What is DLL and where is it implemented?

Descubriendo la Lectura (DLL) is an excellent early literacy supplemental intervention for bilingual students in first grade. DLL and Reading Recovery® are early literacy interventions proven effective in meeting the needs of first-grade students experiencing difficulty learning to read and write in the United States (Bates et al., 2020). Both interventions provide excellent, supplemental support for students in bilingual education programs because the intervention can be matched to the language of literacy instruction in the classroom. Thus, if early literacy instruction is in English, eligible students receive Reading Recovery, and if the language of instruction is Spanish, they receive DLL.

In schools that offer dual language programs, which support the full linguistic repertoire of students, and have both interventions available, the literacy team can select the intervention that best matches the language of literacy instruction and the strengths of the student (Torres Elías, 2017).

What makes DLL unique?

DLL is the reconstruction of Reading Recovery in Spanish. As such, it is built on the theoretical underpinnings of Reading Recovery, and it is rooted in Clay’s (2015) work. However, literacy acquisition is not the same in these two languages. Therefore, the reconstruction accounts for language-specific differences as well as sociocultural differences in language use.

How is it designed?

DLL is an investment in the professional expertise of teachers, not a program that can be purchased. DLL professionals at all levels develop and refine their practices as they acquire complex theoretical understandings of the ways children learn to read and write in Spanish. Important topics focus on elements that contribute to accelerative learning, including building on children’s strengths, systematic observation, and learning how to adjust instruction to meet the idiosyncratic needs of each child. Ongoing professional learning enhances this knowledge and supports theory as it applies to practice.

How is it implemented?

In order to successfully implement DLL, it is critical to have an established bilingual education program with early literacy instruction in Spanish and a clear vision of student biliteracy goals that includes continued Spanish literacy development. A DLL teacher leader manages the implementation and is responsible for the initial training of teachers, annual data collection and analysis, and the ongoing professional development of trained teachers. These teacher leaders are also able to lead professional learning communities and provide support to biliteracy teachers (Klein et al., 2017).

At the district level, the site coordinator manages organizational policies, budgeting, and personnel to ensure a high-quality implementation. University trainers, in collaboration with a DLL university trainer, support teacher leaders and administrators and are responsible for program evaluation and research.

DLL instruction is individually designed and delivered in Spanish by a highly trained teacher to first-grade students who are in dual language programs and are performing in the bottom 20–25% of their class. Lessons are daily, 30-minute sessions. The intensive, individualized support complements students’ regular classroom instruction with the goal of raising their literacy skills to the level of their peers. Therefore, while students are guaranteed an intervention of 20 weeks, a student exits the intervention as soon as they exhibit the proficiency and independence that will ensure continuing growth in the classroom teacher’s Spanish literacy program.

How are teachers selected and trained?

Teacher selection, initial training, and bridging are important considerations to ensure a successful implementation. Selecting strong, experienced, certified bilingual teachers is one of the most important aspects of the
process because teachers are primarily responsible for implementation at the school level.

Teachers enroll in year-long, graduate-level courses taught by a DLL teacher leader. The research-based coursework includes theory, assessment and analysis of children’s reading and writing behaviors, and the design of lessons tailored to the specific needs of each individual. Teachers’ learning is applied daily in lessons for children identified for early intervention in their schools.

There are two alternative paths for teacher training. One is training in DLL if a class is available, and the other entails initial training in Reading Recovery followed by a year of bridging. The bridging year includes study of the assessment and instruction of bilingual students who are learning to read and write in Spanish. For a trained Reading Recovery teacher, a year of training is required to bridge their knowledge of working with Reading Recovery to the new context of DLL.

What does the research say?
A recent multisite, student-level randomized controlled study completed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) revealed that DLL students achieved higher Spanish literacy, reading fluency, and alphabetic knowledge than students who did not receive the intervention. DLL produced impressive impacts of a magnitude rarely seen for school-based programs and particularly remarkable for a brief intervention spanning 12–20 weeks (Borman et al., 2019; Borman et al., 2020). A second study by AIR examined the cost-effectiveness. Results indicated that in terms of cost effectiveness DLL was more than adequate when compared to the few similar interventions, and it was unmatched when considering the proven, positive results. In fact, the study revealed that similar interventions have a higher cost-effectiveness ratio (Brodziak de los Reyes et al., 2021).

Upon their review of the AIR randomized controlled study, the USDE Institute of Education Sciences What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) reported that DLL meets rigorous standards without reservation. In addition, their assessment indicates that the study showed favorable and statistically significant findings, thus demonstrating promising evidence (WWC, 2021).

DLL is an excellent, effective early literacy intervention for children learning to read and write in Spanish. Seminal research (Escamilla et al., 1998), decades of successful implementation, as well as current, rigorous research show DLL is a viable option for Spanish learners that merits careful consideration.

References

About the Author
Annette Torres Elías is a professor in the Literacy & Learning Department at Texas Woman’s University and a member of the North American Trainers Group.