

Strategies for Supporting All Dual Language Learners



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Strategies for Supporting All Dual Language Learners

- **Create** a welcoming classroom environment which reflects children's backgrounds. Include pictures, posters, toys and books which portray children's languages and cultures in a respectful and authentic way.
- **Ask** families to continuously share information over time about their children's interests and infuse the information into classroom activities and curriculum.
- **Provide** opportunities for families and community members to share stories and information in their home language with teachers, staff and children.
- **Carry** out your program's language policy to support children's continued development of the home language and facilitate English language learning.
- **Provide** opportunities for teachers and staff to develop knowledge of first and second language development as well as culturally and linguistically responsive practices.
- **Remember** that dual language learners are individuals; there is no one size fits all strategy. Use information from families and observations of children in the classroom to individualize services. Strategies should be used on a long term basis and in line with the program's language policy.

Supporting Dual Language Learners

Develop a picture of each child's language learning background and experiences. Learn about every child's culture, family, and characteristics.

Work with families and caregivers to develop a plan to support children's home language. Make it an ongoing and continuous process in collaboration with families.

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- **What is the child's language background? Do they speak one language, two languages or more?**

 - **What exposure to English have they had? In what environments?**

 - **Are they learning both languages at the same time? Or are they learning a home language first followed by a second language?**

 - **Which language is dominant?**

 - **What are their experiences and exposure to the home language?**

 - **What is the family's culture?**

 - **What are the child's individual characteristics, interests and experiences?**

For more detail see *Young Dual Language Learners: Gathering Background Information* (on the ECLKC) for additional questions to ask and considerations when working with families.

Supporting Jean:

Jean is a 5 year old Haitian-Creole/ English dual language learner. Jean spoke no English when he entered Head Start two years ago, but has learned a lot over the past couple of years. Jean feels comfortable speaking English in the classroom and with his peers during outside time and classroom activities. He's building vocabulary and his grasp of the English language is steadily improving.



- Involve Jean in all areas of the classroom and curricular activities.
- Meet with Jean's family on an ongoing basis and support his home language development.
- Create learning experiences which allow Jean to use vocabulary and make meaningful connections across instructional activities.
- Teach Jean to recognize and use words that are similar in Haitian-Creole and English (words that are similar across languages are known as cognates).
- Use pictures or real objects when introducing new vocabulary words or concepts to help Jean make connections.
- Pre-teach Jean new vocabulary words before a lesson using those words. Introduce the new words before a learning experience or reading a book and provide developmentally appropriate definitions. Children's dictionaries can be great resources for developing definitions.
- Provide Jean opportunities to creatively express the meanings of words and ask him to think deeply about the definitions of new words. Jean's father shared that he loves dramatic play; use his interests to support his language development.

Supporting Nissa:

Nissa is a 4 year-old Hebrew/English dual language learner. The center staff has learned from her family that Nissa speaks only Hebrew at home. During the first few days, Nissa tried to speak Hebrew to her new teachers, but has fallen silent after they were not able to respond to her. Her frustration with the new language environment is growing and the teachers often observe her to be somewhat upset and withdrawn.



- Ask Nissa's family to share and/or tape-record some key words in Hebrew.
- Set aside a quiet space in the classroom where Nissa can seek refuge when she needs a break. Use Nissa's love of books to create a perfect quiet space.
- Create classroom routines which allow Nissa to anticipate upcoming activities without understanding the language; for example, make the classroom schedule with pictures and use it to help Nissa visualize the day.
- Nissa loves music; play music as a way to help her feel welcome and introduce language through songs and games.
- Use gestures and pointing to help Nissa understand new content and try to match gesture to vocabulary (eating, drinking).
- Model language by narrating actions using self-talk strategies, "I am using this red crayon to color in this big circle," and explicitly use parallel talk to narrate Nissa's actions, "Nissa, you are using the paintbrush to paint your circle green."
- Repeat new vocabulary, ideas, and instruction by re-using words with their definitions and repeating instructions in shorter, simpler sentences.
- Create ways for Nissa to participate in activities in a non-verbal way (clapping, playing instruments).

Supporting Aniese:

Aniese is a 4 year old Spanish/ English dual language learners. She has been in the Head Start program for almost five months. Her teacher has noticed that Aniese has begun to develop many words in English and seems to show basic comprehension by following directions and responding to simple questions with basic answers. She has also been heard repeating simple phrases such as “gonna go”.



- Create interesting centers with creative materials (art supplies, musical instruments, etc.) which give Aniese opportunities to practice her oral language skills and express herself creatively.
- Meet with Aniese’s family to learn her language background and develop ways to support her home language.
- Use pictures and real world objects to teach Aniese basic words like “paintbrush,” “marker” and “book”. Ask her family to share the same words in their home language.
- Help Aniese make meaningful connections to new vocabulary and content being taught by helping her find way to connect her personal experience to new content.
- Ask Aniese’s mother to share information about her experiences, background and interests.
- Observe Aniese to learn about her interests and language use in the classroom.
- Try to pair Aniese with peers who speak Spanish.
- Label objects and areas of the room with Spanish words.

Supporting Yelia:

Yelia is an 7 month old Mandarin/ English Dual Language learner. She is learning both English and Mandarin simultaneously. She babbles happily, giggles and seems to enjoy listening to music.

Yelia's teachers are concerned because no one in the Head Start program speaks Mandarin and they do not have a great amount of experience supporting simultaneous bilinguals.



- Have staff engage in sustained, language rich activities with Yelia like putting together a puzzle or playing with blocks. This provides opportunities to model language use and introduce vocabulary.
- Read out loud and often to Yelia. Choose developmentally appropriate and visually stimulating books that match her interests. Yelia's mother shared a love of animals; find books with animals to engage Yelia.
- Create an open and respectful dialogue with Yelia's family about first and second language development and ways to support her home language development.
- Imitate Yelia's babbling and vocalization, creating a back and forth dialogue. Remember to leave space for Yelia's responses and to observe and make use of non-verbal communication. For example, if she reaches toward the blocks ask, "Yelia, would you like to play with the blocks?"
- Play music to engage Yelia and teach her language.
- Educate staff about language development, dual language development and milestones as well as signs of language delay.
- Make connections with community leaders and members who speak Mandarin.

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