There are many myths about English-language development that are not supported by research. Together we will explore some common myths and important research about “hot topics” related to dual language development.

**Directions:** Look at each category in the table; listed within each category are two true statements and one myth about the topic. With a partner, read each of the three statements and determine which statement is a myth/false.

***MYTHS ARE ITALICIZED IN BOLD***

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| **Topics:** | **Lists of true statements and myths:** |
| **Code-Switching** | 1. ***Code-switching is a result of confused or inadequate language development.*** 2. Code-switching is a natural, normal part of multi-lingual development. 3. Careful use of code-switching can be a way to make sure that all of your students understand what is being said.   Explanation: Code-switching is the use of two or more languages within one stream of talk, or the ability to alternate between language systems within a conversation. It is a normal part of language development for many bilingual children. Code-switching is not merely a strategy used early in the second language development process, but rather it serves multiple purposes for bilingual individuals. As young as age three, when code switching, children utilize the appropriate grammar structures and phonological rules for each of the languages used. Additionally, children can change languages based on the person to whom they are talking to meet their own social goals. (PEL Guide 2009, 58-59)  Often families have concerns about children’s code-switching, as they believe the usage is due to confusion. We need to help families understanding that code switching is used deliberately and sometimes to communicate necessary vocabulary when the child does not have the vocabulary in the second language. We value code-switching as we do other language play. In helping children learn their second language, we may use code switching to make sure that the children understand what is being said, but side-by-side translation should be avoided. (PEL Guide 2009, 58-59) |
| **Maintenance of Home Language** | 1. Many bilingual children lose much of their first language as they go through school and their exposure to English increases. 2. ***It is not necessary for parents to provide sufficient opportunities for children to speak their home language so that it can be maintained.*** 3. If older children and adolescents cannot communicate well with their parents or grandparents, the cost to the family can be great.   Explanation: Exposure to and opportunity to practice the first and second language are often unequal. A child may spend more time in the school setting (where English is spoken), than he does in the home where he is exposed to the home language. Even when families continue to use the home language, the home language may not develop at the same rate and degree as the second language. In order to maintain the home language, there needs to be sufficient exposure, opportunity to practice and motivation to learn. Thus, for families to maintain their home languages, it is recommended that they continue to speak, read and write the home language with their children. In cases where family members (e.g., parents, grandparents) do not speak the second language, losing the home language may have devastating results on family communication. (PEL Guide 2009, 60-61)  When the child’s home language and cultural practices do not represent the mainstream or are considered less valued than the mainstream, the home language is more fragile. Thus, young dual language learners may be at greater risk of “cultural and linguistic identity displacement.” If a child loses the home language, the parent may be unable to “transmit familial values, beliefs and understandings” which underlie a child’s socialization and identity. (PEL Guide 2009, 103-104) |
| **Language Structure** | 1. Linguists agree that languages are composed of five components: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. 2. ***The phonology of all languages is the same.*** 3. Understanding the basic structure of the children’s home language(s) can be helpful in understanding the errors children make in English.   Explanation: Linguists agree that oral and sign language systems are comprised of five components: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (For further discussion of each component, see pages 22-23 of the PEL Guide.). As young children are learning language they are experimenting with language based on patterns or rules of language that they believe to be true. When learning a second language, children base their hypothesis on what they already know about their first language. For example, in Spanish, one would say “la casa roja.” The adjective follows the noun; however, in English the adjective precedes the noun. Thus, a common error for a Spanish speaking child who is learning English might be a misplacement of the adjective-- a syntax error. If we are familiar with the basic structures of the child’s home language, we will be better able to analyze the children’s errors and provide support in helping them learn the way the components work in English. |
| **Acquiring Language** | 1. ***The best way to learn English as a young child is to be fully immersed in English.*** 2. The home language provides a solid foundation for acquiring a second language. 3. When examining a dual language learner’s vocabulary in both languages, his vocabulary exceeds that of a monolingual English speaker.   Explanation: “Children’s identity and sense of self are inextricably linked to the language they speak and the culture in which they have been socialized....children are first introduced to language and literacy in the home language, and those experiences provide an important foundation for success in learning literacy in English (Durgunoglu & Oney, 2000; Jimenez, Garcia & Pearson, 1995; Lanaue & Snow, 2989; Lopez & Greenfield, 2004” (PLF 2008, 103). When children have the receptive and expressive skills in their home language, they will transfer that knowledge to learning a second language, making learning the second language a more efficient process. (PLF 2008, 104) |
| **Stages of Second Language Acquisition** | 1. Young children who are exposed to the second language after age three move through four stages of second language acquisition: home language, observational/listening, telegraphic/formulaic, and fluid language use. 2. A child may appear to be in one or more of the four stages at any given time depending on a number of factors. 3. ***The only influence on a child’s progression through the stages of second language is his/her school experiences.***   Explanation: When exposed to a second language at age three or after, the child is already familiar with his home language and structure and the usage of language to communicate. The progression of second language is different than it is for those who are exposed to two languages from birth (simultaneous bilinguals). Sequential or successive bilinguals progress through four stages of second language development: home language, observational/listening, telegraphic/formulaic, and fluid language use. The length of time in each stage and the level of expectations for second language learning are contingent on individual children’s characteristics as well as that of the child’s language environment. While the child’s age may determine the child’s developmental level, his temperament may affect his motivation to learn a new language. Additionally, the amount of exposure and opportunity to practice the language impact the rate at which children move through the stages. (PLF 2008, 105)  It is important to recognize that the context in which communication occurs and communication partners may also influence the stage at which a child appears to be. For example, in a whole group situation, a child may not feel comfortable trying out his new language and may appear to be in the observational/language phase. However, when with his peers in dramatic play, he she may use telegraphic/formulaic speech to participate in the activity. (PEL Guide 2009, 46) |
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**CHALLENGE:** With your partner, develop your own “two truths and a myth” about dual language learners; write about it in the blank row above.