



DLL Teaching Strategies

If you've been wondering how you can best support children who are dual language learners (DLLs), you've come to the right place! Use this list of 38 research-based classroom strategiesⁱ to jumpstart your planning. All of these practices have been shown to improve learning outcomes for DLL children.

Create an emotionally supportive classroom environment by

- Establishing warm relationships through proximity, conversation, and affection
- Communicating respect through language, tone of voice, and eye contact
- Allowing children to make choices and express themselves

Create an instructionally supportive learning environment by

- Getting children physically engaged in learning
- Helping children generate and reflect on plans for their timeⁱⁱ
- Integrating new content into children's existing knowledge
- Connecting instruction to children's actual lives and culturesⁱⁱⁱ
- Asking open-ended questions that scaffold children's language use

Make effective use of children's home languages by

- Using the home language to review a story
- Using the home language to support higher-order thinking
- Using the home language to explain concepts

Make effective connections between children's home languages and English by

- Learning songs in both English and the home language
- Using picture books to connect the home language to English^{iv}
- Distinguishing between English and the home language
- Identifying and using cognates^v

Support children's acquisition of English by

- Explaining features of English words and sentences
- Providing sentence frames for children to fill in
- Retelling stories children have heard before
- Teaching songs and rhymes that have repetitive elements

Support children's understanding of concepts by

- Using puppets and other manipulatives to illustrate concepts
- Using real-world objects to illustrate concepts
- Using games to illustrate concepts
- Using graphic organizers to illustrate concepts^{vi}

Support children's understanding of vocabulary by

- Providing definitions and synonyms
- Using gestures to make vocabulary concrete
- Using illustrations to clarify vocabulary
- Integrating language instruction into content instruction
- Integrating new vocabulary into familiar songs and chants
- Using vocabulary words across different contexts
- Using multimedia to enhance vocabulary instruction^{vii}

Set the stage for successful classroom experiences by

- Providing materials in the home language
- Using signs around the classroom to pair words and objects^{viii}
- Providing materials that are culturally representative
- Working with children one-on-one or in small groups whenever possible^{ix}
- Providing opportunities for paired and small group interactions^x
- Pairing children who are DLLs with different levels of English proficiency
- Engaging family members in classroom activities^{xi}
- Providing “safe havens” where children can be silent



Frequently Asked Questions about Working with Children Who Are DLLs

I want to be intentional in supporting children who are DLLs, but I'm not sure how to get started. What should I do first?



An important part of supporting children who are DLLs is following a Classroom Language Model (CLM) that fits the mix of languages spoken in your classroom. CLMs are strategic plans for when and how each of the languages will be used. The four CLMs recommended by the Office of Head Start (OHS) are

- English with Home Language Support
- Dual Language
- Home Language as a Foundation for English Development
- English

If you are not already following a CLM, work with your administrators or a coach to choose a language model that is appropriate for your classroom and decide how to implement it. OHS's [Classroom Language Models: A Leader's Implementation Manual](#), available in your myTeachstone® resource library, describes each of these models and offers guidance for choosing one.

As you prepare to implement a CLM, think about when and how you are using the teaching strategies listed on the previous page. Experiment with some that are new to you and take care to implement the strategies in a way that's aligned to your CLM.



How can we help children who are DLLs learn if my assistant teacher and I don't speak their home languages?



Many of the DLL strategies listed in this document don't require you to speak a child's home language. For example, you can use a variety of modalities and materials (pictures of vocabulary words, puppets, games, movement activities, multimedia-enhanced instruction) to make it easier for children who are DLLs to understand concepts and actions.

Nonetheless, home language support is a vital component of effective DLL classrooms. Even if you don't speak the language yourself, there are many ways to get the language into your classroom. Here are a few ideas^{xii}:

- Bring parents and other community members who speak the language(s) into the classroom.
- Incorporate children's home language(s) into the environmental print in your classroom.
- Learn a few basic words and phrases (greetings, words related to the body, terms of endearment) in the language(s) to help children build relationships with you and successfully navigate life in the classroom.



Frequently Asked Questions about Working with Children Who Are DLLs

How can I respond to parents of DLLs who are worried their children won't learn English if we speak the family's home language in the classroom?



Research has shown that children can learn two languages simultaneously, without confusion or delayed development.^{xiii} Building on children's knowledge of their home language while learning English has been shown to lead to more success in achieving English fluency than monolingual instruction. Additionally, bilingualism has a number of cognitive benefits. Studies have shown that once children who are DLLs learn enough English to successfully convey their wants and needs, they demonstrate better executive control, self-control, and interpersonal skills than monolingual children.

To learn more about the benefits of bilingualism, check out the US Department of Education tip sheet [Talk, Read and Sing Together Every Day!](#) available in your myTeachstone resource library.



Why is it important to engage with the families of DLLs, and how can I do this?



Family engagement is associated with academic achievement for all children, but it is an especially important part of creating a supportive learning environment for children who are DLLs.^{xiv} The families of DLLs can be your greatest allies in ensuring that the children you work with do not lose their skills in the home language as they master English. In addition to modeling the home language outside of school, families of children who are DLLs are great assets as classroom visitors. They can teach the children in your class about various cultural traditions and supplement the amount of the home language spoken in the classroom.

Parents of children who are DLLs face unique challenges when interacting with schools. Here are a few ideas to help the families of the DLLs you teach feel comfortable interacting with you and your organization:

- Encourage your program to hire bilingual staff or recruit bilingual community volunteers to serve as a bridge to families of children who are DLLs.
- Ask your administrator to provide newsletters and program materials in each language spoken by the families your program serves.
- Invite families into the classroom to share their language and culture.
- Plan informal activities where you and the other staff at your school or center can interact with families of children who are DLLs.
- Learn about the cultures of the families in your program as part of planned professional development.
- Collaborate with families in setting academic goals for children who are DLLs.



ⁱ Unless otherwise noted, these strategies represent findings listed in Goldenberg, C., Nemeth, K., Hicks, J., Zepeda, M., & Cardona, L. M. (2013). Program elements and teaching practices to support young dual language learners. In Faye Ong & John McLean (Eds.), *California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers* (pp. 99-127). Sacramento: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care.

ⁱⁱ Magruder, E. S., Hayslip, W. W., Espinosa, L. M., & Matera, C. (2015). Many languages, one teacher: Supporting language and literacy development for preschool dual language learners. In M. Dombink-Green & H. Bohard (Eds.), *Spotlight on Young Children: Supporting Dual Language Learners* (pp. 24-32). National Association for the Education of Young Children.

ⁱⁱⁱ Castro, D. C., Espinosa, L. M., & Paez, M. M. (2011). Defining and measuring quality in early childhood practices that promote dual language learners' development and learning. In M. Zaslow, I. Martinez-Beck, K. Tout, & T. Halle (Eds.), *Quality Measurement in Early Childhood Settings* (pp. 257-280). Baltimore: Brookes.

^{iv} Magruder et al., Many languages, one teacher.

^v Espinosa, L. M. (2013). *Early Education for Dual Language Learners: Promoting School Readiness and Early School Success*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

^{vi} Magruder et al., Many languages, one teacher.

^{vii} Silverman, R. & Hines, S. (2009). The effects of multimedia-enhanced instruction on the vocabulary of English-language learners and non-English-language learners in pre-kindergarten through second grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol 101(2), 305-314.

^{viii} Magruder et al., Many languages, one teacher.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Halgunseth, L. C., Jia, G., & Barbarin, O. A. (2013). Family engagement in early childhood programs: Serving families of dual language learners. In Faye Ong & John McLean (Eds.), *California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers* (pp. 128-180). Sacramento: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care.

^{xii} Adapted from Goldenberg et al., Program elements and teaching practices.

^{xiii} The response to this question is adapted from Sandhofer, C. & Uchikoshi, Y. (2013). Cognitive consequences of dual language learning: Cognitive function, language and literacy, science and mathematics, and social-emotional development. In Faye Ong & John McLean (Eds.), *California's Best Practices for Young Dual Language Learners: Research Overview Papers* (pp. 99-127). Sacramento: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care.

^{xiv} The response to this question is adapted from Halgunseth et al., Family Engagement in Early Childhood Programs.