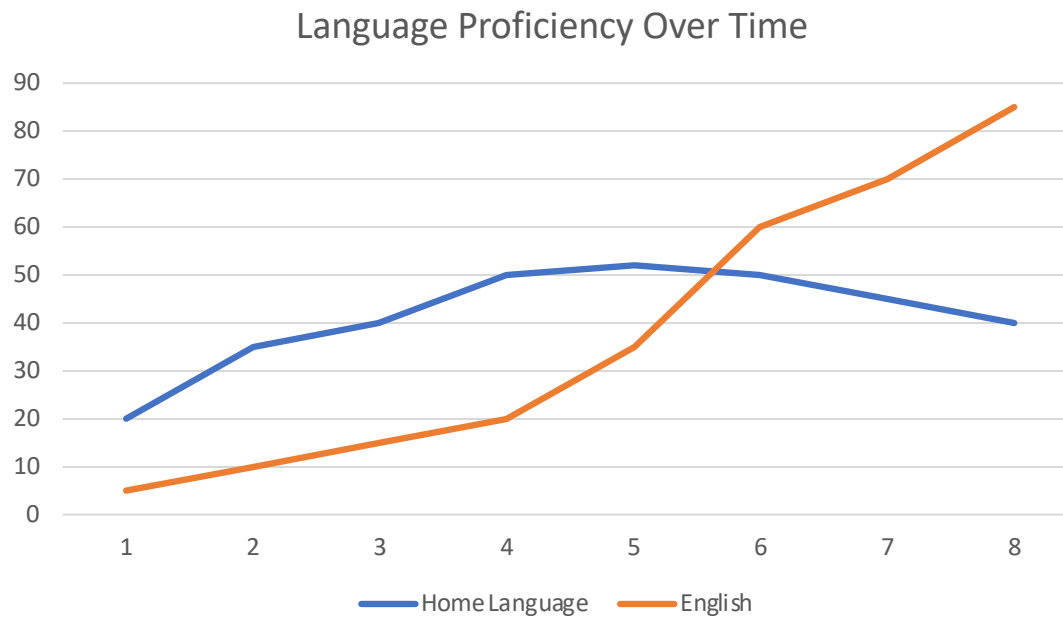
Myth:

Children with disabilities should focus on learning one language only.

The Consequences of a “Monolingual Only” Model: limiting communicative opportunities

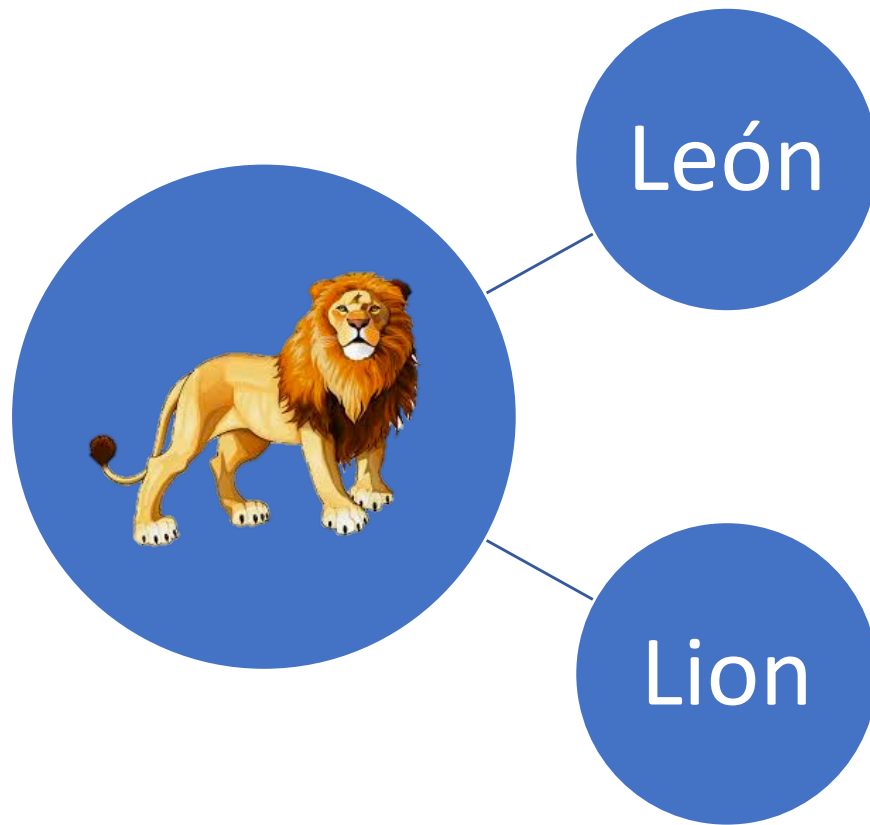


Home language attrition is more likely in children with communication disorders

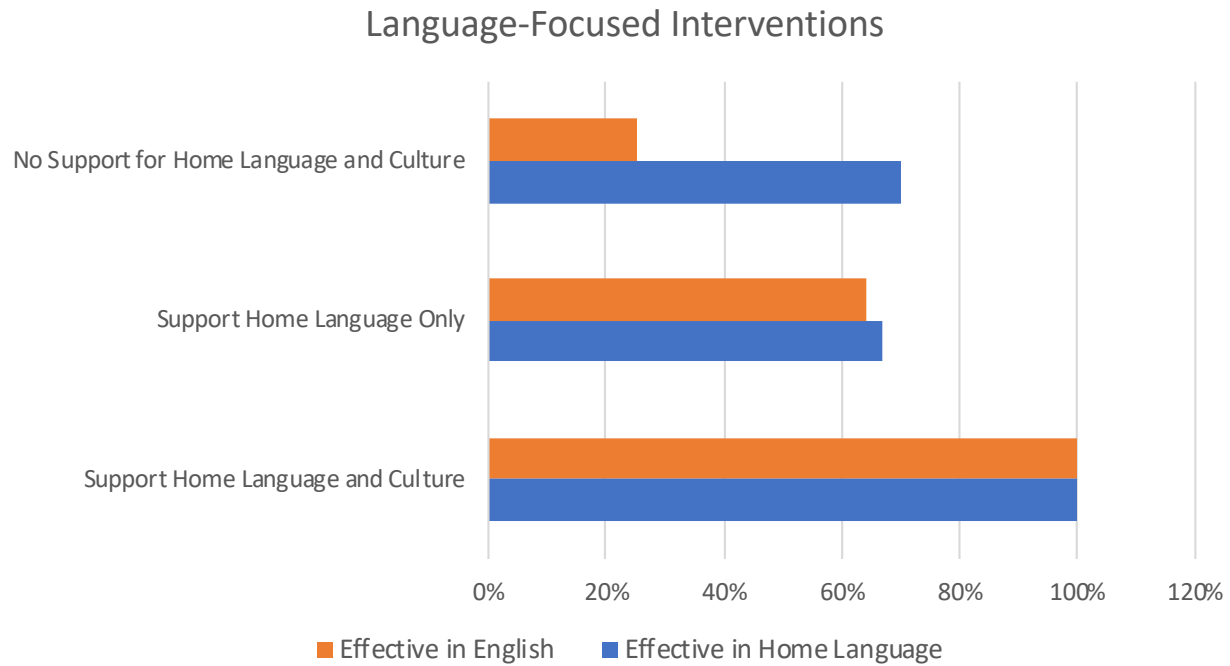


Ebert, Pham & Kohnert, 2014

Multilingualism provides additional support for children with communication challenges



Bilingual Language Interventions



Larson, Ccyk, Carta, Hammer, Baralt, Uchikoshi, An, & Wood, 2020, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*

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Where do these myths come from and what are their consequences?

These myths are partly rooted in social constructs surrounding immigration and education in the US



“There can be no doubt that the child reared in a bilingual environment is **handicapped** in his language growth. One can debate the issue as to whether speech facility in two languages is worth the consequent retardation in the common language of the realm.” (p. 367) George Thompson (1952)



“...a youngster whose wider experiences in two cultures have given him **advantages** which a monolingual does not enjoy. Intellectually his experience with two language systems seems to have left him with a **mental flexibility**, a **superiority** in concept formation, a more **diversified** set of mental abilities... In contrast, the monolingual appears to have a more unitary structure of intelligence which he must use for all types of intellectual tasks” (p. 20) Elizabeth Peal and Wallace Lambert (1962)



Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Table 1. Preschool teachers' self-reported beliefs about language and culture.

	All Teachers (n = 53)		Spanish-Speaking Teachers (n = 23)		Non-Spanish-Speaking Teachers (n = 26)	
	<i>Strongly Disagree or Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree or Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree or Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree or Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree or Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree or Agree</i>
The same school program works for both bilingual and monolingual children [REV].	41.5%	58.5%	45.5%	54.5%	42.3%	57.7%
English should be the only language spoken in school [REV].	90.6%	9.4%	100.0%	0.0%	88.5%	11.5%
All parents should speak English at home [REV].	79.2%	20.8%	90.9%	9.1%	76.9%	23.1%
Information about home languages should be shared with all children in school.	15.4%	84.6%	18.2%	81.8%	28.0%	72.0%
Teachers do not need to try to communicate with parents who speak a different language [REV].	88.7%	11.3%	81.8%	18.2%	96.2%	3.8%
Parents should speak their home language with their children.	1.9%	98.1%	4.5%	95.5%	0.0%	100%
Materials from other languages and cultures should be shared with all children in school.	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Bilingual children require more special education services [REV].	88.2%	11.8%	86.4%	13.6%	87.5%	12.5%

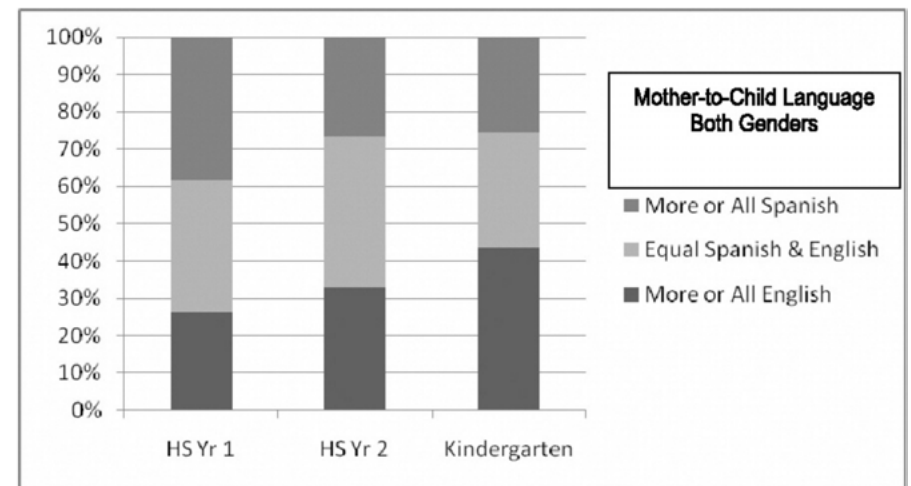
Note. Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*. Four response categories were collapsed into two for table presentation. [REV] = item reversed before calculating mean. N for teachers varies because of missing self-reported data. Wording of items adapted from Tabors (2008).



Families' Beliefs & Practices

En el pediatra me decían que le hablara no más un idioma. Que escogiera el español como era para nosotros que porque. . . se podrían confundir ellos con los dos. Por eso también yo nada más le hablé uno. . . también como tengo un sobrino que. . . a los 5 o 6 años todavía no hablaba muy bien... y que decían que era porque se había confundido porque le hablaban de los dos.

Cycyk & Hammer, 2019, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*



Hammer, Davison, Lawrence & Miccio, 2009, *Scientific Studies of Reading*



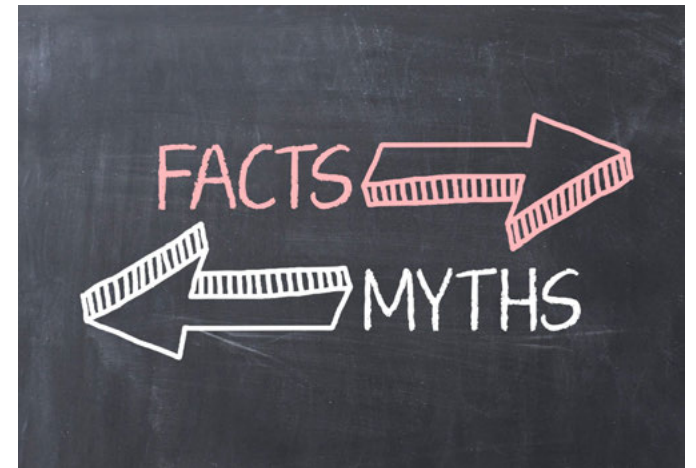
At best, these myths hinder linguistic diversity

- At worst, they hinder and limit children's long term success
- Even dual language programs show a preference for English
- By pushing for "English only" or "monolingual only" we hinder linguistic diversity



Combating these myths

- Know the facts and share them
- Celebrate all language in children's homes
- Question deficit models
- Be aware of your own biases
- When in doubt, ask an expert





Thank you!



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