



MULTILINGUAL
Learning Toolkit

OVERVIEW



A Foundational Text for Educators of Multilingual
Learners Pre K–3rd Grade

How to Use the Toolkit

The P–3 Multilingual Learning Toolkit Overview provides an introduction to supporting young Multilingual Learners (MLs), who include both Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and English Learners (ELs). It is intended for educators of children from preschool–3rd grade, particularly those who may have limited opportunities to participate in training on how to support ML children. The Toolkit describes the foundational principles and evidence-based strategies for instruction that are critical for teachers to know.¹ Teachers can use it to learn about evidence-based strategies. School or district administrators will find the Toolkit useful in understanding how to support their teachers and inform decisions about the training and resources to provide. Please visit www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org to access the full, interactive version of the Multilingual Learning Toolkit with the latest resources geared specifically for a practitioner audience.

These practices within the Toolkit are distilled from a large body of research over the last few decades on how to support the language and academic development of Multilingual Learners.² It synthesizes, summarizes, and builds upon a wide range of existing resources.

This resource directly complements recent efforts by the California Department of Education (CDE) to invest in promoting professional development (PD) for educators of MLs and builds on the contributions of the [PD developers](#) that were awarded CDE grants to provide ML-focused PD.

Further, the Toolkit aligns with the vision of [California's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care](#), which emphasizes the importance of providing DLLs in early learning and care programs with culturally relevant experiences and high-quality language exposure in both English and their home language. In support of this vision and with a deep commitment to MLs, this resource aims to support educators in promoting optimal success for MLs.

The Toolkit introduces key ideas and practices that can and should be explored in greater depth by accessing the resources linked throughout the [website](#). Using a few of the strategies below in isolation does not ensure full access to learning and effective participation for MLs. Ideally these strategies will be embedded in a comprehensive evidence-based language approach to

ensure equitable learning for all children. (See the chart on page 17 for some examples of effective PD programs with a comprehensive set of best practice strategies in the context of a coherent model.) In addition, these strategies should be continuously practiced, reflected on, and strengthened in the context of professional learning. Lastly, we acknowledge that many educators may not have fluency in the languages of some of the children and families they serve, but even so, there are many strategies they can use to effectively support learning.



KEY TERMS

Dual Language Learner (DLL)

Children, birth to age 5, who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. They may be learning two (or more) languages at the same time (*simultaneous DLL*), or start learning a second language while continuing to develop their first language (*sequential DLL*). (Based on the definition from the [U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services and Dept. of Education Joint Policy Statement](#).)

English Learner (EL)

Students in the K–12 education system who have a home language other than English, and with levels of English proficiency that indicate the need for programs and services that will support them in becoming English proficient. (Based on the definition from [Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Chapter 1](#).)

Multilingual Learner (ML)

An umbrella term that encompasses DLLs and ELs, as described above. (Based on the definition from [Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Chapter 1](#).)

Foundational Principles of Dual Language Learning and Development

This section lays out four key principles that are critical to know when working with Multilingual Learners and their families. We encourage educators to bring these perspectives to all the work they do in serving these children and their families.

All young children can acquire more than one language at once and achieve high proficiency in both languages.

Bilingualism is a strength and is associated with many academic and social benefits.

Strong partnerships with families using two-way communication are especially powerful for supporting ML children.

ML children benefit from high-quality instruction in both languages that is aligned with their language skills and background.

- 1 Young children can acquire more than one language at once and achieve high proficiency in both languages.** Young children, starting in infancy, have the capacity to learn more than one language simultaneously.³ Home language development plays an important role in English language development, and developing a language other than English does not impede English acquisition. Rather, a strong base in the home language can actually help facilitate English acquisition.⁴ The earlier that children are regularly exposed to two languages, the more likely they will be to develop bilingualism.⁵
- 2 Bilingualism is a strength.** Bilingualism has linguistic, academic, cognitive, and sociocultural benefits.⁶ These benefits are most likely to occur when a child achieves high levels of competence in both the home language and English.⁷ Such benefits make it clear that bilingualism should be actively fostered and celebrated. For more information on how bilingualism benefits individuals, check out this [infographic](#).
- 3 Strong partnerships and two-way communication with families are especially powerful for supporting ML children.** Engaging in such communication in which teachers and families learn from each other can help build strong home-school partnerships.⁸ Families have assets and skills to bring to the classroom setting and important knowledge about the child and culture to share with teachers, and teachers can share important information about the child's learning with families.⁹
- 4 Multilingual Learners benefit from high-quality instruction in both languages that is aligned with their language skills and background.** ML children enter the classroom with language backgrounds that may or may not be shared with their classmates and teachers. It is the role of the teacher to learn about and understand best practices that they can use to promote these children's learning. To gain this understanding, educators need to build their knowledge of dual language acquisition and instructional strategies that integrate content and language learning in both languages. In doing so, teachers cultivate an *asset-based approach* to instructing ML children (read more in [Asset-Based Pedagogy: Chapter 2](#) in the CDE Research to Practice resource on Multilingual Learners). This approach also includes an intentional focus on cultural responsiveness and anti-bias training. Educators develop such understanding through professional development opportunities. These are most effective as part of continuous, content-focused, and job-embedded experiences.¹⁰

Context and Conditions

The context and conditions in which you engage and support ML children and their families are critical to consider; they influence the implementation of the best practice strategies outlined in this Toolkit. Your unique context may differ depending on the age and language background of the children and families you serve, as well as the local program, school, and district policies and approaches. Being mindful of these differences is important as you plan and implement instruction.



How linguistically diverse is the classroom?

While Spanish is the dominant language of ML children across California and the nation, ML children come from diverse linguistic, social, and cultural backgrounds.¹¹ Many classrooms are “superdiverse” and made up of children with a wide range of language backgrounds.¹² While educators may not speak the language or be familiar with the culture of all their children, they can still acknowledge and celebrate the diverse language and cultural assets of all children.¹³ There is further diversity among ML children with disabilities, who often need additional targeted supports (see here for the CDE published [California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities](#)). Instruction should always be tailored to the age and developmental level of the individual children in the classroom.

What is the institutional context?

Children ages 3–8 learn and develop in very different

institutional contexts. The early childhood system and the K–12 system have differing pedagogical roots, governance and institutional systems, policies, approaches to teacher preparation, curriculum/instructional foundations, and standards. Teachers of young MLs need to understand the continuum of language and cognitive development, as well as how to instruct MLs within the local program and school system in which they teach. Preschool teachers are generally more able to focus on play-based and informal interactions as opportunities for supporting language development, and they have more flexibility in shaping curriculum and instruction. They can draw on resources like the [California Preschool Learning Foundations](#) for guidance about curriculum content and developmentally responsive instruction. Teachers in grades K–3 are responsible for teaching grade-level curriculum and addressing standards—and ensuring that all children have an equal opportunity to participate and master those standards. Instruction for MLs takes place through both Designated and Integrated English language development (ELD) time in which teachers are guided by standards for academic content and ELD.

What language model is being used?

Critical to MLs’ successful learning and language development is having an intentional, systematic approach based on community context, program goals, and educator capacity. Specific instructional strategies should be intentionally chosen and used consistently within the context of the program’s language model (see Common Language Models table below). The way in which teachers use certain strategies will differ depending on the language model in use. For example, the use of the home language will look very different in a *dual-language immersion program* compared to a *structured English immersion program*. Even the language models themselves may look different in preschool versus K–3 settings, though the overarching goals may be similar. Below is a list of the most common language models for ML children.

COMMON LANGUAGE MODELS

Language Model	Description	Goals	Grade Level
Dual-Language Immersion (or Two-Way Immersion)	Language and academic instruction in both English and another targeted language (for ML children and English only speakers who wish to become bilingual)	Bilingualism, biliteracy, and academic achievement in both English and another language, and cross-cultural understanding	Preschool and K–8 th grade, but may also be offered through grade 12
Developmental Bilingual	Language and academic instruction specifically for English Learners, using both English and the children’s home language	Language proficiency and academic achievement in children’s first and second languages	Preschool and K–8 th grade
Transitional Bilingual*	Language and academic instruction in both English and ML children’s home language, with a gradual, systematic transition to English only	English language proficiency and academic achievement in English	Preschool and K–3 rd , but may also be offered at higher grade levels
English Language Development with Home Language Support	English is the primary language of instruction, but home language is used and supported (to varying degrees) to facilitate understanding of content, and as a bridge to English	English language proficiency and school readiness skills in English, and promotion of the home language	Preschool
Structured English Immersion	Instruction in English (may include home language use as a support, but not for bilingual instruction purposes)	English language proficiency and academic achievement in English	K–12 th grade

Note: This table was derived from the [CDE Research to Practice resource on Multilingual Learners](#) and the [CDE webpage on Multilingual Education](#). It should be noted that in K–3 settings, [state guidance](#) indicates that all language programs should include both Integrated and Designated ELD, as defined in the [CDE English Language Development Standards](#).

*Also known as Home Language as a Foundation for English Development, as described in the [CDE Preschool Program Guidelines](#).

For more details on program language approaches for instruction check out:

Preschool:

- [California Preschool Program Guidelines—Chapter 6](#) (pages 75–91)
- [Early Learning and Care for Multilingual and Dual Language Learners—Chapter 4](#) (pages 206–208) in the CDE Research to Practice resource on Multilingual Learners
- Head Start resources, including:
 - [Classroom Language Models—A Leader’s Implementation Manual](#)

- [Supports for Classroom Language Models for All Children: Step by Step Guide](#)

- [Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center resources on Planned Language Approach](#)

K–3rd grade:

- [Multilingual Programs and Pedagogy—Chapter 3](#) (pages 118–126) in the CDE Research to Practice resource on Multilingual Learners
- [CDE: Overview of Multilingual Programs](#)

How accessible to all children are the learning opportunities?

Regardless of the language model being implemented, classrooms need clear routines and processes that support integration of language and content learning.¹⁴ Instruction should be *intellectually rich, developmentally appropriate, and integrated across language, literacy, and content learning* (as described in the [English Learner](#)

[Roadmap, English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework, and the CDE Preschool Program Guidelines](#), Chapter 6). As these resources describe, *MLs succeed when learning opportunities are accessible to them* through multiple instructional modalities, when there are varied opportunities to demonstrate learning, and when they receive additional individualized supports.

WHAT IS THE “GOLD STANDARD” FOR SUPPORTING BILINGUALISM?

Dual language and bilingual education models use both the home language and English as the languages of instruction and have the explicit goal of developing bilingualism. Bilingual models vary in how much time is allocated to each language, but the use of the home language for instruction across these models shows a valuing of and commitment to home language development. Research suggests that dual language education has positive effects on children’s home language and English language skills, as well as other learning domains.¹⁵ It takes a great level of commitment for a program to adopt a dual language model, including administrator/program commitment, qualified bilingual staff, intensive training, materials, and resources. See this [list of questions every ML teacher and administrator should be able to answer about their program](#) from CDE’s Research to Practice resource on Multilingual Learners (page 119).



Instructional Strategies:

What teachers and administrators need to know to best serve Multilingual Learners

Below you will find answers to key questions along with strategies gleaned from the latest research on Multilingual Learner (ML) children. Each question area includes both research support for why it is important, and specific evidence-based strategies. To access resources to help implement these strategies, visit www.multilinguallearningtoolkit.org. Many of the research studies underlying these practices integrate several strategies over an extended period. This means that determining the impact of a single strategy implemented is not possible. Therefore, individual strategies across the different question areas are interconnected and we must implement them together, in a purposeful and connected manner. Always bear in mind, of course, your classroom or school's language model when implementing the strategies and adapt accordingly.

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1. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

How can I welcome and engage families of Multilingual Learners as active partners in their child's learning?

Families have a wealth of knowledge to share, particularly about their language, culture, home life, and of course, their child.¹⁶ Research shows that strong home-school connections are related to positive learning and developmental outcomes for children from diverse backgrounds.¹⁷ Families play a critical role in helping to maintain the home language and culture for their children. Such an environment promotes children's identity development, along with the other advantages of bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism.¹⁸ By partnering

and engaging in two-way communication, teachers and families can share information and learn with and from each other. Within the classroom, teachers should integrate families' language and culture in the learning.¹⁹ In turn, teachers help children make connections between their experiences in the home, school, and community to provide early learning experiences that best meet their needs.²⁰ Communication with families should be frequent, ongoing, and responsive to families' needs, even if you do not speak the home language.

Evidence-Based Strategies

- A. Gather information on each child's language/cultural background from parents upon enrollment.*
- B. Talk with families about their language and learning goals for their child. Ask families to share their thoughts on the child's bilingual development and how this may relate to their goals.
- C. Provide families with information on home language development and the benefits of bilingualism and encourage them to continue to speak their home language to their children.
- D. Partner with families to provide varied opportunities for them to come to the classroom to share their language and culture.
- E. Provide parents with children's learning activities to support home language development and connect the curriculum with learning at home.
- F. Partner with families in identifying topics or ideas that are of interest to the child and incorporate these in curriculum planning.

*Note: When collecting information from families, gather information that will be helpful for informing instruction. Avoid questions that may be sensitive, such as those concerning citizenship or immigration status, which should not have implications for a child's access to free public education (see [CDE description of immigration status of students](#)) and their right to feel safe and secure at school (as described in [Assembly Bill No. 699](#)).

2. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

How do I foster the social-emotional health and development of Multilingual Learners?



Social-emotional support is critical for all young learners, particularly for MLs. Children who speak a language other than English may need additional support from teachers to make sure they feel comfortable and included in the classroom and to ensure they have meaningful access to all learning opportunities. Engaging with children and families in a friendly and accepting way helps foster self-confidence and family pride and conveys a message of caring and respect for the family and child.²¹ Inviting families to contribute to their children’s education promotes social-emotional well-being. Additionally, using the home language and incorporating their culture in classroom activities is a positive message that gives social-emotional support for young ML children. In fact, research shows that teachers’ use of the home language is related to social-emotional competence among young MLs.²² ML children should be encouraged to speak in their language of choice and educators can provide space for their full range of expression, whether this is verbal or non-verbal, and opportunities for ML children to share their own language with the class.²³ Classrooms and schools should be responsive to the strengths, needs, and identities of MLs, and build upon their strengths to create a safe and affirming learning environment (see [EL Roadmap, Principle One](#)), including drawing from anti-bias training and trauma-informed practices. Teachers should make it a point to become familiar with available culturally and linguistically responsive resources in order to assist families with health, mental health, and basic needs (e.g., nutrition, housing, legal resources). Such efforts increase awareness of and respect for different languages and cultures and foster an inclusive and diverse classroom culture that celebrates the strengths and differences of all children and families.

Evidence-Based Strategies

- A.** Engage individually with ML children in a warm and inclusive way. Take time to build trust, respect, and strong relationships with children and their families.
- B.** Help ML children join fully in group learning settings by providing opportunities to have a role in small and large groups.
- C.** Provide opportunities for ML children to build friendships and relationships and to meaningfully participate in peer social interactions.
- D.** Provide opportunities for ML children who speak the same home language to serve as peer support for each other.
- E.** Provide adequate time for informal learning and exploration to help develop relationships within the classroom.

3. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

What can I do to set up my classroom environment to support the learning of Multilingual Learners?

Environments should support rich language development through hands-on, inquiry-based, content-rich learning. It is important to create a culturally and linguistically responsive learning environment that shows ML children that their language and cultural backgrounds are valued and helps them feel comfortable.²⁴ ML children should be able to “see” themselves in the classroom. Interventions that integrate ML-specific classroom materials, such

as the ones listed below, with dual language-specific instructional strategies, have been shown to be effective in promoting ML children’s learning.²⁵ These materials should not only be present, but also must be actively used in instruction and easily accessible to children. An environment where multilingualism and diverse cultures are valued is important for all children.

Evidence-Based Strategies

- A.** Include labels and other functional print in the home language. Make sure home language print is on an equal footing with English print (for example, make labels the same size in both languages).
- B.** Provide books and materials in the home language that depict the cultural and linguistic background of children in a positive light. Make sure children of each language and cultural background can see themselves represented in the classroom.
- C.** Display and provide culturally relevant materials, including family pictures and cultural items from children’s homes. Include families in helping to select books, objects, and materials to display in the classrooms.

4. ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

How can I support my Multilingual Learners’ oral language development?

Oral language development—in both English and the home language—should be a central focus in teaching MLs. Although not all programs provide intentional dual language instruction, research suggests that dual language education is optimal for young ML children’s learning and development²⁶—this is the ideal goal for programs to reach. Oral language strategies should be used intentionally to promote both languages. Key oral language skills include expressive and receptive vocabulary, listening comprehension, and grammatical knowledge, all of which are critical for future reading comprehension.²⁷ Teachers should incorporate rich and high-quality language experiences with back-and-forth exchanges in both languages, as consistent with the program’s language model. Such interactions foster language development and achievement.²⁸

ML children’s developing language skills may also include code switching, or using words and phrases from both languages in a single sentence or exchange (check out the [Toolkit on Code Switching](#) from the Office of Head Start for more information). Such switching is a normal part of bilingual development and demonstrates children’s flexibility in drawing on the resources they have in both languages (read this [Fact](#)

[Sheet on Translanguaging](#) for more information on how multilingual children use their full language repertoire to make sense of and communicate information). While MLs may have a smaller vocabulary in each language initially and lack some “translation equivalents,”²⁹ educators should account for and encourage vocabulary use in both English and the home language. It is important for teachers to serve as strong language models in the languages that they speak. Further, they need to be clear about which language will be used at different times (language allocation).³⁰ Teachers should also highlight the similarities and differences between the languages children speak and English in order to support children in making connections. By providing high-quality, culturally appropriate language interactions in both languages relevant to children’s experiences, educators help ML children develop a solid foundation in both of their languages, which will support future literacy and content learning.³¹

The following evidence-based strategies should be used with a specific purpose in mind, as consistent with the program’s language model, and differentiated and tailored to each individual child’s level and needs (which should be determined through continuous assessment).

Oral language practices should be integrated with the other strategies presented in this Toolkit. For K–3

teachers, refer also to the California [K–3 ELD Standards](#) that highlight oral language interactions for MLs.

Overarching Strategy	Evidence-Based Strategies
<p>Provide language-rich environments to support each language.</p>	<p>A. Provide high-quality, responsive, and extended talk in each language, including longer utterances with varied vocabulary, a mix of open-ended and scaffolding questions, providing child-friendly definitions for new or unfamiliar words, recasting or repeating an erroneous utterance in a corrected form, and engaging in back-and-forth exchanges.</p>
	<p>B. Ask questions in each language, including a mix of open- and closed-ended questions, to elicit talk from children.</p>
	<p>C. Repeat and elaborate/expand on children’s talk in each language, for example, with adjectives, adverbs, or clauses that are related to the topic the child is discussing.</p>
	<p>D. Incorporate songs, rhymes, and chants in each language, and connect them to content learning.</p>
<p>Provide explicit vocabulary instruction in each language.</p>	<p>E. Select commonly used academic words (e.g., observe, demonstrate, cycle, evaluate, conflict) and content-specific words or phrases (e.g., energy, habitat, food chain, law, freedom) from the focus of study and incorporate them in instruction.</p>
	<p>F. Explicitly teach words through multiple modalities of writing, speaking, and listening (e.g., vocabulary picture cards, word maps, visual aids, props, word walls, gestures, drawings).</p>
	<p>G. Reinforce target words by using them throughout the day and across contexts (e.g., present word during morning meeting, post on word wall, engage with associated objects and words during small group or free choice learning time).</p>
	<p>H. Provide hands-on, inquiry-based experiences (such as designing and carrying out experiments) to help give language meaning and purpose.</p>

5. LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

How can I support my Multilingual Learners’ literacy development?

As children learn oral language, they also start to develop early literacy skills and to understand the connection between spoken language and print. For children of all language backgrounds, oral language and literacy development are closely related³², however, developing two languages simultaneously can lead to some unique developmental patterns for ML children. For example, research shows that emergent literacy skills in the home language can help facilitate parallel skills in English.³³ This is called cross-language transfer. In addition, metalinguistic awareness, including the ability to recognize that other languages exist and have different characteristics, is important for reading development and is heightened in bilingual children.³⁴ This finding is a key reason to foster literacy in both

languages and to align literacy instruction across the languages. In doing so, teachers should maintain language separation, that is, consistent periods of instruction through each language.³⁵ Teachers who speak the home language should pay extra attention to its characteristics. For example, the Roman alphabet is made up of letters that represent *sounds*, while the Chinese writing system is made up of characters that represent *words or parts of words*. Of course, using developmentally appropriate practices for literacy teaching in the language is key. Because oral language and literacy development are so connected, literacy strategies should be integrated with oral language strategies described in Question 4.



Overarching Strategy	Evidence-Based Strategies
<p>Build foundational reading skills in each language.</p>	<p>A. Conduct phonological awareness activities that explicitly teach children to hear individual segments of sounds in words, such as using manipulatives to represent sound units (relevant for letter-based writing systems only).</p>
	<p>B. Help children identify letters and develop awareness of letter-sound connections, that is, phonics (relevant for letter-based writing systems only).</p>
	<p>C. Provide instruction on book concepts and knowledge (particularly in preschool to support emergent literacy).</p>
<p>Use shared reading activities to build oral language and reading comprehension skills in each language.</p>	<p>D. Read text aloud with appropriate speed and expression to promote oral reading fluency.</p>
	<p>E. Conduct pre- and post-reading activities and discussions in each language to foster critical thinking skills and reading comprehension.</p>
	<p>F. Engage in interactive (dialogic) reading by asking open-ended questions, prompting children to retell narratives, and modeling and supporting language and content comprehension skills.</p>
	<p>G. Introduce and explain new vocabulary words before, during, or after reading.</p>
<p>Provide consistent opportunities and appropriate scaffolds to engage children with writing in each language.</p>	<p>I. Practice developmentally appropriate writing activities (pre-writing in preschool) in each language.</p>
	<p>J. Provide language-based supports (e.g., graphic organizers, sentence starters) to help children begin and develop writing.</p>
	<p>K. Provide writing assignments that are content-based and help develop academic language as well as writing skills (elementary only).</p>
	<p>L. Develop student writing for a variety of genres and audiences, using appropriate content, organization, and style (elementary only).</p>

6. BILINGUAL CLASSROOMS

How can I support bilingualism in the context of a dual language or bilingual classroom?

In addition to the effective language and literacy strategies presented in Questions 4 and 5, teachers in dual language or bilingual classrooms must be strategic in their use of the two languages. To do so involves promoting home language development, as well as English, with the goal of developing proficiency in both languages. Exposing children to both languages in early education settings can help them experience the benefits of being bilingual, including cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic advantages.³⁶ Research shows positive effects of instructing MLs in two languages on their skills in each language, as well as other learning domains.³⁷ In fact, evidence also shows that fostering the home language supports the development of English—often called cross-language transfer.³⁸

Learning in dual language / bilingual classrooms builds upon what children know and have learned in one language to support high levels of learning in the other language, and vice versa.³⁹ It is not teaching the same thing in two different languages, but rather providing strategically coordinated and aligned instruction in both languages with language-specific scope and sequence. Content is integrated with language and literacy development and is used as a bridge across languages. In dual language programs, teachers can provide and promote opportunities for active bilingualism, biculturalism, and building sociocultural competency. Bilingualism should be actively celebrated and promoted, and teachers should provide extra support and affirmation



for languages other than English. It is important to provide language-choice time where children can determine which language (or mix of languages) they wish to use for expression. The guidance below can be followed in the context of different dual language and bilingual models to promote home language and English language development.

Evidence-Based Strategies

- A.** Provide curriculum and language support materials in each language that are of equally high quality.
- B.** Follow an intentional, systematic plan for supporting the development of each language that includes maintaining separate protected time for each language.
- C.** Integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking in both languages to develop bilingualism and biliteracy.
- D.** Make sure to use content to build both the home language and English, so that ML children develop content understanding in both languages.
- E.** Provide separate (and complementary) oral language and literacy opportunities and materials in each language to allow children to become immersed in each.
- F.** Provide explicit opportunities for children to compare and contrast the two languages to support cross-language transfer of learning.
- G.** Assess children in both their home language and English to understand their full range of skills.

7. HOME LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

What can I do to encourage home language development if I don't speak the home language of all the Multilingual Learners in my classroom?

With the substantial language diversity across California, it is likely that many teachers will have at least one student in their classroom whose language they do not speak, even among bilingual teachers. Teachers who are not proficient in the child's home language can still take important steps to support it.⁴⁰ Learning and using key words in the home language and providing opportunities for children to hear their home language in class shows respect and interest in the children's home languages and makes children feel valued.⁴¹ All teachers,

regardless of whether they speak the home language, can and should do this. These practices will help create a welcoming classroom environment where each child, culture, and language background is valued and children are excited about language diversity. It can also help English-only speaking children understand that other languages exist and have different characteristics (an aspect of metalinguistic awareness), and foster respect for other languages and cultures.

Evidence-Based Strategies

- A. Learn key words and phrases in the home language of children. Ask parents or community volunteers for help.
- B. Introduce key vocabulary words in the home language that are related to the content being taught, prior to teaching in English.
- C. Use cognates (e.g., art/arte, computer/computadora in Spanish) to emphasize connections between English and the home language (if applicable to the home language).
- D. Invite children to be experts and share their home language.
- E. Invite parents and other speakers of the home language to join classroom activities to speak, tell, and share stories, and to read in the home language (for example, invite parents to read a story in the home language before reading the same story in English).

8. ADDITIONAL ELD STRATEGIES

Are there additional strategies I can use to support my Multilingual Learners' English language development (ELD)?

Multilingual Learners often need additional targeted support to help develop English language skills, particularly those who have minimal exposure to English.⁴² There are many things you can do that include both verbal and non-verbal strategies. Such strategies are important to include in daily teaching because ML children often know things in their home language that they may not yet be able to understand or express in English. Providing non-linguistic cues and specific social-emotional supports can provide a bridge to help them access what they already know in their home language.⁴³ To help support their oral language and literacy development in English, use the following strategies along with the others in this Toolkit (for example, use visual cues as described on page 14 when supporting vocabulary instruction as described in Question 4).



Evidence-Based Strategies

- A. Use visual cues, gestures, and signals to accompany speech.
- B. Use instructional tools (e.g., videos, graphic organizers) to develop language in context.
- C. Teach word learning strategies (e.g., use of context clues, word parts, cognates) to help children learn the meaning of English words.
- D. Conduct supplemental small group instruction, in the home language and/or English, with ML children of similar proficiency levels to help support content learning.
- E. Preview concepts in the home language to activate and build background knowledge, prior to teaching new content in English.
- F. Permit ML children longer wait times to allow them to process speech.
- G. Introduce longer phrases and sentences and offer less support as ML's English proficiency grows.
- H. Talk with ML children one-on-one, providing targeted, language interactions based on their needs.
- I. Provide children opportunities to work in pairs or small groups with English proficient peers who can serve as language models.

9. CONTENT LEARNING

How can I support my Multilingual Learners' content learning?

Language and content instruction are deeply interconnected. Children develop language most effectively during authentic and hands-on content learning experiences (e.g., math, science) where they can actively explore and make sense of new language and concepts.⁴⁴ Strategic language support ensures that MLs have access to content learning. Content instruction should be integrated with language instruction. An effective teacher plans purposeful opportunities that help children interact with both the content and the language that is needed to understand the content.⁴⁵

Content selected for instruction should be relevant to ML children's experiences and cultures and learned *in context*. These strategies should be used in conjunction with the others in this Toolkit, particularly the additional ways of supporting oral language and literacy, and some of the specific strategies noted in question 8 to provide additional support for English language development. When possible, the following strategies should be provided in both the home language and English so ML children can use their full range of language skills to speak and learn in each language.

Evidence-Based Strategies

- A. Provide hands-on, inquiry-based experiences to help give content and subject matter meaning and purpose.
- B. Preview and review learning material (e.g., books, vocabulary) in the home language before teaching it in English, to activate and connect to background knowledge children have about the topic from their home language.
- C. Provide targeted small group instruction for ML children to facilitate learning of new content and targeted support of language and literacy.
- D. Strategically organize ML children in pairs or small groups with same language peers to support content learning.
- E. Provide multiple opportunities for children to engage with and practice content area vocabulary and concepts.

10. ASSESSMENT

What do I need to consider when assessing Multilingual Learners?



Special considerations need to be made when assessing ML children, given that their language and content skills may be distributed across English and the home language.⁴⁶ Experts generally recommend assessing MLs in both English and the home language to get an adequate picture of their skills.⁴⁷ Continuous monitoring of ML children's learning is crucial to make sure that they are benefitting from instruction. Assessments should occur at regular intervals and should be linguistically, culturally, and developmentally appropriate for the ML children that are being served.⁴⁸ Identifying ML children is a critical step in the process that will help determine individual needs. However, policies and practices around identification, assessment, and services for preschool MLs and those in K–3 vary. Educators should become familiar with the most common assessments for the age group they teach and understand their purpose and the variety of skills they assess. For example, the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) used in preschool contains specific questions about English language development for ML children and considers home language development, [as described here](#) and in this [video](#). In K–3, the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) is used for identifying and exiting students from EL services.

Evidence-Based Strategies

- A. Co-create language and content learning goals for children with co-teachers and parents.
- B. Use assessment results to inform instruction based on student English language development progress. Use assessment to inform strategic grouping and small group instruction.
- C. Draw from a variety of formative assessment tools (e.g., observations of child's oral language, portfolios of written work, comprehension-focused questions or tasks) to monitor progress.
- D. Use summative assessment tools (e.g., a standardized tool that measures a specific skill) to determine if children are adequately learning content and progressing in language development.
- E. Assess children in their home language. If you do not speak the home language, try to find interpreters to help conduct assessments.
- F. Learn about the process of second language acquisition in order to help assess and monitor ML children's progress in language development.

II. BUILDING EDUCATORS' CAPACITY

How can I build my capacity to serve Multilingual Learners?

By reading this Toolkit, you are on the path to building knowledge and skills for serving MLs. As you do this, you will build more confidence that you can meet these children where they are and help build their skills. In addition to learning and exploring the strategies in the Toolkit, ongoing professional learning is critical for helping to ensure that you can implement them effectively. In fact, the [Master Plan for Early Learning and Care](#), released in 2020, highlights workforce development and enhancing educator competencies for serving ML children as a key goal to improving education for all. This learning is best achieved through *consistent, sustained, and local job-embedded professional development* opportunities that are driven by data reflecting where children are and where they need to go.⁴⁹

For Teachers: Professional development should help you...

- Build knowledge of dual language development and promoting an asset-based view of linguistic diversity. This includes building knowledge about:
 - ML language acquisition
 - Evidence-based instructional strategies
 - Building relationships with ML children
 - Cultural competence, diversity, asset-based instruction, and inclusion
 - Developing partnerships and engaging with ML families
- Learn instructional strategies in context (through modeling in the classroom, exemplar videos, lesson plans, etc.).
- Engage in opportunities for feedback and reflection of your own practice with a coach, instructional leader, or master teacher.
- Develop self-reflection skills on your own by seeking out assessment tools and checklists.
- Collaborate with other teachers (e.g., through professional learning communities) to learn, discuss, and reflect on practice.



For Leadership: As a school administrator, it is critical for you to...

- Build your own understanding of dual language development, supporting ML children, and an asset-based view of linguistic diversity.
- Learn how to support teachers in implementing strategies in the classroom.
- Create a site-wide culture that values dual language learning and the engagement of families to support dual language learning.
- Articulate the site's language and learning goals for ML children.
- Establish a program-wide approach to meet language and learning goals for ML children and ensure there is clarity among all staff and other school partners about the research-based language program model in use (check out Head Start's Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center resources on [Planned Language Approach](#) for ideas on how to do this in your program).
- Give teachers access to coaches to help them plan and use new teaching strategies.
- Ensure that system-level approaches and instructional practices align with state-wide policies that support ML children (e.g., guiding principles of the [California English Learner Roadmap](#)).

For Leadership (continued)

- Give teachers additional supports such as:
 - Support for teachers to participate in professional development (e.g., paid time for PD outside of the classroom, substitute support, embedded support).
 - Opportunities for teachers who speak a language other than English to receive PD (or additional support) in their preferred language.
 - Supports for teaching assistants and paraprofessionals.
 - Classroom materials connected to the content in a variety of languages.
 - Translation and interpretation support, such as community members, advocates, and learning tools.

In addition, here are some Professional Development (PD) programs and resources that you can check out to learn more about how to build you and your team’s capacity to serve MLs:

Name	Brief Description	Age
CA DLL PD Project at California State University Channel Islands	This site describes an innovative DLL professional development program for the California Early Childhood Workforce. The site describes the components of the PD program, as well as links to some helpful resources, including a book list and other recommended resources.	Preschool
CABE’s Dual Language Teacher Academy (DLTA)	This 8-module program (2 English and 6 Spanish), will prepare DL educators with higher levels of academic Spanish and effective DL pedagogical knowledge and practices.	P–12 th grade
California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN)	CPIN provides a number of professional topics and training sessions, including one dedicated to English Language Development (ELD). Check their menu of Professional Learning opportunities to learn more about what is covered in the ELD training.	Preschool & TK
Personalized Oral Language Learning Strategies, from the Language Learning Project (LLP)	The LLP project provides a free, online toolkit that explains how to implement Personalized Oral Language Learning (POLL) strategies (based on current dual language research) into the classroom, with video and picture examples of the strategies. It also provides brief foundational professional development training sessions.	Birth–5
Project GLAD® (Guided Language Acquisition Design) National Training Center	A professional development organization that provides training (grades P–12) in language acquisition and literacy. Trainings provide teachers with practical tools and strategies for how to implement the GLAD® model to promote academic language and literacy.	Preschool & Elementary
Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL)	A research-based program that provides professional development, curriculum support, and technical assistance to give educators and school systems the knowledge they need to provide high-quality education to all MLs.	Preschool & Elementary
Young Multilingual Learners Program at SRI Education	The Young Multilingual Learners Program at SRI Education focuses on enhancing educators’ mindset and skillset to effectively incorporate children’s home life experiences, cultural background, home languages, interests, and strengths. It provides professional development , advising, and technical assistance, and engages in research and evaluation for programs serving children from birth to age eight.	Preschool & Elementary

Insights from the Field in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual and hybrid learning has increased. While there is little research on effective practices for virtual instruction for young MLs, there are some considerations and lessons learned from the field for adapting practices to a virtual environment, including:

- Focus on developing relationships with families and supporting the role of caregivers as partners in learning activities.
- Devise robust plans for communicating with and collaborating with families.
- Support parents with technology and virtual platforms.
- Help parents understand this is an optimal time for them to promote the use of the home language.
- Provide culturally responsive and trauma-informed support to families, recognizing the added stress the pandemic and virtual learning can have.
- Deliver online virtual learning at times convenient for families' schedules and needs.
- Identify ML-specific strategies that are most relevant and appropriate for virtual delivery.
- Emphasize oral language development: make sure DLLs/ELs have opportunities to use language, particularly during synchronous learning periods.
- Provide small group and individual learning opportunities virtually.
- When planning, consider if an adult is required to be present for the learning activities provided.
- Deliver PD virtually to allow for flexibility and access for educators.



Endnotes

- 1 The content for this Toolkit was developed by American Institutes for Research (AIR), in collaboration with Early Edge California and ML experts and PD developers around the country.
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