Background

The Fresno Language Project (FLP) is a learning collaborative dedicated to strengthening practices of educators in language development for all children and home language support for Dual Language Learners (DLLs) ages birth to five.

The cross-sector collaboration aims to develop, test, and implement professional development approaches with practitioners, coaches, and administrators and builds on a decade of local community partnerships. The project involves the following organizations:

The Fresno Unified School District, Fresno Economic Opportunity Commission, Children's Services Network, The Lighthouse for Children, The Early Learning Lab

The Fresno Language Project is part of 'Starting Smart and Strong'—a 10-year, place-based initiative funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to develop an early learning network in three California communities and scale what works.

The Early Learning Lab, in partnership with The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, acts as an external catalyst and supports innovation and learning by working collaboratively with program leaders, teachers, intervention developers, experts, families, and others in implementation teams to put new and improved interventions into the pre-K pipeline.

Fresno Unified School District | Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission | CSN Children's Services Network | The Lighthouse for Children | THE Early Learning Lab

Context

- 30% of Fresno Unified's 18,000 Dual Language Learners are designated 'Long Term English Language Learners,' meaning they have not been re-designated as English Proficient after 6+ years
- Cross-sector collaboration involves multiple sectors, multiple ages (0–3yrs, 3–5yrs), and K–3

Program Goals

1. Support the educational success and language acquisition of all children with a focus on dual language learners
2. Scaffold the principles of Improvement Science as an approach to identifying problems and installing evidence-based solutions
3. Develop and spread tools for the project and the field

The Challenge

How do we support home language development for all children and promote English language development (ELD) with multiple languages of children/families, monolingual teachers, within different educational contexts?

Because there is no "off-the-shelf" evidence-based solution that addresses this question for children birth to five, The Fresno Language Project uses implementation science to identify evidence-informed solutions and co-design adaptation and installation activities. See Fig. 1.

The Intervention

Personalized Oral Language Learning (POLL) strategies

The POLL strategies adapted for use by the FLP were developed for both monolingual and bilingual teachers to systematically integrate into their classrooms and teaching to build on students' vocabulary, productive language, and comprehension skills. Targeted language activities build on what children know conceptually and linguistically, facilitating their language transfer into English.

Espinosa, L. (2015). Getting It Right for Children from Diverse Backgrounds: Applying Research to Improve Practice with an Emphasis on Dual Language Learners. Upper Saddle River: New: New Jersey, Pearson.

Research shows that even high-quality reading instruction is not enough for Dual Language Learners and additional focused enhancements should be embedded in teachers' daily instructional practice in order for the students to succeed academically.

Fig. 1 Fresno Language Project Driver Diagram

SMART aim: By June 2017, all program participants implement POLL strategies in their learning settings, measured by program coach and agency leadership observations

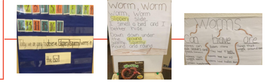
Global aim: Grade level academic achievement and English language proficiency for all children by fourth grade with continued development in home language

Drivers	Activities
Teacher Practice: Teachers are supported to be deliberative in their language interactions and to use strategies that extend and deepen children's comprehension of content so children are engaged and learning.	Training on POLL strategies (5 sessions) • Environmental supports • Intentional use of songs and chants • Meaningful, complex and authentic conversations (incl. book reading strategies) Follow-up coaching (per classroom) • Observation/coaching in classroom 1x/month • Coaching feedback 2x/month (face-to-face; peer or remote
Language model: A coherent language model is adopted and implemented consistently.	Training on language models to develop an intentional classroom by classroom approach to language use Classrooms receive technical support for intentional language use based on the staff language ability and daily routine
Family engagement: Classrooms will reflect family cultures and values and teachers will partner with families to extend language learning practices in the home.	Use family interviews to deepen family engagement Strengthen representation of families and their home languages and cultures in classrooms

Implementation Activities

Rich language interactions: Use of intentional messages, anchor text, songs and chants

"We were studying worms and the children enjoyed the chant about worms and they created the motions to go with it. The children make up their own chants as well. It's really fun!" –Teacher



The child gets the book and takes it to Mommy for her read.

"It's a pine cone, just like in the book!"

"This is the seed to the pine cone. It's pointy. Before the pine cone gets this big, it's a seed first."

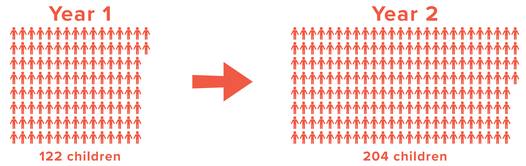
The Impact

Year 1 classrooms (fall 2015–16):

- Four (4) Fresno Unified School District, Early Learning
- Two (2) Head Start
- Two (2) Early Head Start
- Three (3) family child care homes

Year 2 classrooms (fall 2016–17):

- Seven (7) Fresno Unified School District, Early Learning
- Six (6) Fresno County Superintendent of Schools
- Three (3) Head Start
- Three (3) Early Head Start
- Three (3) family child care homes



"[Teachers] looked at their environment, the books that they had, [and considered] what they might want to change. The sessions gave them the language for their planning, and you know that they valued quality because they valued the information they were getting from parents also. All of those things connected together ups the quality of what's going on in their rooms. […] Quality is there because they've managed to put together all these different components in a way that makes them more successful." –Program Manager

Measures

Year 1: Qualitative

- Semi-structured interviews: site administrators, community stakeholders, school district administrators, site coaches, and program design partners
- Educator Focus Groups

Year 2: Qualitative

- Semi-structured interviews: site administrators, community stakeholders, school district administrators, site coaches, and program design partners
- Educator Focus Groups

Year 1: Quantitative

- Family Language and Interests Interview
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) 2015 child development assessment

Year 2: Quantitative

- Family Language and Interests Interview
- DRDP 2015 child development assessment
- Professional development dosage, content and intensity (training and coaching)
- Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) rating (includes CLASS)
- Language Mapping Tool (rollout 1/2017)

Lessons Learned

Language Focus

Change is doable in concrete, articulated steps. For example:

- Y1: Built awareness of current language environment, POLL strategies and supports
- Y2: Digging into the application of POLL strategies and intentional use of the language model

Co-Design and Partnership Process

- Build from the bottom up and top down
- Take time to build buy-in for innovation with partners and educators (collaboration is easy to talk about, hard to achieve)
- Phase in implementation
- Shared professional development: co-designed, concrete and coherent

Challenges

- Create user-friendly data collection system that supports real-time use of data; agree on data sharing protocol between partners
- Adapt and tailor established implementation science methodologies from the health field for birth-to-five context