

# Instructional Practices That Support ELL Children in Los Angeles Universal Preschool Classrooms

*Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), funded by First 5 LA, seeks to make voluntary, high-quality preschool available to every 4-year-old in Los Angeles County. A 2007–2008 study of LAUP programs conducted by Mathematica Policy Research—the Universal Preschool Child Outcomes Study (UPCOS)—showed that nearly half of the children served by LAUP spoke a language other than English at home.<sup>1</sup> The UPCOS also showed that, while these English-language learners (ELLs) made progress during their time in LAUP, they still lagged behind their peers in some outcomes by the end of the year. In this brief, we describe instructional practices that support ELLs and present findings on how those practices are applied in LAUP center-based classrooms and family child care (FCC) programs.*

## Identifying Practices That Support ELL Children

We used three strategies to identify practices that support ELLs in LAUP programs. First, we reviewed the research literature to identify practices with evidence of improving outcomes for young ELL children, not only in their language and literacy skills which was a major focus, but in all areas of school readiness. Second, we developed a questionnaire for LAUP teachers and providers about the practices they use with ELL children. We sent the questionnaire to the approximately 1,000 teachers and assistant teachers in LAUP center-based and FCC programs and 35 percent of the teachers responded. The average sample teacher had nine years of experience teaching preschool and 10 years of experience teaching ELL children. On average, teachers reported that half of the children in their classrooms were ELLs, but individual reports varied widely (from 0 to 100 percent of children).<sup>2</sup>



Finally, we observed a sample of 124 LAUP classrooms (72 center based and 52 family child care) using a variety of observation tools (see Table 1). Together these tools provided evidence of instructional quality while capturing the prevalence of practices and contextual features that support child development, particularly in language, literacy and other areas important for ELLs. We observed classrooms for the full length of a single half-day LAUP session. On average, 45 percent of children in these classrooms were ELLs, with percentages ranging from 0 to 100.<sup>3</sup>

## Five Effective Practices in LAUP

The review identified nine practices, five with enough evidence to be considered effective. In addition, the review found that practices that support development for all children also provide support for development of ELL children. The findings showed that LAUP programs are using many of the effective practices identified and, in general, provide quality environments supportive of all children, including ELLs. In the remainder of this brief, we highlight findings related to the five effective practices implemented in LAUP, as reported in the teacher questionnaire and observed in classrooms.<sup>7</sup>

### Effective Practice 1: Providing instruction in the home language (as well as in English) supports the development of skills in both languages.

- More than 60 percent of teachers reported talking with ELLs at least once a day, in their home language, about things that happen outside of preschool. More than 60 percent also reported talking with ELLs in their home language at least once a day about things as they happen in the classroom.
- 37 percent of teachers reported that they use songs in ELLs' home language daily or more frequently.
- 35 percent of classrooms had labels or posters with words in Spanish or in languages other than English in learning areas, on shelves, or elsewhere in the classroom.
- 27 percent of classrooms had recorded books or stories available for children in Spanish or in languages other than English.
- Approximately half of all classrooms had books in Spanish or in languages other than English, although the vast majority had fewer than six such books.
- Observations revealed that teachers used a home language more often in classrooms where more than 50 percent of children are ELLs.

### Effective Practice 2: Teaching children phonics skills such as letter sounds and sound blending promotes literacy acquisition.

- More than 40 percent of teachers reported that they teach individual letter sounds more than five times a day.
- More than 50 percent of teachers taught sound blending more than once a day and counted syllables and taught English rhyming words at least once a day.
- Work on sounds and blending was “strongly” or “extremely” evident in more than 50 percent of classrooms.

Table 1.  
UPCOS Classroom-Observation Measures

Measure	Domains Assessed
Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) <sup>4</sup>	Emotional Support, Classroom Organization and Instructional Support
Measures of Early Language and Literacy Environment (ELLE) <sup>5</sup>	Section 1: Availability of literacy resources (including toys and puzzles, technology, books and writing materials) Section 2: Book-reading activities
Language Interaction Snapshot (LISn) and End-of-Visit Ratings (EVR) <sup>6</sup>	LISn: Language interactions between children and (1) other children, (2) teachers and (3) other adults in the classroom EVR: Use of specific practices and behaviors that support language development, including social and emotional supports for learning

**Effective Practice 3: Book reading in English and ELLs' home languages supports children's interest in reading, print concepts and knowledge and vocabulary.**

- 91 percent of teachers reported that they read books in English every day.
- 23 percent of teachers reported that they read books in ELLs' home language several times a day or more (and another 33 percent reported doing so one to four times a week).
- During the observations, 70 percent of classrooms had at least one large-group book-reading session, 32 percent had at least one small-group book-reading session and 31 percent had more than one book-reading session.
- The most frequent literacy activities were reading with a friend, reading alone and reading in English with the entire class.
- Meaningful talk about the content of books was “strongly” or “extremely” evident in 43 percent of classrooms.
- Teaching children vocabulary words before book reading was “strongly” or “extremely” evident in 23 percent of classrooms.

**Effective Practice 4: Providing structured and well-planned opportunities for ELLs to practice their language skills with peers who have more developed English abilities supports English-language development and social inclusion.**

- On average, teachers reported using peer strategies one to four times each day, such as pairing talkers and nontalkers, pairing children who are more fluent in English with children who primarily speak another language and encouraging English-speaking children to talk with ELLs.
- Peer-to-peer interaction (including nonverbal interaction) about activities was “strongly” or “extremely” evident in 60 percent of classrooms.

**Effective Practice 5: Using evidence-based curricula, including practices such as small-group activities and direct instruction in phonological awareness, phonics and/or vocabulary skills, may be the best way to support children's learning.**

- 70 percent of teachers reported teaching math vocabulary at least once a day.
- 62 percent of teachers reported teaching concepts in science and social studies in English at least three times each week.
- 56 percent of teachers reported directly teaching more than 10 words each week in English (that is, more than 2 words a day in English) and 22 percent of teachers reported directly teaching ELLs more than 10 words each week in their home language.
- During the observations, 63 percent of children were observed in at least one small group.
- Teaching basic concept words to children (such as top, bottom, under and between) was “strongly” or “extremely” evident in 36 percent of classrooms.
- Teaching challenging or sophisticated words, which is associated with long-term positive outcomes for children, was “strongly” or “extremely” evident in 25 percent of classrooms.





Practice supportive of all children is also supportive of ELL children.

Besides the five effective practices listed above, the literature also indicated that practices that support the development of all children also support ELLs. Our observations revealed strong general language stimulation in LAUP classrooms. Figure 1 shows the percentages of classrooms in which different language and instructional practices were strongly or extremely evident. For example, in 80 percent or more of classrooms, teachers listened attentively and modeled the correct use of English, and in 72 percent they provided clear instructions.

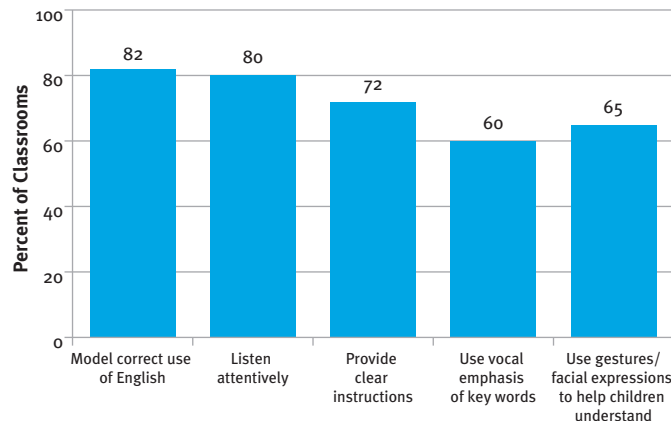
## Looking Ahead

The UPCOS study highlights many practices in LAUP classrooms that support the development of ELL children, but there is room for growth. LAUP is now building on its strengths to promote greater use of the five effective practices. Among the initiatives currently underway or planned for the coming year are a teacher institute focused on vocabulary development, ELL-related trainings and communities of learners, a lending library of ELL-related professional development resources and children's books (bilingual and multicultural) and an e-library of resources for LAUP coaches and providers on working with and meeting the needs of ELLs. These resources will enhance LAUP's efforts to help providers, which in turn will strengthen supports for ELL children.

## References

1. Love, John M., Sally Atkins-Burnett, Cheri Vogel, Nikki Aikens, Yange Xue, Maricar Mabutas, Barbara Lepidus Carlson, Emily Sama Martin, Nora Paxton, Margaret Caspe, Susan Sprachman and Kathy Sonnenfeld. "Los Angeles Universal Preschool Programs, Children Served and Children's Progress in the Preschool Year: Final Report of the First 5 LA Universal Preschool Child Outcomes Study." Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 2009.
2. Please note that the responding sample is not representative of all LAUP teachers or providers.
3. Classrooms were selected randomly and results were weighted to be representative of all LAUP classrooms.
4. Pianta, Robert C., Karen M. La Paro and Bridget K. Hamre. "CLASS: Classroom Assessment Scoring System Manual." Charlottesville, VA: Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, 2008.
5. The ELLE instrument is adapted (with permission) from the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (ELLCO)—Research Edition (Smith, Miriam W. and David K. Dickinson with Angela Sangeorge and Louisa Anastasopoulos. Early Language & Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) Toolkit, Research Edition Newton, MA: Education Development Center, 2002.), the *Child/Home Early Language and Literacy Observation Tool (CHELLO)* (Neuman, Susan B., Julie Dwyer and Serene Koh. *Child/Home Early Language & Literacy Observation Tool (CHELLO)*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2007.) and the ELLCO Addendum (Castro, Dina. "The ELLCO Addendum." Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2005.).
6. Atkins-Burnett, Sally, Susan Sprachman and Margaret Caspe. "Language Interaction Snapshot with End-of-Visit Ratings (LISn + EVR)." Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research, 2010.
7. Please note that this brief only provides highlights from UPCOS on LAUP classrooms and instructional practices; extensive findings are available in the full study report.

**Fig 1. General Language Stimulation in LAUP: Strongly or Extremely Evident**



## MATHEMATICA Policy Research

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